

**SPECIAL METHOD IN THE
READING OF COMPLETE ENGLISH
CLASSICS IN THE GRADES OF THE
COMMON SCHOOL**

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Special Method in the Reading of Complete English Classics in the Grades of the Common School by Charles A. McMurry

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CHARLES A. MCMURRY

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BY

CHARLES A. MCMURRY, Ph.D.

THIRD EDITION.

PUBLIC-SCHOOL PUBLISHING COMPANY
BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS
1897

This Book is Dedicated

TO THE FOLLOWING TEACHERS WITH WHOM THE IDEAS TREATED IN
ITS PAGES WERE DISCUSSED IN
ROUND-TABLE CONFERENCES IN CHICAGO. THEIR STRONG
INTEREST IN THE PROBLEMS RAISED AND
THEIR PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS,
SPRINGING FROM THEIR LONG EXPERIENCE IN
SCHOOLS, HAVE BEEN
VERY HELPFUL AND ENCOURAGING.

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PREFACE.

This little book is a continuation of the series of Special Methods, of which it is the third number. The Special Method in Literature and History is a preparation for this book. It deals with the oral treatment of fairy stories, Crusoe, and myths before the children are old enough to read them and prepares them for the reading discussed in this book.

The effort to gather into a rising series the best classic products of our English tongue and to appropriate them to direct school purposes is very inspiring. It opens up a field of great richness and culture to both teachers and children. If all our teachers in the common schools should read with thoughtful appreciation ten or a dozen of the best books in the series, it would surely improve the teaching in all our schools by twenty-five per cent.

The best literature suited to the grades has a variety of close and vital relations to nearly all the other studies as, for example, to history, geography, natural science, and language. Since literature is so elevating and so many-sided in its culture influence, it supplies a solid basis for the correlation and unification of studies now so much discussed. The other books of the series can be seen in the price list at the end of this book.

NORMAL, ILLINOIS, Sept. 1, 1895.

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CHAPTER I.

The Value of Complete Classic Masterpieces in the Common School.

The purpose to introduce complete classics as readers into each grade of the common school is the controlling thought in the following chapters. In the first two or three grades, it may not be possible to execute fully this plan, but the inquiry to what extent it may be done, even here, is worth serious thought and experiment.

What is a classic? One of the elements that goes into its make-up is an important, underlying, permanent truth. Whether written today or perchance in the fifth century B.C., it must contain lasting qualities that do not fade away or bleach out or decay. Time and weather do not stain or destroy its merit. Some classics, as Gray's *Elegy* or *Thanatopsis*, are like cut diamonds. The quality that gives them force and brilliancy is inherent, and the form in which they appear has been wrought out by an artist. The fundamental value of a classic is the deep, significant truth which, like the grain in fine woods, is wrought into their very structure. The artist who moulds a masterpiece like *Enoch Arden* or *The Scarlet Letter* is

not a writer of temporary fame. The truth to which he feels impelled to give expression is strong, natural, human truth, which has no beginning and no end. It is true forever. Schiller's William Tell, though idealized, is a human hero with the hearty thoughts of a real man. Shylock is a Jew of flesh and blood, who will laugh if he is tickled, and break into anger if he is thwarted. The true poet builds upon eternal foundations. The book-maker or rhymmer is satisfied with empty or fleeting thoughts and with a passing notoriety. New books are often caught up and blazoned as classics which a few years reveal as patchwork and tinsel. Time is a sure test. Showy tinsel rusts and dulls its lustre, while simple poetic truth shines with growing brightness.

But truth in poetic dress is an object of suspicion to many people. If it were plain, ungarnished, even ugly, they could give it a heartier reception; as being closer to the real and practical. But true poetry stands closer to real life and in quicker touch with the daily motives of conduct than people dream. How far away and unpractical to the unbeliever are the poetic truths of Scripture; how fundamental and strong and real they are when wrought into the conduct of a faithful witness. It is profoundly well with us when we see truth not only in its strength but in its beauty. It is the magic of literary artists to reveal truth to pupils and teachers in this double potency.