Minnich: McGuffey and His Readers

bility, a new biography of Miss Dix is more than timely. By a re-examination of the materials used by the Reverend Francis Tiffany, her earlier biographer, and by the discovery and analysis of correspondence not hitherto utilized, Miss Marshall has contributed much to the understanding of Miss Dix as an individual. Her childhood and adulthood had few personal satisfactions. An absorption in great causes became the great motivating force of her life. Her reliance upon religion, her self-denial, her fanatical courage developed a detachment apparent even in her associations with close friends. Miss Marshall’s skillful use of materials has served to emphasize the quality of martyrdom already familiar to those who have followed the achievements and disappointments of Dorothea Dix. An excellent bibliography is included in the study that should be useful to those who may wish to analyze more minutely the contribution of this great leader to social reform in America.

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These two volumes should be of particular interest to residents of western Pennsylvania for several reasons. McGuffey was born in this area, a few miles from West Alexander, and, although his family moved to Ohio when he was very young, he received both his secondary and collegiate education at western Pennsylvania institutions. He attended the Greersburg, later called the Darlington, Academy, near Beaver Falls, and received his collegiate training at Washington College. Too, these books make their appeal here because the early McGuffey Readers were used in many schools of western Pennsylvania years ago.

The latter hold the most remarkable record of any series ever published in America. First written upon the special request of Truman and Smith, a printing firm in Cincinnati, these books have had a more or less continuous sale from 1836, when the First and Second Readers were first published, until now. In
all, over 120 million copies have been sold, and it is easily understood why the
two volumes here reviewed were prepared to aid in the centennial celebration
of the first appearance of the series.

The biography of McGuffey was written by Dr. Harvey C. Minnich, dean
emeritus of Miami University, Oxford, Ohio. It was quite appropriate to have
someone from Miami do this, for McGuffey was a professor at Miami Uni-
versity when most of the readers were written. Last year a beautiful memorial
statue of McGuffey was dedicated at Miami. Too, Miami University has made
a fine collection of the various readers of different dates and prints. A list of
them reveals that the McGuffey Readers were published by seven successive
publishing houses. Dean Minnich has written a fascinating story both of the
life of McGuffey and of the readers. The biography shows that McGuffey was
successively professor of philosophy at Miami, president of Cincinnati College,
and professor of moral and mental philosophy at the University of Virginia. Thus he had a remarkable career as an educator.

The Old Favorites is a collection of 150 selections from the six McGuffey
Readers. These were chosen by such men as Henry Ford, former Governor
James M. Cox, Mark Sullivan, John H. Finley, editor of the New York Times,
John W. Studebaker, United States commissioner of education, and former
Senator Simeon D. Fess. These men have all acknowledged the positive influ-
ence the readers have had on their lives. But what were the characteristics of
these readers that produced such influence?

The answer lies in the circumstances under which they were written, the na-
ture of the times, and the philosophy of McGuffey. The McGuffey Readers
were written particularly to meet the needs and interests of the West. This
was then largely a new country in which the frontier life called for certain
qualities. Consequently the readers dealt with such homely qualities as courage,
temperance, perseverance, thrift, loyalty, kindness, integrity, self-dependence,
and honesty. Too, the selections in the fourth, fifth, and sixth readers were
such as to lend themselves to effective oral reading or elocution, which was pop-
ular in those days. Hence it can be said that the McGuffey Readers helped
greatly to mold the civilization and ideals of the western country. The chief ad-
verse criticism of the readers as viewed by an educator today would be that
many of the selections were poorly graded for children of the several ages for
whom they were intended, and that a few were rather morbid in character.
The later editions, however, largely avoided these weaknesses.

Old Favorites holds an unusual appeal for everyone who ever used any of the

The author, a Chicago chemist with a flair for history and a special interest in the American Civil War, was struck by the discrepancies, mysteries, and unanswered questions in the accounts of the assassination of President Lincoln and the trial of the assassins. He engaged in research covering a period of ten years and involving the expenditure of twenty-five thousand dollars. The result is an extended formulation of the question, or questions, together with a large mass of circumstantial evidence selected and interpreted to produce a definite conclusion. This is, in effect, that Lincoln was murdered to further the ambitions of the unscrupulous egomaniac, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton (sometime resident of Pittsburgh and Steubenville), and to make way for the policies of the Radical Republicans for the crushing of the South and the establishment of their control of the national government.

Stanton urged Grant not to go to Ford's Theater that night, on the ground that his attendance with the President would invite disaster; the general left Washington at six o'clock that evening. On the same day Stanton refused Lincoln's request that the secretary's chief aide accompany him to the theater as a bodyguard. The armed guard who violated orders and deserted his post, thus clearing the way for Booth's entrance into the box, was a veteran of the Washington police, but with a bad record; he was inadequately examined, not court-martialed, and not even dismissed from the White House guard. Although Booth was recognized by many people in the theater, Stanton withheld Booth's name from publication for several hours after the crime had been reported. Every avenue of escape for the assassin was blocked, presumably in time to stop him—with the single exception of the road by which he actually escaped. The commercial telegraph lines of Washington were all out of order for several hours on the night of the crime—without adequate explanation. In defiance of positive orders that he should be taken alive, Booth was unnecessarily shot to death. Suspects who presumably had recently talked to Booth were terrorized, silenced by ingenious masks and in every other way possible, and railroaded to death or