

NOTES ON SCHOOL READERS.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE LADY OF SHALOTT — N. B. Reader IV, p. 165.

Notes on this poem have been asked for. The following comment and paraphrase are reprinted from the REVIEW for November, 1903. The teacher will of course use her judgment about reading the story to the class first. If they can read intelligently enough to grasp it for themselves all the better.

We may take for our starting point the words in the fourth verse, "Tis the fairy Lady of Shalott." For the story is what children call "a kind of a fairy story," by which they mean a story in which things do not happen, nor people act, as they do in real life. Such a story is to be accepted, not for what we may learn from it, but purely for the pleasure that it gives us. For while different people have read different meanings into the story — I have even been told that it is an allegory — and while it is quite natural for an imaginative reader to find various lines of thought suggested by the idea of the life that was never more than a shadow in a world of realities, and that faded away at the first contact with the real, still, Tennyson has treated it in a purely romantic fashion. That is, he has told the story for the story's sake. It seized upon the poet's fancy — the island in the river, the lady in the tower, the mirror, the magic web, the gallant knight riding by, the curse and its fulfilment: There is no moral, no character drawing; it is simply a striking story that lends itself to a picturesque background. And the poet has adorned it with all the beauty of description that he knew so well how to work. An eminent critic, Mr. Stopford Brooke, says of Part 3, "Horse and man, sunlight and scenery, gleaming river and glancing armour — how they fit together, into what unity of impression they are knit! The verse flashes and scintillates like the armour. A wonderful piece of gold and jewel work, and only Milton can excel it in its own sphere."

But just because of this series of brilliant pictures in which it is told, some children will find it hard to get hold of the story itself. It might be well to tell it to them first in some such words as these: "Once upon a time, long ago, there was a beautiful city, surrounded by towers and walls, and full of busy people. A river flowed under the walls of this city, and up the river, not very far away, was an island where water lilies grew. The country people told strange stories about this island. No living person had set foot upon it, but sometimes men working in the fields near by, early in the morning, or late at night, would hear sweet singing that echoed down the river. Then they would whisper to each other, 'That is the fairy lady of Shalott.' The fairy lady lived all alone on the flowery island, and wove night and day a web of many colors. She had been told that if she ever left off weaving, or looked out on the river or the city, some terrible thing would happen to her. She did not know what the terrible thing might be, so she thought of

nothing but her weaving. But she had one way of seeing what passed her island, for hanging before her was a great mirror, and looking into it she could see all the people that came and went on the highway, going to and from the city. Market-women, shepherd boys, gaily-dressed pages, quiet working-men, laughing girls, knights on horse-back, funerals, bridal pairs, — all these she saw in the mirror, and she took pleasure in weaving pictures of them all into her work. But she grew very tired of seeing only reflections and nothing real. At last one bright day there came riding by a gallant knight in full armour. The sun flashed on his shining helmet and sparkling shield; the bells on his horse's bridle rang merrily, his armour clashed, and as he passed he sang a gay little song. The poor fairy lady could bear it no longer; when she saw the knight riding so gallantly and so happily along, she left her weaving and took three steps toward the river. For one moment she saw the water-lilies, and the knight, and the city in the distance, and then — the work she had been weaving flew out loose from the loom, the great mirror cracked from side to side, and she knew that the terrible thing had happened. She could no longer stay in the flowery island; she found a little boat floating under a willow tree, and on it she wrote her name, 'The Lady of Shalot.' Then she got into the boat, and when evening came, a stormy, rainy evening, she floated down the river to the city. As she went she sang her last song, and just as she came to the city she died. The boat floated on under the walls, and all the people came out to look at it. They read her name, and were afraid. But the gallant knight whom she had seen looked at her lovely face, and prayed that God would grant her His mercy."

Camelot, the city of King Arthur, of which we read in all the stories of King Arthur and his Knights. Some writers identify it with Winchester, others place it in Wales or Somerset. It makes no difference to the enjoyment of the poem where it is. Explain the adjectives applied to Camelot. What adjectives are applied to the island?

What time of year is pictured? Study the different pictures. What lines would you choose to contrast with 1-4, part IV? What words express color? Motion? Sound? Have you seen willows whiten and aspens quiver?

From what point of view is part I of the story told? Write a little conversation between two of the people who go up and down gazing. Tell in your own words about "The mirror's magic sights." Explain the word "there" in verse 2, part II.

Note the separate groups of passers-by in part II. Which group is most important to the story? Why? Can you correct by ear the mistake in the printing of line eight, in the last verse of part II? And, what is wrong