

JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY AND THREE OF HIS POEMS.

One of the sunshine souls amongst American journalists and authors, is James Whitcomb Riley. He is 57 years old, having been born in Greenfield, Ind. 1853. At the age of twenty he went to Indianapolis and began work for the Indianapolis Journal and has resided in that city ever since. His poetry, published in Indiana papers, soon attracted wide attention, and, being written in the Hoosier dialect, won for the author the title of "Hoosier poet." Mr. Riley's first volume, a collection of his poems, appeared ten years after he went to Indianapolis and was entitled "The Old Swimmin' Hole, and 'Leven More Poems." The pseudonym under which it was published, and under which Mr. Riley still writes, was Benj. F. Johnson, of Boon.

We are told that copies of this first edition are very scarce and command a high price, a copy having sold in New York not long ago for \$28.00, more than twenty times what the book sold for when first published. Mr. F. G. Darlington, of Indianapolis, who is a great admirer of Mr. Riley is making a collection from various editions of the Riley books. This collection now numbers more than one hundred and thirty-five volumes of all sorts of binding, from paper-backs, or no binding at all, to costly vellum. Mr. Riley's second volume, "The Boss Girl," appeared in 1886, and is very rare also. It is quoted in the New York rare-book market at \$25.00 a copy.

These things attest the great popularity of an author who is still living. Usually first edition copies do not become so much in demand until after the author's death, and sometimes, not even then. One can buy rare leather-bound first edition copies of seventeenth century English authors as cheaply as one can some of Mr. Riley's first edition copies. This is not because Mr. Riley is a man of rare and rich thought, or that he is a great literary artist, but rather because he is a soul who dwells close to the average human heart, and he is full of hope and tender sympathy. He and Bill Nye were friends and traveled and gave readings together from their writings, in Nye's life time; and Mr. Riley still gives readings from his poems. These exhibitions are very popular, for almost everybody is acquainted with more or less of his verse. It is said that his poem "An old Sweetheart of Mine," has had more readers than any other poem in the English language, Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" excepted.

The following three poems are in such happy keeping with the spirit, which every one would like to have for himself, and to see also in his fellows, that we select them from a varied collection. Those of us who may feel that we are of those whom cruel fortune hath scratched, or who are down in the dumps, these little poems will help:

In a Friendly Sort o' Way.

When a man ain't got a cent, and he's feelin' kind o' blue,
An' the clouds hang dark and heavy,
An' won't let the sunshine through,
It's a great thing, O, my brethren, for a feller just to lay
His hand upon your shoulder in a friendly sort o' way!

It makes a man feel curious, it makes the teardrops start,
An' you sort o' feel a flutter in the region of the heart:
You can look up and meet his eyes; you don't know what to say,
When his hand is on your shoulder, in a friendly sort o' way.

Oh, the world's a curious compound, with its honey and its gall,
With its cares and bitter crosses, but a good world after all.
An' a good God must have made it—least-ways, that is what I say,
When a hand is on my shoulder in a friendly sort o' way.

All of us have felt and we understand what the poet meant in these simple but life-touching lines. And in the next is a plea, gentle and persuasive for one to put gladness in his heart in place of gloominess.

Just to Be Glad.

Oh, heart of mine, we shouldn't worry so!
What we have missed of calm, we couldn't have, you know!
What we have met of stormy pain,
And of sorrow's driving rain,
We can better meet again,
If they blow.

We have erred in that dark hour, we have known;
When the tears fell with the showers, all alone.

Were not shine and shadow blent
As the gracious Master meant?
Let us temper our content
With His own.

For we know, not every morrow can be sad;
So, forgettin' all the sorrow we have had,
Let us fold away our fears
And put by our foolish tears,
And through all the coming years,
Just be glad.

Then in this final poem is an appeal to add to gladness the greatest of all heart qualities—love for our fellow men in the hour of defeat, distress, and disgrace. In these three poems is linked a chain of human helpfulness not to be despised of any one.

Let Something Good be Said.

When over the fair name of friend or foe
The shadow of disgrace shall fall; instead
Of words of blame, or proof of so and so,
Let something good be said.
Forget not that no fellow being yet
May fall so low but love may lift his head;
Even the cheek of shame with tears is wet,
If something good be said.
No generous heart may vainly turn aside
In ways of sympathy; no soul so dead
But may awaken strong and glorified,
If something good be said.
And so I charge ye, by the thorny crown,
And by the cross on which the Saviour bled,
And by your own soul's hope for fair renown,
Let something good be said.

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