

English in the Lower Grades.

THE VISION OF MIRZA.

BY ELEANOR ROBINSON.

(N. B. Reader, No. 4, p. 67.)

Joseph Addison, the author of "The Vision of Mirza," lived from 1672 to 1719. He is best known by his writings in the *Spectator*. This was a paper written by Addison and his friend, Richard Steele, and published every day from March 1st, 1711, to December 6th, 1712. It was not like our newspapers, for it did not have any of the news of the day, nor discussions on politics, but each paper contained a short essay, or story, or description. These are written about a great many different subjects, such as the fashions of the time, the way people treat their servants, the plays at the theatre, walks about London, the reading of the church service, the beauty of trees, the books that people are reading, and so on.

Many of them are very useful reading for us, because they paint a true picture of the way people lived at that time, and help us to read and understand the history of the period; and they are written in a very entertaining and sometimes amusing way. The most famous papers are those that tell us about the good old knight, Sir Roger de Coverley, his country house, his family and friends. But Steele and Addison were not satisfied only to entertain and amuse their readers; they tried also to teach and improve them. Sometimes they made fun of some silly or extravagant fashion, or expressed grave surprise at some unkindness or rudeness in manners, or found fault with a wicked book or play; and by admiring and calling attention to what was good and beautiful in people's characters, or books, or nature, they set their readers to thinking more wisely and rightly. Sometimes the paper for the day takes the form of a lecture or sermon on a particular vice or virtue, or again it sets forth the writer's reflections on some aspect of human life.

And not only are the subjects widely varied, but they are presented to the reader in very different ways. One paper will consist of letters from imaginary correspondents, another of a report of a conversation. Now the writer will tell us something that occurred to his mind while he was going about London, or some story that he heard in a foreign country, and again he will relate a dream that he had in his own arm-chair.

"The Vision of Mirza" is given to us under the

thin disguise of a translation from the works of an eastern writer. In the first number of the *Spectator*, Addison, in an imaginary and amusing sketch of his life, says:

"An insatiable thirst after knowledge carried me into all the countries of Europe, where there was anything new or strange to be seen; nay, to such a degree was my curiosity raised, that, having read the controversies of some great men concerning the antiquities of Egypt, I made a voyage to Grand Cairo, on purpose to take the measure of a pyramid; and as soon as I had set myself right in that particular, returned to my native country with great satisfaction."

He refers more than once, in other papers, to this visit to the capital of Egypt, and now he uses it to explain how he came into possession of Oriental manuscripts. To say that the story came from the East accounts for its being an allegory, as that is a form of writing often used by eastern writers. Addison himself was fond of it, and in a paper on the "Pleasures of the Imagination," written for Thursday, July 3rd, 1712, he says:

"Allegories, where well chosen, are like so many tracks of light in a discourse, that make everything about them clear and beautiful. A noble metaphor, when it is placed to an advantage, casts a kind of glory round it, and darts a lustre through a whole sentence."

An allegory differs from a metaphor in being a connected story, and nearly always used to convey a moral or spiritual lesson. The most famous example of an allegory in English literature is "The Pilgrim's Progress." The fable and the parable are only short forms of the allegory. In them all "a story is told of one object, and the imagination of the reader is called upon to apply the teaching of the story to another object." Generally, the meaning and teaching of the story is explained at the end. In this case, the genius explains each point as it comes up. Note that the allegorical part of the tale begins with Mirza's vision from the pinnacle of the rock.

Who and what is Mirza? (Bagdad, or Bagdad, a city on the river Tigris, about 500 miles from its mouth, was the centre of the Mohammedan power in the east). How are his thoughts and feelings prepared for the vision and its teaching?

What is the exact meaning of "vanity" here? (Ps. 39:5 and 6), (Job 14:2).

What is a genius? What is the plural form of the word? The "vale of misery." (See Ps. 84:6). Why were there three score and ten arches? Where do we find three score and ten given as the limit of man's age? What is the meaning of the thousand arches? What is the meaning of the pitfalls being