

Juvenile Rambles through the Paths of Nature. London, 1786. 16mo., 4 1/8 inches x 2 13/16 inches (105 mm x 71 mm), 128 pages, 13 woodcuts (two hand-colored, most likely by a young owner).

This work, the dedication of which is signed “R.J.” is generally attributed to Richard Johnson, an author closely associated with the publications of the Newberys and Thomas Carnan. Sarah Trimmer (1741–1810), a prominent writer of children’s books, apparently considered *Juvenile Rambles* a shameless borrowing of her book *An Easy Introduction to the Knowledge of Nature* (1780). Johnson is often termed a “hack-writer” because he would write, abridge, or even “borrow” anything that his publishers would pay for. Johnson made a decent living from scattered commissions, most of them from John Newbery’s successors, Thomas Carnan among them. Johnson’s reliance on pseudonyms—such as “Revd. W. D. Cooper,” “Master Michael Angelo,” and “Master Tommy Littleton”—adds to the challenge of positively identifying Johnson’s work.

This particular book is narrated by a kindly adult who leads little Charlotte and Billy on a series of twelve “rambles,” during the course of which he describes the uses of lambs, trees (the oak in particular), various grains, flax, hemp, and cotton; the characteristics of different birds such as the peacock, pheasant, owl, and hummingbird; and the varieties and uses of soils and their suitability for different ornamental plants. The narrator also engages in a discussion of minerals such as marble, coal, silver, copper, iron, and gold; describes the useful products derived from cows; offers advice about keeping one’s clothes and shoes dry; shares tidbits about mice, porcupines, and hedgehogs; deliberates on the social organization and virtues of bees; praises the utility of different classes of dogs (guard, herd, sport) and donkeys, as well as the nobility of horses; details the ingenuity of birds in their nest-building; and comments on the value of chickens and traits of other domestic fowl. The final “ramble” is a cautionary tour of the graves of children who have done foolish things.

This book was published by Thomas Carnan who was the stepson of John Newbery (1713–1767), the Englishman considered by some to be the inventor of children’s

literature and by others to have been the first to recognize its commercial potential. After Newbery's death in 1767, the publishing business was continued by two separate firms, one headed by Newbery's son Francis and Thomas Carnan, and the other by Newbery's nephew Francis and Francis' wife Elizabeth. Relations between the competing firms were not friendly, and Carnan and Newbery's partnership dissolved after a time, with Carnan continuing to publish and Francis selling patent medicines, which were part of his father's business.

This copy of *Juvenile Rambles* is now part of the Douce Collection at Oxford's Bodleian Library. Francis Douce (1757–1834) was a British antiquary and the Keeper of Manuscripts at the British Museum from 1807 to 1811. His bequest of more than 19,000 volumes contained printed books from various periods, including nearly 500 incunables, as well as roughly 425 manuscripts. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century children's books numbered among Douce's wide range of collecting specialties. This book is in a contemporary binding of boards covered with Dutch floral paper. The inscription "Marg^t H Haskoll | Dec^r 17 1799" appears on the front free endpaper, the title page bears the stamp "EX DONO FR. DOUCE | BIBL. BODL.," and the signature "Emily Haskoll 1819" is on leaf A4.

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