

## NOTES ON SCHOOL READERS.

BY THE EDITOR.

INCIDENT OF THE FRENCH CAMP. Robert Browning, N. S. Reader IV, p. 356. N. B. Reader III, p. 75.

The title given above is the correct one. "An Incident at Ratisbon" is the title in the New Brunswick Reader.

As this is a historical ballad the setting must be known. If you have a map of Europe on the board, mark the countries conquered by Napoleon, with the tricolour done in crayons; or, have them pointed out on a wall map. Show pictures of Napoleon. Give a sketch of his life, emphasizing the fact of his influence over his soldiers.

Napoleon was one of the greatest soldiers and leaders that ever lived. Born in Corsica, he entered the army while very young, and rapidly rose to power. After the French Revolution he led the French armies against the other powers of Europe, and won victory after victory. His ambition was never satisfied, and he cared nothing for the misery he worked. But his soldiers adored him, and believed him to be invincible. He was made Emperor of France in 1804. After he had conquered nearly all Europe, he was defeated by the Allies at Leipzig, and forced to abdicate. He was sent to the island of Elba, but escaped, and his old soldiers flocked to fight under him. For one hundred days he was again Emperor, but he was defeated at the battle of Waterloo, 1815, and sent as a prisoner of the British to the island of St. Helena, where he died in 1821.

The story told in the poem is true, but the hero was a man, not a boy. The incident took place when Napoleon was conquering Austria. Ratisbon was taken in May, 1809.

(Connect this with what the pupils already know, e. g., this was while the English under Wellesley were fighting against Napoleon in the Peninsular War. The battle of Corunna was fought by Sir John Moore, four months earlier).

The teacher reads, or, much better, recites the poem. The pupils then read it silently. Teacher asks questions to be answered in the words of the poem, e. g., Where was Napoleon? Describe him as he stood. What was he thinking?

Teacher asks questions to be answered in pupils' own words, e. g., who tells the story? Why does he put a "perhaps" in "Just as perhaps he

mused?" Where is the teller supposed to be? How do you know? Describe Napoleon; the boy. What feelings does the boy show?

Do you think the boy was a hero? Why?

The teacher should use her discretion in discussing the last two lines of the poem from the point of view taken by Owen Wister's *Virginian*:

"The last part drops. The soldier should not have told the general he was killed," stated the cow-puncher. "What should he have told him, I'd like to know?" said Molly. "Why, just nothing. If the soldier could ride out of the battle all shot up, and tell this general about their taking the town—that was being gritty, yu' see. But that truck at the finish—Will yu' please read it again."

So Molly read the last two lines.

"Nay, I'm killed, sire," drawled the *Virginian*. "Now a man who was man enough to act like he did, yu' see, would fall dead without mentioning it."

Can you find in the poem any reason why Napoleon's soldiers were so faithful to him.

Explain: Incident, stormed (a town), prone, anon, vans, touched to the quick, to hearts' desire ("Vans" = wings, is an old use of the word in poetry). What was the "flag-bird"? Is the military title "marshal" still used?

Name poems that tell a short, exciting story of (a) war; (b) the sea; (c) love.

Pick out the words and expressions that seem to you most descriptive. Note: The motion in the last half of stanza 2; the number of short and simple words. The poem has no lines noticeable for beauty of sound. Its merit lies in the directness and vigour with which the story is told.

For composition. Tell the story in about 120 words, beginning thus: A boy soldier of the army of Napoleon received his death wound in planting the imperial flag within the walls of Ratisbon. Write out any other story of heroism in war that you remember, using not more than 150 words.

The *Incident* is, as has been said, founded on fact; but concerning *How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix*, N. S. Reader IV, p. 351, Browning himself wrote: "There is no sort of historical foundation for the poem. I wrote it under the bulwark of a vessel, off the African coast, after I had been at sea long enough to appreciate even the fancy of a gallop on the back of a certain good horse 'York,' then in my stable at home." It is, however, thought that Browning had in mind the Pacification of Ghent, which was a union in 1576, of the southern Netherlands