

# PERKIN THE PEDLAR

*Eleanor Farjeon*

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Also by Eleanor Farjeon  
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## About the Book

This is the story of the twenty-six children of Zeal Monachorum who did not know their ABC, until one day Perkin the Pedlar came by. He told them a story and a verse for each letter of the alphabet, starting with Appledore and ending with their own Zeal Monarchorum. And so they learned their ABC.

Eleanor Farjeon's unique gifts appear at their best in this enchanting alphabet book, where the little stories are in the enduring tradition of English folktale, and the verses pure, delightful poetry.

# Perkin the Pedlar

Eleanor Farjeon

**RHCP DIGITAL**

## THE A B C PEDLAR

THERE WAS ONCE a place called Zeal Monachorum, and for the matter of that, there still is. If you think it does not sound a very likely sort of place to be, for the matter of that, there once wasn't.

This is how it came to be.

One day a Wizard was walking along, and every here and there he came to a town or a village on his way. Presently he came to a big bare space, where there wasn't a place of any sort. So he stopped his walk, and stamped his foot, and turned round three times backwards, muttering:

'Zeal Monachorum!  
High Cockalorum!  
    Above 'em,  
    Below 'em,  
    Behind 'em,  
    Before 'em!  
Snip-Snap-Snorum!  
Riddle-me-ree!  
Zeal Monachorum—  
So let it be!'

And so it was! A village sprang up then and there, where the Wizard had stamped his foot and uttered his spell, and in the middle of the village was a sign-post with

ZEAL MONACHORUM

written on it in big black letters. And the Wizard nodded his head, and went on with his walk.

But although there was now a place in the space, there were as yet no people in the place. Till one day a man came along with his wife and said, 'Wife, here is a place with nobody in it. Let *us* live in it, and bring up our children here.'

The wife was willing, and they settled down; and after thirteen years had passed they had no less than twenty-six children, made up of thirteen pairs of twins. There was a boy and a girl in each pair. If you want to know their names

The 1st pair of twins were Anna and Bertie,  
The 2nd pair of twins were Celia and Dick,  
The 3rd pair of twins were Eva and Fred,  
The 4th pair of twins were Gladys and Henry,  
The 5th pair of twins were Ida and John,  
The 6th pair of twins were Kitty and Lionel,  
The 7th pair of twins were Mabel and Nick,  
The 8th pair of twins were Olive and Peter,  
The 9th pair of twins were Queenie and Roger,  
The 10th pair of twins were Susan and Tom,  
The 11th pair of twins were Una and Vernon,  
The 12th pair of twins were Wilhelmina and Xerxes,  
And the 13th pair of twins were Yvonne and Zebediah.

All the twenty-six children were bright and clever except for one thing: they could not say their A B C. They could recite little verses, and sing little songs, and say all the Kings and Queens of England, and the Multiplication Table up to 9 times 9. But they *could* not say their A B C.

When they tried, they would say, 'A is for Strawberry, B is for June, C is for Scrubbing-brush, D's for the Moon'—which *sounded* all right, but *was* all wrong. The only letter in the whole Alphabet they really knew was Z. When their Mother asked them 'What does Z stand for?' the whole twenty-six shouted with one voice:

'Z is for Zeal Monachorum!'

Which was perfectly true.

Their lack of the Alphabet bothered their parents greatly.

One morning, as the father was lathering his chin upstairs, and the mother was stirring the porridge downstairs, there was a knock at the door, and Anna, who was nearest, opened it. There stood a queer little man in an old leather jacket and a ragged felt hat, stooping under a big bag slung across his back.

'Good morning, Anna,' said the little man.

'However do you know my name?' she asked.

'Because A is for Anna, of course,' said he.

'Is it?' said Anna. 'I thought A was for Humming-top.'

'Dear, dear, dear!' said the little man. 'Where have *you* been brought up?'

'In Zeal Monachorum,' said she. 'Z is for Zeal Monachorum, you know.'

'To be sure I know,' said the little man. 'Don't I know what every letter under the sun stands for?'

'How come you to know all that?' asked Anna, wondering at him.

'Because I am Perkin the Pedlar, my dear,' said he; 'I peddle Alphabets, and make all my Alphabets myself.'

On hearing this, the mother came towards him, eagerly waving the wooden porridge spoon in the air. 'Can you really make Alphabets?' she asked.

'That's my job, ma'am. I go all over England making them. It may be an Alphabet of Trees: A is for Ash, B is for Beech, C is for Chestnut, and so on. Or an Alphabet of Birds: A is for Albatross, B is for Blackcap, C for Canary—and so on again. Now just lately I've been making an Alphabet of Places, and Zeal Monachorum finishes it nicely. So as I'm a bit footsore with wandering, I'd be glad to sit down and rest.'

'So you shall, and welcome,' said the mother, 'and bite too, if you please. And if you will but stay and teach your



Alphabet to my twenty-six children here, you shall have bed and board until they can say it from A to Z.'

'That's a bargain,' said Perkin. 'I'll teach them my last Alphabet of all, my Alphabet of Places, and give them something to remember each name by. For as I wandered over Britain, finding A here, B there, and C somewhere else, I always managed to hit on how or why the places came by their names, so I've a story to tell of every place. And now, by your leave, I'll step in and sit down, and as soon as we've had our porridge, I'll begin.'

So saying, the little man came into the room, hitched his bag off his back, sat himself down on a stool, and ate heartily of the porridge and salt and new milk which the children always had for breakfast. When he had had enough, he took Anna on his knee, and said, 'Come, children, listen to me, while I tell you the story of A is for Appledore.'