

The Renowned History of Giles Gingerbread: A Little Boy who lived upon Learning.
London: Newbery and Carnan, 1769. 3 11/16 inches x 2 1/2 inches (93 mm x 63 mm), 31 pages, 16 woodcuts.

This book was originally published by 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. Newbery’s publishing career began in 1730 when he was hired by William Carnan, printer of the *Reading Mercury*. Newbery must have pleased his employer, as he inherited a portion of Carnan’s estate in 1737 and married his widow Mary two years later. By 1740 Newbery had begun publishing books in Reading, and he relocated his business to London in either late 1743 or early 1744. His 1744 *Little Pretty Pocket-Book*, often referred to as the first children’s book, was intended to “make Tommy a good Boy, and Polly a good Girl,” as stated by the publisher on the title page. A motto in the book, “Instruction with Delight” neatly sums up Newbery’s approach to children’s literature, which underpinned his success. Perhaps a reflection on Newbery’s own history, the children who peopled his tales succeeded or failed according to their virtues. The most noteworthy example can be found in *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* (1765), believed to have been authored by Oliver Goldsmith. Newbery also issued books for adults, among them works by Samuel Johnson and the poet Christopher Smart, who wed Newbery’s stepdaughter Anna Maria. Newbery supplemented his publishing business by selling patent remedies, as indicated in advertisements that appeared in certain of his books.

After Newbery’s death in 1767, the publishing business was conducted by two separate firms, one headed by Newbery’s son Francis and stepson Thomas Carnan, and the other by Newbery’s nephew Francis and Francis’ wife Elizabeth. This edition of *Giles Gingerbread* was issued in 1769 by the former firm, Newbery and Carnan. This was the first of Newbery’s children’s books to be reprinted in the United States (in 1768, one year after John Newbery’s demise).

It believed that *The Renowned History of Giles Gingerbread* was written by John Newbery, as its preface is signed “The Bookseller” and refers to Newbery’s birthplace Waltham as “my native place.” The story certainly exemplifies the children’s books published by John Newbery, being both entertaining and egalitarian in nature. *Giles Gingerbread*, subtitled “A Little Boy who lived upon Learning,” tells of a boy who learned his lessons by eating his way through gingerbread books made by his father. Gaffer Gingerbread tells his son Giles that “Merit and Industry may entitle a Man to any Thing” and illustrates his point with the tale of Sir Toby, whose virtues allow him to rise from humble origins to wealth and position. In addition to its emphasis on the value of learning, *Giles Gingerbread* promoted obedience, selflessness, honesty, and industry to its young readers. Not only does the text make reference to “Mr. *Newbery*’s pretty Play-Thing” (1759), but a Newbery advertisement also follows the story.

This book, from the Bodleian Library’s Douce Collection, is in a contemporary binding of boards covered with Dutch floral paper. 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. “Lydia” is written on the frontispiece of this copy of *Giles Gingerbread*; the title page bears the inscription “Lydia Heaton | Febuar^y 4 1770” and a stamp “EX DONO FR. DOUCE | BIBL. BODL.”

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