

READING

FOR GRADES VII AND VIII

HORATIUS

A FEW years after the expulsion of the Tarquins for their despotism and crimes, the neighbouring Etruscans, to which nation they belonged, endeavoured to restore the tyrants to power, and came against Rome with an overwhelming force. The Romans, repulsed at first, fled across a wooden bridge over the Tiber, when the Roman Consul ordered the bridge to be destroyed, to prevent the enemy from entering the city.

BUT the Consul's brow was sad,
And the Consul's speech was low,
And darkly looked he at the wall,
And darkly at the foe.
"Their van will be upon us
Before the bridge goes down;
And if they once may win the bridge,
What hope to save the town?"

Then out spake brave Horatius,
The captain of the gate:
"To every man upon this earth
Death cometh, soon or late;
And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers,
And the temples of his gods!

"Hew down the bridge, Sir Consul,
With all the speed ye may;
I, with two more to help me,
Will hold the foe in play.