

How a Prince Learned to Read

by James Baldwin

A thousand years ago boys and girls did not learn to read. Books were very scarce and very precious, and only a few men could read them.

Each book was written with a pen or a brush. The pictures were painted by hand, and some of them were very beautiful. A good book would sometimes cost as much as a good house.

In those times there were even some kings who could not read. They thought more of hunting and fighting than of learning.

There was one such king who had four sons, Ethelbald, Ethelbert, Ethelred, and Alfred. [Footnote: Eth'el bald, Eth'el bert, Eth'el red, Al'fred.] The three older boys were sturdy, half-grown lads; the youngest, Alfred, was a slender, fair-haired child.

One day when they were with their mother, she showed them a wonderful book that some rich friend had given her. She turned the leaves and showed them the strange letters. She showed them the beautiful pictures, and told them how they had been drawn and painted.

They admired the book very much, for they had never seen anything like it. "But the best part of it is the story which it tells," said their mother. "If you could only read, you might learn that story and enjoy it. Now I have a mind to give this book to one of you"

"Will you give it to me, mother?" asked little Alfred.

"I will give it to the one who first learns to read in it" she answered.

"I am sure I would rather have a good bow with arrows" said Ethelred.

"And I would rather have a young hawk that has been trained to hunt" said Ethelbert.

"If I were a priest or a monk" said Ethelbald, "I would learn to read. But I am a prince, and it is foolish for princes to waste their time with such things."

"But I should like to know the story which this book tells," said Alfred.

A few weeks passed by. Then, one morning, Alfred went into his mother's room with a smiling, joyous face.

"Mother," he said, "will you let me see that beautiful book again?"

His mother unlocked her cabinet and took the precious volume from its place of safe keeping.

Alfred opened it with careful fingers. Then he began with the first word on the first page and

read the first story aloud without making one mistake.

"O my child, how did you learn to do that?" cried his mother.

"I asked the monk, Brother Felix, to teach me," said Alfred. "And every day since you showed me the book, he has given me a lesson. It was no easy thing to learn these letters and how they are put together to make words. Now, Brother Felix says I can read almost as well as he."

"How wonderful!" said his mother.

"How foolish!" said Ethelbald.

"You will be a good monk when you grow up," said Ethelred, with a sneer.

But his mother kissed him and gave him the beautiful book. "The prize is yours, Alfred," she said. "I am sure that whether you grow up to be a monk or a king, you will be a wise and noble man."

And Alfred did grow up to become the wisest and noblest king that England ever had. In history he is called Alfred the Great.

Read, and You Will Know

by James Baldwin

"Mother, what are the clouds made of? Why does the rain fall? Where does all the rain water go? What good does it do?"

Little William Jones was always asking questions.

"I want to know," he said; "I want to know everything."

At first his mother tried to answer all his questions. But after he had learned to read, she taught him to look in books for that which he wished to know.

"Mother, what makes the wind blow?"

"Read, and you will know, my child."

"Who lives on the other side of the world?"

"Read, and you will know."

"Why is the sky so blue?"

"Read, and you will know."

"Oh, mother, I would like to know everything."

"You can never know everything, my child. But you can learn many things from books."

"Yes, mother, I will read and then I will know."

He was a very little boy, but before he was three years old he could read quite well. When eight years of age he was the best scholar at the famous school at Harrow. He was always reading, learning, inquiring.

"I want to know; I want to know," he kept saying.

"Read, and you will know," said his mother. "Read books that are true. Read about things that are beautiful and good. Read in order to become wise.

"Do not waste your time in reading foolish books. Do not read bad books, they will make you bad. No book is worth reading that does not make you better or wiser."

And so William Jones went on reading and learning. He became one of the most famous scholars in the world. The king of England made him a knight and called him Sir William Jones. Sir William Jones lived nearly two hundred years ago. He was noted for his great knowledge, the most of which he had obtained from books. It is said that he could speak and write forty languages.

Sources:

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