

Jock of Hazeldean

A LESSON IN LITERATURE.

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[The following is merely a suggested treatment of the poem, and the teacher may find it advisable, according to conditions, to depart wholly or partially from the method here outlined.]

"The difficulty that I find in teaching a poem such as this", said an English teacher recently, "is that the story is so easy that the pupils understand it at once. There are only one or two difficult words or phrases, and all that is to be done is to read the poem through, and then go on with something else."

If a poem is so simple that no teaching is required, the teacher's task becomes an easy one. It is a foolish thing for the teacher to attempt to find difficulties where none exist, and we may take it for granted that there are poems in the English language so simple and yet so beautiful that it is sufficient for us merely to read them and enjoy them without trying to dissect them.

But it is true also that a very simple poem may require a great deal of skill in teaching; and although there may be no words in the passage whose meaning is not perfectly understood, the poem may contain a wealth of suggestion which neither teacher nor pupil can afford to miss. As a usual thing there is plenty of material in a poem of fifteen or twenty lines to occupy a class profitably for half an hour,—and if the teacher finds the time heavy on his hands and sees nothing in the poem to teach, there is something wrong with either his point of view, or his method, or both. The thing which he must constantly keep before his mind in preparing his lesson is: *How can I present this poem so that my class will both understand it and enjoy it?* How shall I introduce the poem? What explanations are necessary? What kind of questions shall I ask? What illustrations, if any, shall I use? What difficulties does it contain, and how shall I meet them? How much time should I give to the poem? How shall I test the pupils' knowledge and appreciation?

To introduce a lesson on *Jock of Hazeldean*, only a simple preliminary statement is required, as, for example: "To-day we are going to study a short poem which contains the outline of a love story. As we read it stanza by stanza I want you to try to supply the details of the story".

The teacher reads the first stanza, and then questions as to the story. (Perhaps it is as well for the class to keep books closed.)