

ECLECTIC EDUCATION SERIES

History of McGuffey's Readers

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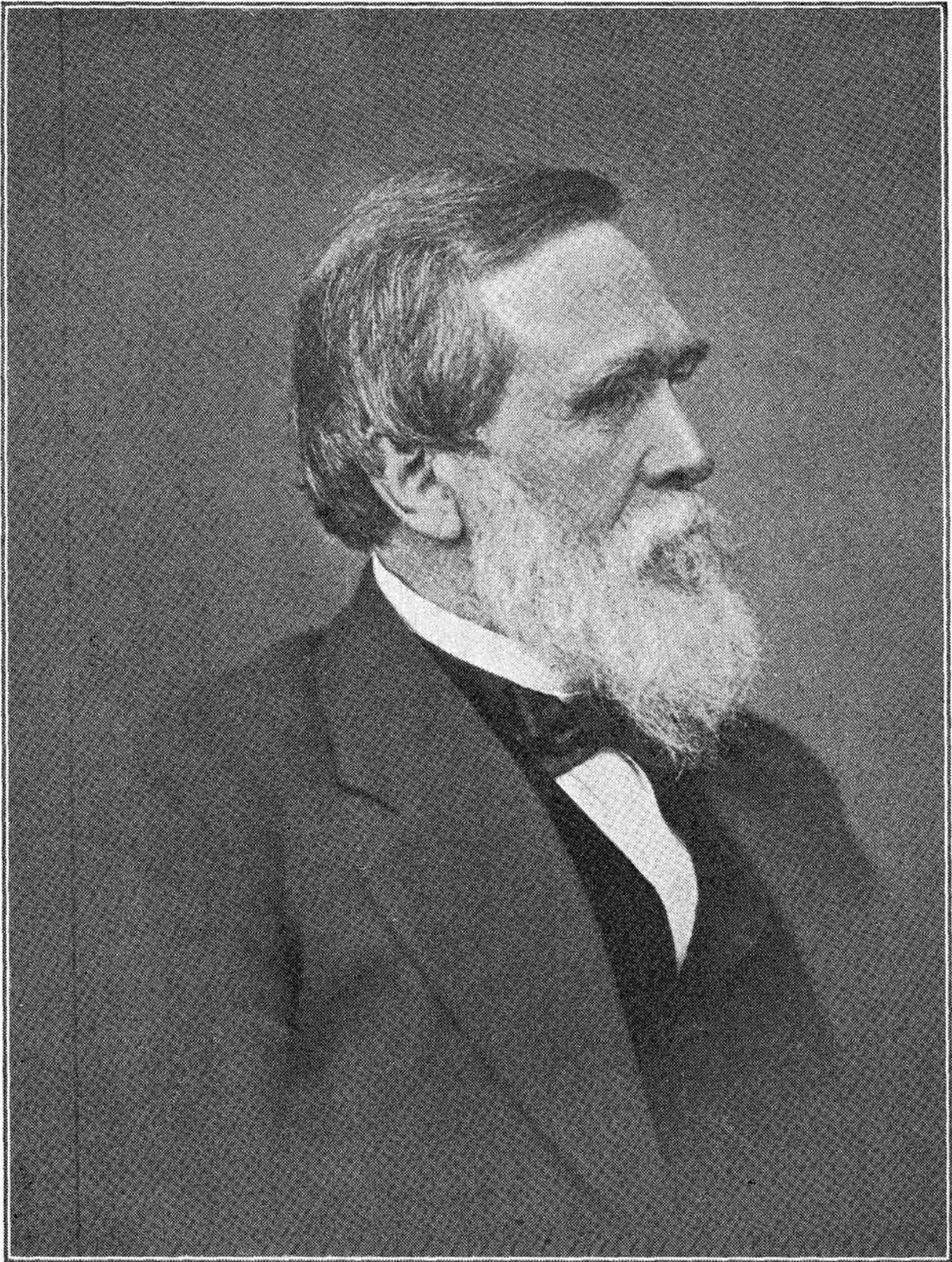
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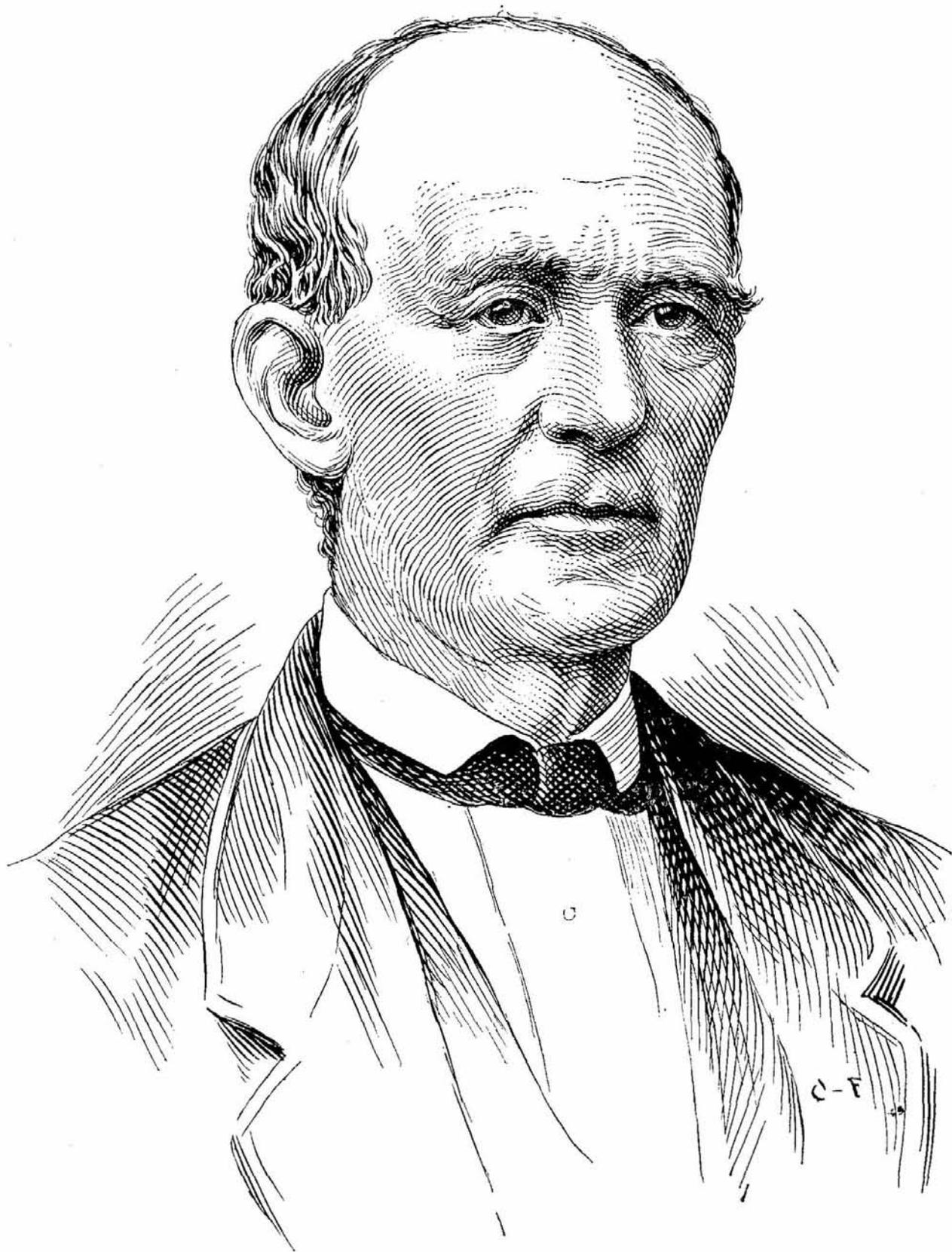




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A HISTORY
OF THE
McGUFFEY READERS

By
HENRY H. VAIL.

WITH THREE PORTRAITS.

THE BOOKISH BOOKS—IV.

New Edition.



CLEVELAND
THE BURROWS BROTHERS CO.
1911

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A History of the McGuffey Readers

THE BOOKS.

Before me are four small books roughly bound in boards, the sides covered with paper. On the reverse of the title pages, two bear a copyright entry in the year 1836; the others were entered in 1837. They are the earliest editions of McGuffey's Eclectic Readers that have been found in a search lasting forty years.

They represent the first efforts in an educational and business enterprise that has for three-quarters of a century called for the best exertions of many skilled men, and in their several forms these books have taken a conspicuous part in the education of millions of the citizens of this country.

But what interest can the history of the McGuffey Eclectic Readers have to those who did not use these books in their school career? Their story differs from that of other readers since in successive forms, adjusted more or less perfectly to the changing demands of the schools, they attained a wider and more prolonged use than has been accorded to any other series.

The Function of Readers

By custom and under sanction of law certain studies are pursued in the common schools of every state. Spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, history, grammar, civics and physiology are the subjects usually taught. The school authorities select the textbooks which shall be used in each subject. The readers are the only texts used in all schools affording opportunity for distinct ethical teaching. The history of our country should give ideas of patriotism; the civics should contain the primary notions of government; the physiologies should instruct the pupils in the laws of health; but the reader should cover the whole field of morals and manners and in language that will impress their teaching indelibly upon the mind of every pupil. While the chief aim of the school readers must be to teach the child to apprehend thought from the printed page and convey this thought to the attentive listener with precision, these efforts should be exerted upon thoughts that have permanent value. No other texts used in the school room bear directly and positively upon the formation of character in the pupils. The school readers are the proper and indispensable texts for teaching true patriotism, integrity, honesty, industry, temperance, courage, politeness, and all other moral and intellectual virtues. In these books every lesson should have a distinct purpose in view. and the final aim should be to establish in the pupils high moral principles which are at the foundation of character.

Formers of Character

The literature of the English language is rich in material suited to this intent; no other language is better endowed. This material is fresh to every pupil, no matter how familiar it may be to teacher or parent. Although some of it has been in print for three centuries, it is true and beautiful today.

President Eliot has said, "When we teach a child to read, our primary aim is not to enable it to decipher a way-bill or a receipt, but to kindle its imagination, enlarge its vision and open for it the avenues of knowledge." Knowledge gives power, which may be exerted for good or for evil. Character gives direction to power. Power is the engine which may force the steamer through the water, character is the helm which renders the power serviceable for good.

Readers which have been recognized as formers of good habits of action, thought, and speech for three-quarters of a century, which have taught a sound morality to millions of children without giving offense to the most violent sectarian, which have opened the doors of pure literature to all their users, are surely worthy of study as to their origin, their successive changes, and their subsequent career.

The story of these readers is told in the specimens of the several editions, in the long treasured and time-worn contracts, in the books of accounts kept by the successive publishers, and in the traditions which have been passed down from white haired men who gossiped of the early days in the school-

Different Editions

book business. Valuable information has also been furnished by descendants of the McGuffey family, and by the educational institutions with which each of the authors of the readers was connected.

For half a century the present writer has had personal knowledge of the readers. At first, as a teacher, using them daily in the class room; but soon, as an editor, directing the literary work of the publishers and owners. It therefore falls to him to narrate a story "quorum pars minima fui."

For more than seventy years the McGuffey Readers have held high rank as text-books for use in the elementary schools, especially throughout the West and South. But during this time these books have been revised five times and adjusted to the changing conditions in the schools. In each one of these revisions the marked characteristics of the original series have been most scrupulously retained, and the continued success of the series is doubtless owing to this fact. There has been a continuity of spirit.

The First and Second Readers were first published in 1836. In 1837 the Third and Fourth Readers were printed. For reasons elsewhere explained these books were "improved and enlarged" in 1838. In 1841 a higher reader was added to the series which was then named McGuffey's Rhetorical Guide. In the years 1843 and 1844 the four books then constituting the series were thoroughly remodeled and on the title pages were placed the words "Newly Revised" and the Rhetorical Guide was annexed as

Contents of the Books

the Fifth Reader. Ten years later the entire series was made over and issued in six books. These were then called the New Readers. From 1853 until 1878 the books remained substantially unchanged; but in the latter year they were renewed largely in substance and improved in form. These readers as copyrighted in 1879 were extensively used for more than a quarter of a century. Changing conditions in the school room called for another revision in 1901. This latest form now in extensive use is called **The New McGuffey Readers.**

Each of these revisions has constituted practically a new series although the changes have never included the entire contents. In the higher readers will be found today many selections which appeared in the original books. The reason for retaining such selections is clear. No one has been able to write in the English language selections that are better for school use than some written by Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, and other early writers. The literature of the English language has not all been written in the present decade nor in the last century.

As at first published, the lower books of the McGuffey Readers had no trace of the modern methods now used in teaching the mastery of words — even the alphabet was not given in orderly form; but the alphabetic method of teaching the art of reading was then the only one used. The pupil at first spelled each word by naming the letters and then pronounced each syllable and then the word.

First Editions

The following stanza is copied from page 61 of the edition of 1844 to illustrate the method of presenting words:

I like to see a lit-tle dog,
And pat him on the head;
So pret-ti-ly he wags his tail
When-ev-er he is fed.

The First Reader was mostly in words of one syllable. In this book we find the story of the lame dog that, when cured, brought another lame dog to be doctored; of the kind boy who freed his caged bird; of the cruel boy who drowned the cat and pulled wings and legs from flies; of Peter Pindar the story teller, and the "snow dog" of Mount St. Bernard; of Mr. Post who adopted and reared Mary; of the boy who told a lie and repented after he was found out; of the chimney sweep who was tempted to steal a gold watch but put it back and was thereafter educated by its owner; of the whisky boy; and of the mischievous boy who played ghost and made another boy insane. Nearly every lesson has a moral clearly stated in formal didactic words at its close.

In the Second Reader we find the story of the idle boy who talked with the bees, dogs, and horses, and having found them all busy, reformed himself; of the kind girl who shared her cake with a dog and an old man; of the mischievous boys who tied the grass across the path and thus upset not only the milk-maid but the messenger running for a doctor

First Editions

to come to their father; of the wise lark who knew that the farmer's grain would not be cut until he resolved to cut it himself; of the wild and ravenous bear that treed a boy and hung suspended by his boot; and of another bear that traveled as a passenger by night in a stage coach; of the quarrelsome cocks, pictured in a clearly English farm yard, that were both eaten up by the fox that had been brought in by the defeated cock; of the honest boy and the thief who was judiciously kicked by the horse that carried oranges in baskets; of George Washington and his historic hatchet and the mutilated cherry-tree; and of the garden that was planted with seeds in lines spelling Washington's name which removed all doubt as to an intelligent Creator. There were also some lessons on such animals as beavers, whales, peacocks and lions.

The Third Reader will be remembered first because of the picture, on the cover, of Napoleon on his rearing charger. This book contained five selections from the Bible; Croly's "Conflagration of the Amphitheatre at Rome;" "How a Fly Walks on the Ceiling;" "The Child's Inquiry;" "How big was Alexander, Pa;" Irving's "Description of Pompey's Pillar;" Woodworth's "Old Oaken Bucket;" Miss Gould's "The Winter King;" and Scott's "Bonaparte Crossing the Alps," commencing "Is the route practicable?" said Bonaparte. 'It is barely possible to pass,' replied the engineer. 'Let us set forward, then,' said Napoleon." The rearing steed facing a

Favorite Selections

precipitous slope in the picture gave emphasis to the words. There were also in this reader several pieces about Indians and bears, which indicate that Dr. McGuffey never forgot the stories told at the fire-side by his father of his adventures as an Indian scout and hunter.

In the Fourth Reader there were seventeen selections from the Bible; William Wirt's "Description of the Blind Preacher;" Phillip's "Character of Napoleon Bonaparte;" Bacon's "Essay on Studies;" Nott's "Speech on the Death of Alexander Hamilton;" Addison's "Westminster Abbey;" Irving's "Alhambra;" Rogers's "Genevra;" Willis's "Parrhasius;" Montgomery's "Make Way for Liberty;" two extracts from Milton and two from Shakespeare, and no less than fourteen selections from the writings of the men and women who lectured before the College of Teachers in Cincinnati. The story of the widow of the Pine Cottage sharing her last smoked herring with a strange traveler who revealed himself as her long-lost son, returning rich from the Indies, was anonymous, but it will be remembered by those who read it.

These selections were the most noteworthy ones in the first editions of these readers.

The First and Second Readers of the McGuffey Series were substantially made new at each revision. A comparison of the original Third Reader with an edition copyrighted in 1847, shows that the latter book was increased about one-third in size.

Favorite Selections

Of the sixty-six selections in the early edition only forty-seven were retained, while thirty new ones were inserted. Among the latter were "Harry and his Dog Frisk" that brought to him, punished by being sent to bed, a Windsor pear; "Perseverance," a tale of kite-flying followed by the poem, "Try, try again;" the "Little Philosopher," named Peter Hurdle, who caught Mr. Lenox's runaway horse and on examination seemed to lack nothing but an Eclectic spelling book, a reader and a Testament — which were promised him; "The Colonists," in which men of various callings offered their services, and while even the dancing master was accepted as of some possible use, the gentleman was scornfully rejected; "Things by Their Right Names," in which a battle was described as wholesale murder; "Little Victories," in which Hugh's mother consoled him for the loss of a leg by telling him of the lives of men who became celebrated under even greater adversities; "The Wonderful Instrument," which turned out to be the eye; "Metaphysics," a ludicrous description of a colonial salt-box in affected terms of exactness designed to ridicule some forms of reasoning. Those who used this edition of the third reader will surely remember some of these selections.

In the Fourth Reader printed in 1844 there were thirty new selections — less than one-third of the book; but some of these were such as will be remembered by those who read them in school. There was "Respect for the Sabbath Rewarded," in which

The Bible

a barber of Bath had become so poor because he would not shave his customers on Sunday, that he borrowed a half-penny to buy a candle Saturday night to give light for a late customer, and was thus discovered to be the long-lost William Reed of Taunton, heir to many thousand pounds; "The Just Judge," who disguised himself as a miller and, obtaining a place on the jury, received only five guineas as a bribe when the others got ten, and who revealed himself as Lord Chief Justice Hale and tried the case over in his miller's clothing; Hawthorne's "The Town Pump;" Mrs. Southey's "April Day."

"All day the low-hung clouds have dropped
Their garnered fullness down,
All day a soft gray mist hath wrapped
Hill, valley, grove and town."

Bryant's "Death of the Flowers;" Campbell's "Lochiel's Warning;" and the trial scene from Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice. All these became favorite reading exercises in later years.

As late as 1840 the Bible was read daily in all the schools of the West. Although sectarian or denominational teaching was not permitted, religious instruction was desired by the great majority of school patrons.

Even up to the opening of the Civil War, whatever the faith or the practice of the adult inhabitants of the country, the Bible story and the Bible diction

Dr. Swing's Opinion

were familiar to all. The speeches of the popular orators of that day were filled with distinct allusions to the Bible and these were quickly and clearly apprehended by the people. It may be questioned whether popular speeches of the present day would have equal force if based on the assumption that everybody knows the Biblical stories. Indeed it is a common remark made by professors of English in the higher institutions of learning that pupils know little of the Bible as a distinctly formative and conservative element in English literature. In the texts authorized for the study of English classics, Biblical allusions are very common. These have little meaning to pupils who have not read the Bible, unless the passage is pointed out and hunted up.

From the pages of these readers the pupils learned to master the printed word and obtain the thought of the authors. Without conscious effort they received moral instruction and incentives toward right living. Without intent they treasured in their memories such extracts from the authors of the best English Literature as gave them a desire to read more.

In one of his sermons Dr. David Swing of Chicago said: "Much as you may have studied the languages or the sciences, that which most affected you was the moral lessons in the series of McGuffey. And yet the reading class was filed out only once a day to read for a few moments, and then we were all sent to our seats to spend two hours in learning

Books as Teachers

how to bound New Hampshire or Connecticut, or how long it would take a greyhound to overtake a fox or a hare if the spring of each was so and so, and the poor fugitive had such and such a start. That was perhaps well, but we have forgotten how to bound Connecticut, and how to solve the equation of the field and thicket; but up out of the far-off years come all the blessed lessons in virtue and righteousness which those reading books taught; and when we now remember, how even these moral memories have faded I cannot but wish the teachers had made us bound the States less, and solve fewer puzzles in 'position' and the 'cube root' and made us commit to memory the whole series of the McGuffey Eclectic Readers. The memory that comes from these far-away pages is full of the best wisdom of time or the timeless land. In these books we were indeed led by a schoolmaster, from beautiful maxims for children up to the best thoughts of a long line of sages, and poets, and naturalists. There we all first learned the awful weakness of the duel that took away a Hamilton; there we saw the grandeur of the Blind Preacher of William Wirt; there we saw the emptiness of the ambition of Alexander, and there we heard even the infidel say, 'Socrates died like a philosopher, but Jesus Christ like a God.'"

This public recognition of the influence of these readers upon the mind and character of this great preacher is again noted in Rev. Joseph Fort New-

How a Japanese Learned English

ton's biography of David Swing in which the books which influenced that life are named as "The Bible, Calvin's Institutes, Fox's Book of Martyrs and the McGuffey Readers;" and the author quotes David Swing as saying that "The Institutes were rather large reading for a boy, but to the end of his life he held that McGuffey's Sixth Reader was a great book. For Swing, as for many a boy in the older West, its varied and wise selections from the best English authors were the very gates of literature ajar."

One of the most eminent political leaders of the present day attributes his power in the use of English largely to the study of McGuffey's Sixth Reader in the common schools of Ohio.

At a dinner lately given in New York to Marquis Ito of Japan, the marquis responded to the toast of his health returning thanks in English. He then continued his remarks in Japanese for some eight minutes. At its close Mr. Tsudjuki, who was then the minister of Education in Japan, traveling with Marquis Ito as his friend and companion, and who had taken shorthand notes of the Japanese speech, rose and translated the speech readily and fluently into good English. One of the guests asked how he had learned to speak English so correctly. He replied that he had done so in the public schools of Japan and added, "I learned my English from McGuffey's Readers, with which you are no doubt familiar."

It is not unusual to see in the literary columns of