A PRIMARY READER: OLD-TIME STORIES, FAIRY TALES AND MYTHS, RETOLD BY CHILDREN

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A Primary Reader: Old-time Stories, Fairy Tales and Myths, Retold by Children by E. Louise Smythe

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E. LOUISE SMYTHE

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Trieste

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WERNER SCHOOL BOOK COMPANY

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BY
E. Louise Smythe

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PREFACE.

This book originated in a series of little reading lessons prepared for the first grade pupils in the Santa Rosa public schools. The object of the lessons was three-fold: to provide reading matter for the little ones who had only a small vocabulary of sight-words; to acquaint them early with the heroes who have come down to us in song and story; and to create a desire for literature.

It has been my endeavor to follow Dr. G. Stanley Hall's suggestions in his monograph, "How to Teach Reading," where he asks for "true child-editions, made by testing many children with the work piece-meal and cutting and adapting the material till it really and closely fitted the minds and hearts of the children."

Various stories were given to the pupils; discussions followed. After a time the story was produced orally by the children. Notes were made on expressions used and points of interest dwelt upon. Later the story was either written on the blackboard or mimeographed and put into the pupils' hands to read.

It gave great delight to the children to recognize an old friend in a new dress, and as interest was aroused, but little difficulty was encountered in recognizing words that were indeed "new" in their sight vocabulary, but old servants in their oral vocabulary.

The spirit of the book may be illustrated by referring to the roast turkey in the story of The Little Match Girl. The story was told as dear old Hans Christian Andersen gave it to the little German children of fifty years ago. But American children have a different idea of the fowl which graces the table at Christmas time. The story as it came from the lips of the children referred to the "turkey," and "goose" was used in only one instance. As the story was to appeal to our children, the word was changed to suit their ideas.

Again, in the story of Red Riding-Hood we preferred to use the German ending, as it leaves a far happier impression on the minds of the children than the accepted English version. The incongruity of the wolf's swallowing whole the grandmother and child does not destroy the child's enjoyment of the story, while the happy release of both grandmother and little girl forms a suitable close.

Also, as this old story handed down in so many languages is an interpretation of one of the Sun myths, it seems better to cling to the original, especially when it meets so entirely with the child's approval.

Before presenting the Norse myths for reading, they had been the subject of many conversations, queries and illustrations. Some were even dramatized—in a childlike way, of course. Detailed descriptions of Mt. Ida, Asgard, and some of the principal heroes, were given. But, though the little audience seemed interested in the introductory remarks, these never came back when the children were called upon to reproduce the story. The narrator at once plunged into the story part. It is for this reason descriptions of heroes and places have been omitted in these stories. It is thus left for each teacher who uses this book to employ her own method of introducing the gods of the hardy Norseman to her pupils.

The following works will be found useful and quite available to most teachers: Andersen's Norse Mythology, Mabie's Norse Stories, Mara Pratt's Stories from Norseland, Fiske's Myths and Myth Makers, Taylor's Primitive Culture, Vol. I.; and Longfellow's Poems.

Hoping these stories will interest other children as they have interested those who helped build them, I send them forth.

E. LOUISE SMYTHE.

Santa Rosa, California.

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