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### *Cobwebs to catch flies*

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## *Cobwebs to catch flies:* a bibliographical case study

When, in 1902, the bibliographer Charles Welsh extolled the virtues of ‘A forgotten primer and its author’ he was perhaps unaware that the subject of his short article had been reprinted in London only a few years before.<sup>1</sup> *Cobwebs to catch flies* was the most popular and successful of the fifty or more small books for children written by Ellenor (later Lady Ellenor) Fenn between the late 1770s and her death in November 1813.<sup>2</sup> The work appeared in the autumn of 1783,<sup>3</sup> and remained a widely used basic reading book until the 1860s, serving the same purpose as the *Janet and John* books which taught so many children to read in the UK in the 1950s and 1960s. It was the earliest recorded reading matter of scholars as diverse as Francis Galton, Charles Darwin and Ralph Vaughan Williams, and was often referred to in both fictional and non-fictional accounts of nineteenth century childhood.<sup>4</sup> The last edition of *Cobwebs* known to the author was published by Frederick Warne & Co. in 1894. More than forty editions were published by at least seventeen publishers, in six cities, in three countries. In fact, the work makes an interesting case study of the changes in children’s book production and design over the century of its popularity.

*Cobwebs* originally appeared in two volumes (but many nineteenth century editions combined them into one.) The first of these was designed for children from three to five years of age, and the second for those from five and eight. The work consisted of a series of short, illustrated dialogues between adults and children, or else between children and their friends or siblings, teaching them basic reading skills. It was an innovative book in several respects. Unlike other primers, which gave only sentences to read, the dialogues in *Cobwebs* focused on the child reader’s own experience and interests, including toys, pets, games, or visits to the local fair. It was one of the first books to differentiate between reading age groups; each volume became progressively more difficult as the child progressed. As the *Monthly Review* noted:

These lessons are very well contrived for teaching children to read: .....  
The dialogues, if not very entertaining or instructive, are however level  
to the capacities of children.<sup>5</sup>

Finding suitably simple words for the relevant age groups, whilst retaining the interest of her audience was a difficult task, as the author herself noted at one point:

This and some others were designed to supply lessons of early words –  
chiefly monosyllables with five or six letters. It is not very easy to  
introduce a number of such words; so that those dialogues are particularly  
stiff and rambling.<sup>6</sup>

The printer failed to understand the author’s plan in the first edition, and jumbled the order in which the dialogues appeared in the second volume, necessitating a note to parents to follow the order given on the Contents page rather than in the book.<sup>7</sup> Yet ultimately, the author was pleased with the results, as noted in her dedication to her sister-in-law Mrs. Frere.

I am sanguine in my hopes of success among my little readers. I think  
that I am the mistress of infantine language; and I print for the sake  
of those ladies who have less leisure than myself. ...

The other way in which the work was innovative lay in its design and typography. It was published in two small volumes, which might therefore be shared between two children of

different ages, printed in large types, and contained attractive illustrations seeking to represent the content of the stories. It was printed and published by John Marshall, of 4 Aldermay Churchyard in London, who had recently inherited his father's printing business and was seeking to establish a reputation as "the children's printer".<sup>8</sup>

The title alludes to a quotation from Jonathan Swift: "laws are like cobwebs, which may catch small flies, but let wasps and hornets break through".<sup>9</sup> Ellenor, who had a great love for natural history, likened herself to a spider attempting to trap the attention of her young charges. She had previously used this metaphor in the introduction to her *Fables in monosyllables*: "I weave nets for insects; and if I suit my toils to my game am I to be derided?"<sup>10</sup> The work was originally conceived as a component part of the author's elaborate and very expensive teaching scheme known as *A set of toys* and copies were provided with the scheme. However, Marshall, who had recently published several successful titles by Mrs. Fenn, astutely realized that the volumes could also have a life of their own.<sup>11</sup>

Although childless, she was nevertheless bursting with ideas for new ways of teaching young children, which she tried out on her many nieces and nephews. Above all, she sought to make the process of learning as enjoyable as possible for the child, describing *Cobwebs* as:

written to please a set of children dear to the writer, and it did please them. In the hope that it may be agreeable to other little people, it is given to the Public.<sup>12</sup>

Eventually, in 1782 after several years of compiling and illustrating manuscript books for the benefit of her nephews and nieces Ellenor decided that some of her efforts might benefit a wider audience. George Wollaston, the Rector of St Mary, Aldermay Church, was a close friend of the family, who would have known the printer working in his churchyard. It was perhaps through Wollaston's agency that she wrote to John Marshall to enquire, "whether he would accept a manuscript and print it without expense to the unknown writer".<sup>13</sup> There followed a seven year collaboration providing the publisher with his most successful titles that would keep him in business for more than forty years. However, in common with all her early titles, Ellenor had handed over the copyright to her publisher in return for a few dozen free copies to distribute among her friends and never earned a penny from the title.<sup>14</sup>

The book was published in a duodecimo format; price two shillings, without any indication of its authorship. It was however regularly listed in John Marshall's catalogues of "Mrs. Teachwell's works", which was the name used by the publisher as a marketing device to identify his valuable new author to readers whilst retaining her anonymity.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the 'Dedication' and the 'Advertisement' setting out her intentions, volume one contained advice 'To my little readers', exhorting them to be "merry and wise" and to "obey readily and cheerfully", and an 'Address to all good children' praising "your good friend *Mr. Marshall*", who "had begun to print for you in a large clear type".<sup>16</sup>

### Later editions

*Cobwebs to catch flies* quickly proved to be Marshall's most successful title and he appears to have kept it constantly in print until at least 1815, producing several undated duodecimo editions in different bindings, some of which differ only in minor typographical details on the title page or the running headlines. Some of these retained the elaborate range of preliminary matter and generous font size of the earliest editions, but he also began to print cheaper and more compact versions in smaller font sizes. Thus the first volume may be found in editions of 94, 72 and 64 pages, and volume 2 (without the preliminary matter) in 88 and 72 pages.

The work also attracted the attention of rival publishers. The Dublin printer John Rice pirated it in 1794 using a new set of woodcuts, and in 1799 Elizabeth Newbery, published an un-

illustrated French language version, *Toiles d'araignees pour attraper les mouches*,<sup>17</sup> possibly in retaliation for Marshall having produced works for children using some of her titles. Copies of *Cobwebs* were also taken to the USA where the work appears to have been published in Philadelphia by Johnson & Warner, in 1813 or 1814 (although no copies are known to have survived),<sup>18</sup> and by Robert Desilver in 1825. In the latter year E. J. Coale, of Baltimore also published an edition. These two editions were first ones to combine the two volumes into one, which became the usual practice thereafter. *Cobwebs to catch flies* was also published in New York by Mahlon Day in several editions between 1832 and 1844, and in New York and Boston by C.S. and J.H. Francis, respectively, in 1851.

After more than thirty years of publishing the title, John Marshall assigned the copyright to Baldwin, Cradock, & Joy, who published four editions between 1815, and 1825, and four more as Baldwin and Cradock between 1829 and 1841. Nevertheless, although he ceased to print the work he appears to have retained some interest in the publication until his death in 1828 since his name also continued to appear on the title pages until the 1829 edition.

Darton and Co. published four editions of the work between 1842 and 1858 which were sold, both as separate volumes and also as two volumes in one. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge likewise produced at least two others between 1844 and 1848, which were specially adapted for use in Sunday Schools. In these editions the number of sketches was reduced from twenty-six to twenty-four by the removal of 'The Fair' and 'The Useful Play' (depicting the use of one of Lady Fenn's teaching schemes). At the same time several of the remaining sketches were extended to give a religious message to the author's original secular text.<sup>19</sup> The SPCK also sold the individual lessons from the work at eight pence per dozen, although none are known to have survived in this format.<sup>20</sup>

By the Victorian period, the large font sizes and generous margins of some of the earlier editions had given way to a smaller, single volume format. Lockwood and Co. took over publication, with editions in 1862, 1866 and 1871. An entirely new undated edition was jointly published by Frederick Warne and Co. in London and by Scribner, Welford, and Co. in New York around 1870, in the 'Crofton Cousins Series' (which was republished in London in 1894 by Frederick Warne). Similarly, George Routledge and Sons published an edition in 1871 and Crosby Lockwood another in 1885. An imitation work, *New cobwebs to catch little flies* was published by the Religious Tract Society, between 1833 and 1839.<sup>21</sup>

### **Illustrations**

One of the attractions of early editions of *Cobwebs to catch flies* lay in its many illustrations. A series of twenty-five oval relief cuts (apparently woodcuts rather than soft metal), was used to illustrate the dialogues, which, in the early editions were surrounded by a decorated border consisting of a headpiece and two sidepieces. The pictures were crudely drawn but in a charming style. Since Ellenor is known to have written, illustrated and even bound copies of her earliest works for use by her many nephews and nieces, these cuts may have been taken from her original drawings. Over the years, individual cuts gradually became worn out or lost due to their constant re-use, and so the presence of individual cuts, and their state of repair will be an indication of the date of a given edition. For example, an illustration of a "Toss-about" children's ride in "the Fair" disappears from editions by the end of the eighteenth century and was never replaced. In one surviving copy, the illustrations for the "The Cottage Garden" and "The Country Visit" in volume 2 have been switched, to create slightly ludicrous results where two young men are shown wearing bonnets and dresses, whilst their sister and a farmer's wife sport breeches and one smokes a pipe.<sup>22</sup> At some time between 1800 and 1810, Marshall abandoned the ornate floral frames around the cuts and by then he had been forced to abandon or re-cut several of the worn out originals. Thereafter he added miscellaneous

woodcuts or wood engravings to fill in the gaps, but these were in an entirely different style and unrelated to the content of the dialogues.

Editions dating from the late 1780s also include two attractive frontispieces, presumably engraved on copper, entitled “The Doll” and “The Bird”.<sup>23</sup> In each case, these depicted a Lady in a strikingly large hat with one of her children. Nothing dates a book faster than illustrations containing female fashions and so these were replaced early in the nineteenth century with others representing the more restrained headgear of the Regency period.

Marshall handed over all of the surviving oval woodcuts to the new printer (Thomas Hansard), at the same time that he assigned the title to Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy in 1815, but they were all in very poor condition. By 1822 the new publishers were advertising an edition “ornamented with new cuts from designs made expressly for the work”.<sup>24</sup> These were oblong in shape and display contemporary costumes and headgear. In the 1825 (Baldwin Cradock and Joy) edition, the new cuts were supplemented by a series of other small woodcut ornaments, which were used to fill areas of blank space at the bottom of pages.

However, during the 1790s and 1800s wood engraving was introduced and popularized by Thomas Bewick. This technique used the harder ‘end grain’ as opposed to the ‘side grain’ of the block, and therefore allowed for much finer detail in the illustrations. The 1825 edition included a newly commissioned wood engraving on the title page depicting a fly caught in a cobweb. By the 1840s, woodcuts had given way to wood engravings throughout the text as well.

The worn out copper plate frontispieces had also been abandoned for the 1822 edition, but by the 1840s other intaglio illustrative techniques, such as etching, begin to be used in the work. For example, the Darton & Co. edition of 1858 incorporated both an etched frontispiece showing a little girl holding a kitten, together with a wood engraving of children boating, on the title page opposite. By the middle years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, publishers had another illustrative technique available to them – lithography - which involved neither relief nor intaglio printing, but rather printing from a flat stone. The 1870 edition published by Warne and Scribner included both a coloured lithographic frontispiece and coloured label on the binding (see below). The following year the Routledge edition likewise contained a coloured frontispiece of an old lady talking to two young children.

### **Trade Bindings**

Marshall included an advertisement for “Books by Mrs. Teachwell for the use of children” at the end of volume 1 of the first edition of *Cobwebs*. This listed seven titles and noted, “The above books may be had in various bindings or uniformly bound in sets.” Marshall clearly sold his books both ready bound or else could bind them to order. Some copies are to be found fully bound in contemporary leather, but most surviving copies exist in one of Marshall’s two different trade bindings. The first of these was the traditional late eighteenth century ‘quarter bound’ style using cheap leather (usually sheepskin) to cover the spine and marbled paper to cover the boards. For these bindings the edition was imposed in a series of sections of six or twelve leaves, which were sewn together on a sewing frame. However, towards the end of the century Marshall appears to have developed an alternative and cheaper technique for binding his small books. The printed sheets were imposed to form a single gathering of up to 48 leaves and then saddle-stitched directly into a pink card binding, (in much the same way that the leaves of a modern small children’s book might now be stapled into a card cover). These saddle-stitched bindings had printed labels on the front board indicating the title, as the spine was too thin to hold a printed title. The existence of this alternative form of trade binding created the need for new impressions with the printed pages

in an entirely different order, so that (for example) the first leaf is conjunct with the final leaf of the book rather than with the final leaf of the first gathering. This binding technique is to be found on surviving copies of several Marshall editions of ‘Mrs. Teachwell’s’ works from the mid 1790s onwards, although surviving copies of *Cobwebs to catch flies* in this form appear rather to date from the first decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup>

Marshall’s successors, Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, continued to offer the work in alternative binding styles, but the publisher’s abandoned his practice of saddle-stitching, preferring to sew the leaves into a pink card binding in the traditional manner. However, from the 1825 edition they also began to issue the two volumes in a single full-leather binding using either black or dark green roan (sheepskin tanned with sumac to imitate morocco), with the single word COBWEBS tooled onto the front cover and four lines rule across the spine. By the 1830s, the book was also being offered in dark blue and dark red roan bindings. These bindings undoubtedly looked splendid when new, but have not survived well due to the inferior materials used.

The earliest use of cloth for binding for the title, seen by the author is on the New York (Mahlon Day) edition of 1832, which has a cloth-covered spine and yellow printed paper-covered boards. However, in 1840s SPCK used a limp, red or dark blue cloth cover, Limp cloth was likewise used in the Darton & Co. edition of 1858, but thereafter boards were again used for trade bindings. The two Frederick Warne editions were issued in the elaborately decorated cloth bindings illustrated below, as was the Routledge edition of 1871.

### **Untangling Cobwebs**

John Marshall’s early editions of *Cobwebs to catch flies* represent a nightmare for the bibliographer since they are neither numbered nor dated, and have often survived in single (sometimes imperfect) copies. Indeed, the surviving examples probably represent only a proportion of the editions that once existed, and have hitherto been inadequately recorded in the *English short-title catalogue*, and *Nineteenth century short-title catalogue*. Marshall’s volumes were published in a duodecimo format, but might be imposed in sections of either 6 or 12 leaves or else re-imposed to make a single large gathering for his cheaper card binding.

By the turn of the century, the work had become so popular and had been reprinted so many times that the publisher appears to have abandoned any concept of discrete editions and merely retained piles of printed sheets to make up into books which were replenished as required. For example, several surviving copies are made up of sheets from different printings, which might have running headlines in a different typographical style from the remainder of the book.<sup>26</sup> There are also some surviving sets, which from the evidence of inscriptions were clearly purchased together, but which nevertheless contain title pages with significant typographical differences.

In spite of these complexities there are a number of clues that may be used to assign approximate dates, or at least a chronological order to Marshall’s surviving editions. For example, Marshall’s apologetic note (mentioned above) readily identifies the first edition. Thereafter the publisher used six substantively different forms of name and address in his imprint, each of which was used for an identifiable period.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, the additional appearance of Marshall’s printer’s imprint usually to be found printed on the last page of text (as opposed to his publisher’s imprint on the title page), will indicate whether an edition was published before or after 1799.<sup>28</sup> The use of the long form of the letter “s” is another way of separating eighteenth century editions from those published in the early nineteenth century,

although a little less precise. Furthermore, the content of John Marshall's advertisements, which appear in many copies may also indicate whether they postdated the appearance of other of Ellenor Fenn's publications which can be dated more accurately. Similarly, the occasional presence of press figures, are a useful means of confirming whether the sheets belong to a given edition, and pointing to one of two periods when Marshall's pressmen appear to have used them.<sup>29</sup>

Contemporary dated inscriptions in copies by owners or those presenting them can also be useful in providing cut-off dates, although should be used with care as they do not always indicate when the book was first acquired. Likewise, dated watermarks in the paper used may also be an indication of the date of publication. Thus the combination of one or more of the above-mentioned factors may be used in assigning an approximate date, or at least an order of precedence to a given copy.

## Conclusion

*Cobwebs to catch flies* was a small and simple work, from a modest writer, and written for a modest purpose. Yet due to the innovative design and content, and the prolonged lifespan it ultimately had far more impact on the lives of its readers, than most other contemporary works. The complexity of early editions and the range of techniques used in printing, illustrating and binding the work also provide an object lesson to the bibliographer that seemingly simple works can often be among the most difficult to study.

The author of this paper is seeking to compile a bibliography of editions of *Cobwebs to catch flies* and has so far examined more than eighty surviving copies, in libraries and museums in Great Britain, Ireland, Canada and the east and west coasts of the USA as well as some in private hands. He should be grateful to hear from any booksellers, book collectors, rare book librarians and others who possess copies of the work (irrespective of the date or publisher) and who would be willing to answer a few questions about them. He may be contacted via email at [das@aber.ac.uk](mailto:das@aber.ac.uk)

David Stoker  
August 2007

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Welsh, 'A forgotten primer and its author', *The Bibliographer* (New York), I. (1902), 190-194.

<sup>2</sup> David Stoker, 'Ellenor Fenn as "Mrs Teachwell" and "Mrs Lovechild": a pioneer late eighteenth century children's writer, educator and philanthropist', *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, LXVIII, (2007).

<sup>3</sup> The work appeared a few weeks after 25 July 1783 (which is the date given on the dedication).

<sup>4</sup> See Lewis M. Terman, 'The Intelligence Quotient of Francis Galton in Childhood' *The American Journal of Psychology*, 28. (2) (1917) 209-215 and Ursula Vaughan Williams. 'Ralph Vaughan Williams and his choice of Words for Music' *Journal of the Royal Music Association* 99, (1972) 81-89, p.81. A recent search of *Google Books* identified references to this work in Elizabeth Lachlan, *Early education: or, the management of children considered* (1821), Maria Edgworth's *Frank* (1822), Catherine Maria Sedgwick, *The poor rich man and the rich poor man* (1836), William Henry De Gatty, *Aunt Judy's letters* (1862), and Matilda Charlotte Houston, *Such things are* (1863).

<sup>5</sup> *The Monthly Review* (June 1784), p.482.

<sup>6</sup> *Cobwebs to catch flies*[1783], vol. 2 p. 75.

<sup>7</sup> *Cobwebs to catch flies*, [1783], vol. 2, Advertisement, [p.4]. He also added the following apology: 'The Printer thinks it but respectful to the Author, to acquaint Ladies and others, that his inattention occasioned the derangement of the Dialogues'.

<sup>8</sup> John Marshall (1756-1824) was the son of the printer and publisher Richard Marshall and inherited the business in 1779 together with his sister Eleanor (b.1755) and his cousin Marshall (dates unknown). James

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withdrew from the partnership in November, 1789 (*London Gazette* 3 April 1790), but John and Eleanor continued in business together until c.1799, thereafter John operated alone until his retirement circa. 1815. Marshall became widely known as ‘the children’s printer’ see Emma Laws, ‘The children’s printer’, *Miniature Libraries from the Children’s Books Collections*, National Art Library, 20 May-17 November 2002 (<http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/wid/exhibits/miniaturelibraries/>).

<sup>9</sup> Jonathon Swift, *A tritcal essay on the faculties of the mind*, (1707).

<sup>10</sup> *Fables in monosyllables by Mrs. Teachwell; to which are added Morals, in dialogues, between a mother and children*. (London: John Marshall and Co., [1783]), xi.

<sup>11</sup> One of the dialogues refers to children using A set of toys, and early editions of *Cobwebs* carry a note advertising the scheme.

<sup>12</sup> *Cobwebs to catch flies*, (London: John Marshall and Co., [1783]), vol.1 ‘Advertisement’.

<sup>13</sup> *Fables, by Mrs. Teachwell*: (London: John Marshall and Co., [1783]), 76.

<sup>14</sup> See Ellenor Fenn’s obituary in *The Gentleman’s Magazine.*, 88 (1813), pt. ii 508. Her husband, John Fenn wrote brief bibliographical notes on her first five published titles (but unfortunately not *Cobwebs*) on a slip of paper inserted in to his manuscript ‘Memoirs’ (Norfolk Record Office NNAS 5050/4/13 f.10). These indicate that she typically received 36 bound copies in lieu of her copyright.

<sup>15</sup> “Mrs Teachwell” was the name of a governess who was the protagonist in some of Ellenor’s earlier works - no doubt inspired by “Mrs Teachum” in Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess*, of 1749.

<sup>16</sup> *Cobwebs to catch flies*, vol. 1, p. xxiii.

<sup>17</sup> Sydney Roscoe, *John Newbery and his successors, 1740-1814 a bibliography*, (Wormley : Five Owls Press, 1973) J129.

<sup>18</sup> The first was advertised in Johnson’s edition of *The economy of human life*, (Philadelphia, 1807), the second from a newspaper advertisement (see Welch, d’Alté A. *A bibliography of American children’s books printed prior to 1821*, (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1972) item 397.

<sup>19</sup> These religious lessons were likewise graded to match the difficulty of the reading matter. Thus the additional materials in ‘The Dog’ and ‘The Fan’ merely contain a simple religious message, whereas those in ‘The Bees’ and ‘The Hedge-hog’ are specifically related to the catechism that the children would be learning at the same time. And contain Biblical references.

<sup>20</sup> Advertisement in Thomas Boyles Murray, *The wise King*, (London: SPCK, 1849).

<sup>21</sup> See Brian Alderson and Pat Garrett *The Religious Tract Society as a publisher of children’s books*, (Hoddesdon: The Children’s Book History Society, 1999), entry 20.

<sup>22</sup> University of California Los Angeles Library, CBC PE1119 A1L94c 1783. Similarly, in volume 1 of this set the illustration supposedly depicting a dog is the cat taken from another of the dialogues.

<sup>23</sup> They were executed by N.C. Goodnight. It is not possible to be certain exactly when these were introduced but they do not seem to have featured in the earliest editions.

<sup>24</sup> Advertisement in *Fables in Monosyllable* 1823. An edition of *Cobwebs* in 2 volumes then cost 3s.

<sup>25</sup> This re-ordering of the printed formes in such a novel manner sometimes caused Marshall’s workmen to make mistakes in the pagination (for example, one surviving copy of volume 2 is paginated [i-iii], 4-32, 37-44 41-72).

<sup>26</sup> For example UCLA copy CBC PE1119 A1L 94c 1812, shares sheet ‘B’ in volume 1 with their copy of CBC PE1119.A1L.94c 1815, but not the others.

<sup>27</sup> The partnership John Marshall and Co., (consisting of John Marshall, Eleanor Marshall and James Marshall) was dissolved in November 1789 and thereafter the “& Co.” was dropped from the imprint. The firm retained a second address at 17 Queen Street, Cheapside (in addition to 4 Aldermary Churchyard) between 1787 and 1798. Soon afterwards he was at Hartshorn Court Basing Lane circa 1800 and at 139/140, Fleet Street from around 1808 until 1828.

<sup>28</sup> Under an act passed in July 1799 (39 Geo.III c.79), all British printers were required to add their names and addresses to their productions.



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<sup>29</sup> Press figures are usually small numerals added by the pressmen to the bottom of one unsigned page on each sheet to identify that they had printed it, for the purpose of calculating their wages.

## Captions

1. One of John Marshall's early edition.
2. Illustration of a "Toss-about" from the original oval set of cuts.
3. The frontispiece from volume 2. of an early edition, compared with that from one dating from around 1815.
4. 'The flies' – from the 1822 replacement set of woodcuts.
5. The 1825 edition with a wood engraving on the title page.
6. The 1844 SPCK edition incorporating wood engravings throughout.
7. The Darton & Co. edition of 1858 with an etched frontispiece and a wood engraving on the title page.
8. Marshall's two trade binding styles. The upper copies have been sewn in sections and quarter bound in sheepskin with marbled paper covered boards. The lower copies have been saddle-stitched into pink paper covered boards with a printed label. Courtesy of the Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books, Toronto Public Library, Canada.
9. A battered copy of the 1825 edition in contemporary dark green roan.
10. Four Victorian editions of *Cobwebs to catch flies* from the Osborne Collection in Toronto. **Top left** –Frederick Warne and Co., c.1894 with pictorial boards. **Top right** - The 'Crofton Cousins' edition by Warne, Scribner, and Welford c. 1870, with a coloured lithographic printed label on front cover. **Bottom left**.- An anonymously published cheaper version of the previous edition in a green cloth binding with the title blocked within a diamond shape on the front cover. **Bottom right** – the SPCK edition of 1844 in limp red cloth with COBWEBS tooled on the front cover within an embossed cartouche. Photo courtesy of the Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books, Toronto Public Library, Canada.

**COBWEBBS TO CATCH FLIES FLIES: OR, DIALOGUES IN SHORT SENTENCES**  
**A PRELIMINARY LIST OF KNOWN EDITIONS**

The following is intended to be a checklist of editions known to the author, arranged chronologically in order of publisher. In some cases it has been compiled from entries in bibliographies or catalogues rather than from an examination of the books (copies of which are widely scattered). It may therefore indicate two editions by one publisher when in fact there was only one, (copies of which have been dated differently by individual libraries). Similarly, there are a number of typographical differences in surviving copies of the early Marshall editions (which will not be apparent from the brief entries given below), but which show that there were more separate printings than is indicated.

**London - John Marshall and Co. (1783-89)**

1. *Cobwebs to catch flies: or, dialogues in short sentences*, (London: John Marshall and Co. No.4, Aldermay Church Yard in Bow Lane, [1783]), 12°. v.1: 94, [2]p.; v.2: 87, [1]p.  
The first edition, contains press figures and includes an advertisement on page [4] of volume 2 regarding the derangement of the dialogues. ESTC T73091.
2. *Another ed.*, (London: John Marshall and Co. No.4, Aldermay Church Yard in Bow Lane, & 17 Queen Street Cheapside [c.1787-9]), 12°. v.1: 94p. v.2: pagination unknown.
3. *Another ed.* [c. 1787-9]), 12°. v.1: 72p. v.2: 88p.  
Contains a long advertisement for *A set of toys*.
4. *Another ed.* [c.1787-9]), 12°. v.1: 72p. v.2: 87, [1]p.  
ESTC N59935.
5. *Another ed.* [1789]), 12°. v.1: 94, [2]p.; v.2: 87, [1]p.  
Contains press figures and includes an advertisement for *The Fairy Spectator*, (Marshall, 1789) and probably therefore was published in that year. (ESTC N26601).

**London - John Marshall (1790-1815)**

1. *Cobwebs to catch flies: or, dialogues in short sentences*, (London: John Marshall No.4, Aldermay Church Yard in Bow Lane, [c.1790-9]), 12°. v.1: pagination unknown, v.2: 87, [1]p.
2. *Another ed.* [c. 1790-9]), 12°. v.1: 72p. v.2: 87, [1]p.
3. *Another ed.* [c. 1799]), 12°. v.1: 72p. v.2: 87, [1]p.  
Includes a printer's imprint.
4. *Another ed.*, (London: John Marshall No.4, Aldermay Church Yard in Watling Street, [c.1800]), 12°. v.1: 72p. v.2: 87, [1]p.  
Includes a printer's imprint.
5. *Another ed.*, (London: John Marshall 140, Fleet Street, [c.1800-1815]), 12°. v.1: 64p. v.2: 72p.  
Includes a printer's imprint.
6. *Another ed.* (London: John Marshall 140, Fleet Street, [c. 1800-1815]), 12°. v.1: 64 [3]p. v.2: 72p.  
This "edition" is imposed as a single gathering, and is found in several different states and the sheets were reprinted several times during the period 1800-1815, with copies sometimes made up with sheets from different printings.
7. *Another ed.* (London: John Marshall 140, Fleet Street, [c. 1804]), 12°. v.1 unknown pagination, v.2: 87p.

**Dublin - John Rice (1794)**

8. *Cobwebs to catch flies: or, dialogues in short sentences*, (Dublin; John Rice No.2, College Green, 1794), 12°. 2v.  
Dated 1794, pagination unknown. No press figures. Illustrations printed without floral frames of the earlier editions. Various miscellaneous cuts and ornaments added. ESTC N44101.

**London – Elizabeth Newbery (1799)**

9. *Toiles d'araignees pour attraper les mouches*, (Londres: de limperie de Baylis, Greville-street, Hatton Garden, et se trouve chez T. Hurst, No.32 Paternoster-row; et E. Newbery, au coin de St. Paul's church-yard, 1799), 12°. 2v.  
Roscoe J129.

**Philadelphia - Johnson & Warner (1813 – 1814)**

10. *Cobwebs to catch flies:*  
Known only from a newspaper advertisement (see Welch, d'Alté A. *A bibliography of American children's books printed prior to 1821*, (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1972) item 397.

**London - Baldwin, Cradock, & Joy (1815-1825)**

11. *Cobwebs to catch flies: or, dialogues in short sentences*, (London: London: Printed for Baldwin, Cradock, & Joy, Paternoster Row; and John Sharpe, Juvenile Library, London Museum, Piccadilly, by assignment from John Marshall 139, Fleet Street, 1815), 12°. v.1: 72p. v.2: 72p.  
Printed by T.C. Hansard, Peterboro'-court, London.
12. *Another ed.*, (London: London: Printed for Baldwin, Cradock, & Joy, 47 Paternoster Row; and N. Hailes, Juvenile Library, London Museum, Piccadilly, and John Marshall 140, Fleet Street, 1817), 12°. v.1: 72p. v.2: 72p.  
Printed by T.C. Hansard, Peterborough-court, Fleet Street, London.
13. *Another ed.*, (London: London: Printed for Baldwin, Cradock, & Joy, 47 Paternoster Row; and N. Hailes, Juvenile Library, London Museum, Piccadilly, and John Marshall 140, Fleet Street, 1822), 12°. v.1: 72p. v.2: 72p.  
Issued as 2 vols in 1. Printed by T.C. Hansard, Peterborough-court, Fleet Street, London. Introduces oblong wood cuts.
14. *Another ed.*, (London: Printed for Baldwin, Cradock, & Joy, N. Hailes, Juvenile Library, London Museum, Piccadilly, and John Marshall 140, Fleet Street, 1825), 12°. v.1: 72p. v.2: 72p.  
Issued as 2 vols in 1. Introduces two title page vignettes showing insects caught in a spider's web.

**Philadelphia - Robert Desilver (1825)**

15. *Cobwebs to catch flies, or, Dialogues in short sentences* (Philadelphia: Robert Desilver ..., 1825). 12°. 108 p.  
No surviving copies known.

**Baltimore - E. J. Coale (1825)**

16. *Cobwebs to catch flies, or, Dialogues in short sentences, adapted for children from the age of three to eight years. Revised and enlarged.* (Baltimore: Published by E.J. Coale, R.J. Matchett, printer, 1825), 2v. in 1 112 p.

**New York: Mahlon Day (1832-1837)**

17. *Cobwebs to catch flies; or, Dialogues in short sentences*, (New York: Mahlon Day, 1832). 2v. in 1 102 p.
18. *Another ed.* (New York: Mahlon Day, 1834). 2v. in 1 105, [2] p.
19. *Another ed.* (New York: Mahlon Day, 1837). 2v. in 1 105, p.

**London - Baldwin & Cradock (1833-1841)**

20. *Cobwebs to catch flies; or, Dialogues in short sentences. A new edition*, (London: Printed for Baldwin, and Cradock, N. Hailes, Juvenile Library, London Museum, Piccadilly, and John Marshall 140, Fleet Street, 1829), 12°. v.1: v.2 p.
21. *Another ed.*, (London: Printed for Baldwin and Cradock, 1833), 12°. v.1 71p.,: v.2 72p.
22. *Another ed.*, (London: Printed for Baldwin and Cradock, 1837), 12°. v.1 71p.,: v.2 72p.
23. *Another ed.*, (London: Printed for Baldwin and Cradock, 1841), 12°. v.1 71p.,: v.2 72p.

**New York: Mahlon Day & Co and Baker, Crane & Co. (1842)**

24. *Cobwebs to catch flies, or, Dialogues in short sentences*, (New York : Mahlon Day & Co. 374, and Baker, Crane & Co. 158 Pearl-Street, 1842).  
105 p.

**London - Darton & Co. (1842-1858)**

25. *Cobwebs to catch flies, or, Dialogues in short sentences*, New ed., (London: Darton & Co., 1842),  
2 v. 63, 64 p.
26. *Another ed.*: New ed. (London : Darton & Co., Holborn Hill, 1845-1847?),  
2 v. in 1 : ill. ; 17 cm.
27. *Another ed.*, New ed., (London: Darton & Co. 1852),  
2v, 63, 64 p: ill ; 17 cm.
28. *Another ed.*, New ed., (London: Darton & Co. 1858),  
2v, 63, 64 p: ill ; 17 cm.

**London - Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (1844-1849)**

29. *Cobwebs to catch flies, or, Dialogues in short sentences*, New ed., (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, c. 1844),  
1 v. (91 p.).  
Printed by R. Clay, Bread Street. The texts of 'The Dog', 'The Fan', 'The Bees', and 'The Hedge -hog' have been altered for use in Sunday Schools and 'The Fair' and 'The Useful Play' have been omitted.
30. *Another ed.*, New ed., (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, c.1849),  
1 v. (91 p.). Printed by S. and J. Bentley, Wilson and Fley, Bangor House, Shoe Lane.

**New York – C.S. Francis & Co., Boston – J.S. Francis & Co. (1851)**

31. *Cobwebs to catch flies, or, Dialogues in short sentences*, a new edition, revised and illustrated, (New York: C.S. Francis & Co., Boston: J.S. Francis (1851),  
1v, 120p.

**London – Lockwood & Co. (c.1866-1871)**

32. *Cobwebs to catch flies: or, Dialogues in short sentences*, A new edition (London: Lockwood and Co., c. 1866) ,  
New ed. 2 v. in 1.
33. *Another ed.*, A new edition (London: Lockwood and Co., c. 1871),  
New ed. 2 v. in 1.

**London – Frederick Warne and Co. (c.1870-1894) and New York Scribner, Welford & Co. (c. 1870)**

34. *Cobwebs to catch flies, or, Dialogues in short sentences*, (London: Frederick Warne and Co. New York: Scribner, Welford, and Co., c. 1870),  
104p.
35. *Another ed.*, New illustrated edition. (no place of publication, publisher's name or date given).  
Possibly printed from the same stereotype plates as the above edition.  
104p.
36. *Another ed.*, New illustrated edition. (London: Frederick Warne and Co. ; New York: Scribner, Welford, and Co., 1876),  
104p.
37. *Another ed.*, A new illustrated edition. (London: Frederick Warne and Co, 1894),  
iv, 104 p.

**London – George Routledge and sons (c. 1871)**

38. *Cobwebs to catch flies, or, Dialogues in short sentences*, New illustrated edition, (London George Routledge and Sons, 1871),  
128 p.

**London – Crosby Lockwood & Co. (1885)**

39. *Cobwebs to catch flies, or, Dialogues in short sentences*, A new edition. (London Crosby Lockwood & Co., 1885),  
126 p.