

[Robert Withy] (Bob Short, pseud.), *The Country 'Squire*. London: H. Turpin, 1781.  
8vo, six woodcuts, 98 pages.

This children's book is a rather morbid text, particularly by modern standards. It is narrated by a country squire who delights in exhorting the young to be sober and mindful of their impending death. The book is certainly a reflection of the rise of Methodism in England, and it cannot but help to remind the contemporary reader that rates of child mortality in the eighteenth century were considerably higher than those of today. No doubt the death of a child in those times was not uncommon. ("However young you may be, reader, know this solemn truth, you are not *too* young to *die*....") Given such a context, the author's urgings for juvenile piety, virtue, and self-reflection as preparation for death are understandable, and even sensible.

The signature "GW" in the preface of *The Country 'Squire* is likely the signature of George Wright, author of *The Rural Christian* and *Solitary Walks*, both of which are quoted in this work. The book is sprinkled with allusions to James Hervey's *Meditations Among the Tombs* (1746), a popular devotional text, as well as quotations from Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742–45), and biblical passages.

This book, now in the Douce Collection of Oxford University'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 copy of *The Country 'Squire* is in a contemporary binding of boards covered with Dutch floral paper. It bears the signature of (presumably) a young boy named Thomas Haskoll on one of the front flyleaves.

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