

from John Locke, *Some Thoughts on Education* (1693):

§ 156. When by these gentle ways he begins to *read*, some easy pleasant book, suited to his capacity, should be put into his hands, wherein the entertainment that he finds might draw him on, and reward his pains in reading, and yet not such as should fill his head with perfectly useless trumpery, or lay the principles of vice and folly. To this purpose, I think *Æsop's Fables* the best, which being stories apt to delight and entertain a child, may yet afford useful reflections to a grown man; and if his memory retain them all his life after, he will not repent to find them there, amongst his manly thoughts and serious business. If his *Æsop* has *pictures* in it, it will entertain him much the better, and encourage him to read, when it carries the increase of knowledge with it: for such visible objects children hear talked of in vain and without any satisfaction whilst they have no ideas of them; those ideas being not to be had from sounds, but from the things themselves or their pictures. And therefore I think as soon as he begins to spell, as many pictures of animals should be got him as can be found, with the printed names to them, which at the same time will invite him to read, and afford him matter of enquiry and knowledge. *Reynard the Fox* is another book I think may be made use of to the same purpose. And if those about him will talk to him often about the stories he has read, and hear him tell them, it will, besides other advantages, add encouragement and delight to his *reading*, when he finds there is some use and pleasure in it. These baits seem wholly neglected in the ordinary method; and 'tis usually long before learners find any use or pleasure in reading, which may tempt them to it, and so take books only for fashionable amusements, or impertinent troubles, good for nothing.

§ 157. The Lord's Prayer, the Creeds, and Ten Commandments, 'tis necessary he should learn perfectly by heart; but, I think, not by reading them himself in his primer, but by somebody's repeating them to him, even before he can read. But learning by heart, and *learning to read*, should not I think be mix'd, and so one made to clog the other. But his *learning to read* should be made as little trouble or business to him as might be.

What other books there are in *English* of the kind of those above-mentioned, fit to engage the liking of children, and tempt them to *read*, I do not know: but am apt to think, that children being generally delivered over to the method of schools, where the fear of the rod is to inforce, and not any pleasure of the employment to invite them to learn, this sort of useful books, amongst the number of silly ones that are of all sorts, have yet had the fate to be neglected; and nothing that I know has been considered of this kind out of the ordinary road of the horn-book, primer, psalter, Testament, and Bible.

§ 158. As for the *Bible*, which children are usually employ'd in to exercise and improve their talent *in reading*, I think the promiscuous reading of it through by chapters as they lie in order, is so far from being of any advantage to children, either for the perfecting their *reading*, or principing their religion, that perhaps a worse could not be found. For what pleasure or encouragement can it be to a child to exercise himself in reading those parts of a book where he understands nothing? And how little are the law of *Moses*, the song of *Solomon*, the prophecies in the Old, and the Epistles and *Apocalypse* in the New Testament, suited to a child's capacity? And though the history of the Evangelists and the *Acts* have something easier, yet, taken altogether, it is very disproportional to the understanding of childhood. I grant that the principles of religion are to be drawn from thence, and in the words of the scripture; yet none should be propos'd to a child, but such

as are suited to a child's capacity and notions. But 'tis far from this to read through *the whole Bible*, and that for reading's sake. And what an odd jumble of thoughts must a child have in his head, if he have any at all, such as he should have concerning religion, who in his tender age reads all the parts of the *Bible* indifferently as the word of God without any other distinction! I am apt to think, that this in some men has been the very reason why they never had clear and distinct thoughts of it all their lifetime.

§ 159. And now I am by chance fallen on this subject, give me leave to say, that there are some parts of the *Scripture* which may be proper to be put into the hands of a child to engage him to read; such as are the story of *Joseph* and his brethren, of *David* and *Goliath*, of *David* and *Jonathan*, &c. and others that he should be made to read for his instruction, as that, *What you would have others do unto you, do you the same unto them*; and such other easy and plain moral rules, which being fitly chosen, might often be made use of, both for reading and instruction together; and so often read till they are thoroughly fixed in the memory; and then afterwards, as he grows ripe for them, may in their turns on fit occasions be inculcated as the standing and sacred rules of his life and actions. But the reading of the whole *Scripture* indifferently, is what I think very inconvenient for children, till after having been made acquainted with the plainest fundamental parts of it, they have got some kind of general view of what they ought principally to believe and practise; which yet, I think, they ought to receive in the very words of the scripture, and not in such as men prepossess'd by systems and analogies are apt in this case to make use of and force upon them. Dr. *Worthington*, to avoid this, has made a catechism, which has all its answers in the precise words of the *Scripture*; a thing of good example, and such a sound form of words as no Christian can except against as not fit for his child to learn. Of this, as soon as he can say the Lord's Prayer, Creed, the Ten Commandments, by heart, it may be fit for him to learn a question every day, or every week, as his understanding is able to receive and his memory to retain them. And when he has this catechism perfectly by heart, so as readily and roundly to answer to any question in the whole book, it may be convenient to lodge in his mind the remaining moral rules scatter'd up and down in the *Bible*, as the best *exercise of his memory*, and that which may be always a rule to him, ready at hand, in the whole conduct of his life.

§ 160. When he can read *English* well, it will be seasonable to enter him in *writing*: and here the first thing should be taught him is to *hold his pen right*; and this he should be perfect in before he should be suffered to put it to paper: For not only children but any body else that would do any thing well, should never be put upon too much of it at once, or be set to perfect themselves in two parts of an action at the same time, if they can possibly be separated. I think the Italian way of holding the pen between the thumb and the forefinger alone, may be best; but in this you may consult some good writing-master, or any other person who writes well and quick. When he has learn'd to hold his pen right, in the next place he should learn how to *lay his paper, and place his arm and body to it*. These practices being got over, the way to teach him to write without much trouble, is to get a plate graved with the characters of such a hand as you like best: but you must remember to have them a pretty deal bigger than he should ordinarily write; for every one naturally comes by degrees to write a less hand than he at first was taught, but never a bigger. Such a plate being graved, let several sheets of good writing-paper be printed off with red ink, which he has nothing to do but go over with a good pen fill'd with black ink, which will quickly bring his hand to the formation of those characters, being at first

shewed where to begin, and how to form every letter. And when he can do that well, he must then exercise on fair paper; and so may easily be brought *to write* the hand you desire.