

The Whitsuntide-Gift: or the Way to be Very Happy. London: J. Newbery, 1767. 3 13/16 inches x 2 1/2 inches (96 mm x 64 mm), 63 pages, 17 woodcuts.

This book was 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. 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. Eventually John Newbery’s publications became the property Elizabeth Newbery, and numerous publishers came to specialize in children’s literature. The American Library Association’s annual Newbery Medal commemorates his contributions to the genre.

The Whitsuntide-Gift is a sequel to Newbery's *The Easter Gift* and, like it, features Master Billy and Miss Kitty Smith, who started out as the very worst little children but were reformed through "good Advice and good Management." In this story, Billy and Kitty are invited by the Duke of Goodwill to visit his son and daughter in Yorkshire. En route and while in Yorkshire, they discuss the wickedness of pride, ambition, and greed. On Sunday, Billy shares the essence of religion (love God, your neighbors, and yourself) with some ignorant boys, followed by an exposition of the Ten Commandments. The final paragraph of the story contains a plug for yet another sequel, *The Fairing*, and is immediately succeeded by an advertisement for "The Books usually read by master Billy and Miss Kitty, are these, and they are Sold at Mr. Newbery's at the Bible and Sun in St. Paul's Church-yard." The book ends with another ad, this one for patent remedies sold by Newbery, and a poem and woodcut of *The little wise Woman* opposite.

This book is now in the Douce Collection of the 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 copy of *The Whitsuntide-Gift* is in a contemporary binding of boards covered with Dutch floral paper. Inscriptions on the frontispiece, title page, D7 verso and D8 read, respectively: "Lydia Heaton | February 4th 1770," "Peggy Haskoll, "Lydia," and "I came to Mrs Leggs | March 25th 1768." The title page has the stamp "EX DONO FR. DOUCE | BIBL. BODL."

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