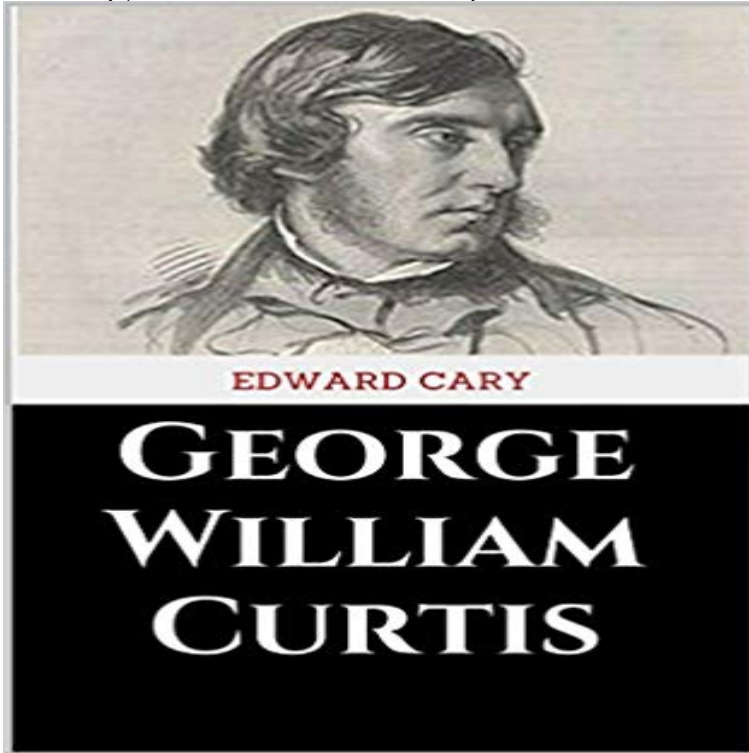


George William Curtis (American Men of Letters)



George William Curtis (February 24, 1824–August 31, 1892) was an American writer and public speaker, born in Providence, Rhode Island, of old New England stock. He settled on Staten Island and instantly plunged into the whirl of life in New York, obtained a post on the Tribune, became a popular lecturer, started work on Nile Notes of a Howadji (1851), and became a favorite in society. He wrote for Putnams Magazine which he helped George Palmer Putnam to found. He became an associate editor along with Parke Godwin and managing editor Charles Frederick Briggs; the three also collaborated on a gift book called The Homes of American Authors (1853).[3] Curtis produced a number of volumes, composed of essays written for Putnams and for Harpers Weekly, which came in rapid succession from his pen. The chief of these were the Potiphar Papers (1853), a satire on the fashionable society of the day; and Prue and I (1856), a pleasantly sentimental, fancifully tender and humorous study of life. In 1855 he married Anna Shaw, daughter of abolitionist Francis Shaw and sister of Robert Gould Shaw of the famed 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. Not long afterwards he became, through no fault of his own, deeply involved in debt owing to the failure of Putnams Magazine; and his sense of honour compelled him to spend the greater part of his earnings for many years on discharging the obligations for which he had become responsible, and from which he might have freed himself by legal process. In the period just preceding the Civil War, other interests became subordinate to those of national concern. He was involved in the founding of the Republican Party, and made his first important speech on the questions of the day at Wesleyan University in 1856; he engaged actively in John C. Fremonts presidential campaign of that year (the Republican campaign headquarters were

located not far from his Staten Island home), and was soon recognized not only as an effective public speaker, but also as one of the ablest, most high-minded, and most trustworthy leaders of public opinion.

In 1862 George William Curtis delivered his Doctrine of Liberty address to the Phi beta Kappa Society at Harvard, on behalf of President Lincoln, who was encouraging support for the Emancipation Proclamation. In it, he laid out the intellectual foundations for the purpose of American education that would last another thirty years, and public schools, nearly one hundred. Curtis circa 1890 In 1863 he became the political editor of Harpers Weekly, which was highly influential in shaping public opinion. Curtis's writing was always clear and direct, displaying fairness of mind and good temper. He had high moral standards. From month to month he contributed to Harpers Monthly, under the title of The Easy Chair, brief essays on topics of social and literary interest, charming in style, touched with delicate humour and instinct with generous spirit. His service to the Republican party was such, that he was offered several nominations to office, and might have been sent as minister to England; but he refused all such offers, preferring to serve the country as editor and public speaker. His works include: Nile Notes of a Howadji (1851) The Howadji in Syria (1852) Lotus-Eating (1852) Potiphar Papers (1853) (Project Gutenberg text) The Duty of the American Scholar to Politics and the Times (1856) Prue and I (1856) (Project Gutenberg text) Trumps (1862) Washington Irving: A Sketch (1891) Essays from the Easy Chair (1893) (Project Gutenberg text) Orations And Addresses (1894) Literary and Social Essays (1895) (Project Gutenberg text) Early Letters of George Wm. Curtis to John S. Dwight: Brook Farm and Concord (1898) Ars Recte Vivendi (1898) This pre1923 publication has been converted from its original format for the Kindle and may contain an occasional defect from the original publication or from the co

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