

The Wisdom of Crop the Conjurer. London: John Marshall and Co., [n.d.]. 4o, 12 woodcuts, 47 pages (C4, D1 lacking).

In this charming narrative, a fortune-teller named Crop obliges a series of children by foretelling their future. These children serve as moral lessons, and the reader is told that one's future may be divined easily from one's behavior. The tale of Crop the Conjurer is followed by the story of Tom Trot, who earned his name because of his quickness in learning. Because of his cleverness and devotion to his lessons, Tom was adopted by a gentleman, reinforcing the overarching message that virtue in children produces happiness. The tone of this book was clearly meant as an enticement to adults shopping for appropriate reading material for their offspring.

This book was from the publishing house of John Marshall (d. 1823), a prolific producer of children's books. (His catalogues of the 1780s included approximately 100 titles for children.) Marshall is considered to be the first significant rival to the Newberys, whose patriarch John was the first to develop a serious specialty in juvenile literature. Marshall's books, like those of Newbery, often included plugs for his business. At the end of the book is a three-page advertisement for John Marshall's children books, overtly intended to promote the love of reading and learning in children. Interestingly, the Tom Trot story contains a reference to Giles Gingerbread, the protagonist of Newbery's highly popular children's book (*The Renowned History of Giles Gingerbread*, ca. 1764)

This book is 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. The book's title page is inscribed "M H Haskoll | 1799" and displays the Douce stamp ("EX DONO FR. DOUCE | BIBL. BODL."). "M. L. Haskoll | 1819" is written on A3. The book is in a contemporary binding of boards covered with Dutch floral paper.

Octavo code: **hasthi**