

NOTES ON SCHOOL READERS.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE SOLITUDE OF ALEXANDER SELKIRK.

N. B. Reader III.

The proper title of this poem is, Verses: supposed to be written by Alexander Selkirk, during his solitary abode on the Island of Juan Fernandez.

Alexander Selkirk, a Scottish sailor, quarrelled with the captain of his ship when in the South Pacific Ocean, off the coast of South America, and was left upon the uninhabited Island of Juan Fernandez. He remained there for five years, 1704-1709, when he was taken off by an English ship. The story of his adventures was told in different books of the time, and is supposed to have suggested to De Foe the story of *Robinson Crusoe*, published 1720, though the two stories are not alike in details. One writer says that Selkirk, after returning home, "pined for his island, and would see no one, only going out of doors after dark."

The teacher, in studying the poem, should read and compare the story of Enoch Arden's sojourn upon his island, *Enoch Arden*, from "The mountains wooded to the peak" to "Surely the man had died of solitude." Tennyson's elaborate description brings out by contrast the simplicity of Cowper's verses. Compare especially with the lines,

When I think of my own native land,
In a moment I seem to be there.

the picture with full details of Enoch's home,
The babes, their babble. Annie, the small house,
The climbing street, the mill, the leafy lanes;

and with the four lines beginning,

There's mercy in every place,

read Tennyson's

Had not his poor heart
Spoken with That, which being everywhere,
Lets none, who speaks with Him, seem all alone,
Surely the man had died of solitude.

Cowper led a quiet, retired life, but he depended very much upon the society of a few dear and intimate friends. With the passage "O Solitude! where are the charms" it is interesting to compare the following words in his poem *Retirement*:

I praise the Frenchman — his remark was shrewd,
How sweet, how passing sweet is solitude!
But grant me still a friend in my retreat,
Whom I may whisper — Solitude is sweet.

The Frenchman was La Bruyere, a writer of the seventeenth century, and he may be one of the "sages" of line six.

In another poem, *The Needless Alarm*, Cowper tells us that "the man to solitude accustomed long" understands the ways of birds and beasts, of herbs and flowers, and "Perceives in everything that lives a tongue."

These comparisons will suggest questions and points of interest that will help the children to read intelligently. What are the advantages of solitude? What were the sorrows of Alexander Selkirk? When he thinks of his "own native land," what does he see? What will he do before he goes to rest that will make him feel less lonely? Has he given up all hope of seeing his home again? Explain: "Ye winds that have made me your sport." If the children have never noticed the rhyme scheme of a poem, this is a good one to begin with. They will find instances of faulty rhymes in verses two, three and six. (Do not let them pronounce "thought" to rhyme with "lot.") They will think that "survey" and "sea" do not rhyme, but tell them that the pronunciation of words sometimes changes and that Shakespeare makes "sea" rhyme with "play."

RURAL SCIENCE.

The *Agricultural Gazette of Canada* contains much that is of interest to the Rural teacher. The February issue gives a section to illustrated reports of school gardens in the different provinces. The Director of Rural Science in Nova Scotia reports a great increase in the number of home gardens cared for by school children. The Director for Manitoba submits a plan for grading school garden work.

The March number has reports of the same kind on "The Beautifying of School Grounds," and the announcement by the Department of Agriculture for New Brunswick of Competitions for boys and girls in raising swine and poultry. Particulars of these contests are to be obtained from the Live Stock Division, Department of Agriculture, Fredericton.

The last number of the *Rural Science Bulletin* of Nova Scotia is a school garden number, and has many helpful directions and suggestions for planting.