

Classic Poetry Series

James Whitcomb Riley
- poems -

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James Whitcomb Riley(7 October 1849 - 22 July 1916)

James Whitcomb Riley was an American writer, poet, and best selling author. During his lifetime he was known as the Hoosier Poet and Children's Poet for his dialect works and his children's poetry respectively. His poems tended to be humorous or sentimental, and of the approximately one thousand poems that Riley authored, the majority are in dialect. His famous works include "Little Orphant Annie" and "The Raggedy Man".

Riley began his career writing verses as a sign maker and submitting poetry to newspapers. Thanks in part to an endorsement from poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, he eventually earned successive jobs at Indiana newspaper publishers during the latter 1870s. Riley gradually rose in prominence during the 1880s through his poetry reading tours. He traveled a touring circuit first in the Midwest, and then nationally, holding shows and making joint appearances on stage with other famous talents. Regularly struggling with his alcohol addiction, Riley never married or had children, and was involved in a scandal in 1888 when he became too drunk to perform. He became more popular in spite of the bad press he received, and as a result extricated himself from poorly negotiated contracts that limited his earnings; he quickly became very wealthy.

Riley became a bestselling author in the 1890s. His children's poems were compiled into a book and illustrated by Howard Chandler Christy. Titled the Rhymes of Childhood, the book was his most popular and sold millions of copies. As a poet, Riley achieved an uncommon level of fame during his own lifetime. He was honored with annual Riley Day celebrations around the United States and was regularly called on to perform readings at national civic events. He continued to write and hold occasional poetry readings until a stroke paralyzed his right arm in 1910.

Although popular in his day, modern critics rate Riley as a minor poet, citing the quality of his work and his lack of serious subject matter as their reasons. Riley's chief legacy was his influence in fostering the creation of a midwestern cultural identity and his contributions to the Golden Age of Indiana Literature. Along with other writers of his era, he helped create a caricature of midwesterners and formed a literary community that produced works rivaling the established eastern literati. There are many memorials dedicated to Riley, including the James Whitcomb Riley Hospital for Children.

Early life

Family and background

James Whitcomb Riley was born on October 7, 1849, in the town of Greenfield, Indiana, the third of the six children of Reuben Andrew and Elizabeth Marine Riley. Riley's father was an attorney, and in the year before Riley's birth, he was elected a member of the Indiana House of Representatives as a Democrat. He developed a friendship with James Whitcomb, the governor of Indiana, after whom he named his son. Martin Riley, Riley's uncle, was an amateur poet who occasionally wrote verses for local newspapers. Riley was fond of his uncle who helped influence his early interest in poetry.

Shortly after Riley's birth, the family moved into a larger house in town. Riley was "a quiet boy, not talkative, who would often go about with one eye shut as he observed and speculated." His mother taught him to read and write at home before sending him to the local community school in 1852. He found school difficult and was frequently in trouble. Often punished, he had nothing kind to say of his teachers in his writings. His poem "The Educator" told of an intelligent but sinister teacher and may have been based on one of his instructors. Riley was most fond of his last teacher, Lee O. Harris. Harris noticed Riley's interest in poetry and reading and encouraged him to pursue it further.

Riley's school attendance was sporadic, and he graduated from grade eight at age twenty in 1869. In an 1892 newspaper article, Riley confessed that he knew little of mathematics, geography, or science, and his understanding of proper grammar was poor. Later critics, like Henry Beers, pointed to his poor education as the reason for his success in writing; his prose was written in the language of common people which spurred his popularity.

Childhood influences

"The Old Swimming Hole" that appears in Riley's poems is now a large and well-used park on the east side of Greenfield.

Riley lived in his parents' home until he was twenty-one. At five years old he began spending time at the Brandywine Creek just outside of Greenfield. His poems "The Barefoot Boy" and "The Old Swimmin' Hole" referred back to his time at the creek. He was introduced in his childhood to many people who later influenced his poetry. His father regularly brought home a variety of clients and disadvantaged people to give them assistance. Riley's poem "The Raggedy Man" was based on a German tramp his father hired to work at the family home. Riley picked up the cadence and character of the dialect of central Indiana from the

travelers along the old National Road. Their form of speech heavily influenced the hundreds of poems he wrote in nineteenth century Hoosier dialect.

Riley's mother frequently told him stories of fairies, trolls, and giants, and read him children's poems. She was very superstitious, and influenced Riley with many of her beliefs. They both filled their homes with "spirit rappings" on places like tables and bureaus to capture any spirits that may have been wandering about. Her influence is recognized in many of his works, including "Flying Islands of the Night."

As was common at that time, Riley and his friends had few toys and they amused themselves with activities. With his mother's aid, Riley began creating plays and theatricals which he and his friends would practice and perform in the back of a local grocery store. As he grew older, the boys named their troupe the Adelphians and began to have their shows in barns where they could fit larger wrote of these early performances in his poem "When We First Played 'Show'," where he referred to himself as "Jamesy."

"Little Orphant Annie"

Many of Riley's poems are filled with musical references. Riley had no musical education, and could not read sheet music, but learned from his father how to play guitar, and from a friend how to play the violin. He performed in two different local bands, and became so proficient on the violin he was invited to play with a group of adult Masons at several events. A few of his later poems were set to music and sang, one of the most well known being A Short'nin' Bread Song—Pieced Out.

When Riley was ten, the first library opened in his hometown. From an early age he developed a love of literature. He and his friends spent time at the library where the librarian read stories and poems to them. Charles Dickens became one Riley's favorites, and helped inspire the poems "St. Lirriper," "Christmas Season," and "God Bless Us Every One."

Riley's father enlisted in the Union Army during the American Civil War, leaving his wife to manage the family home. While he was away, the family took in a twelve-year-old orphan named Mary Alice "Allie" Smith. Smith was the inspiration for Riley's poem Little Orphant Annie. Riley intended to name the poem Little Orphant Allie, but a typesetter's error changed the name of the poem during printing.

Finding poetry

Riley's father returned from the war partially paralyzed. He was unable to continue working in his legal practice and the family soon fell into financial distress. The war had a negative physiological effect on him, and his relationship with his family quickly deteriorated. He opposed Riley's interest in poetry and encouraged him to find a different career path. The family finances finally gave out and they were forced to sell their town home in April 1870 and return to their country farm. Riley's mother was able to keep peace in the family, but after her death in August from heart disease, Riley and his father had a final break. He blamed his mother's death on his father's failure to care for her in her final weeks. He continued to regret the loss of his childhood home and frequently wrote of how it was so cruelly snatched from him by the war, subsequent poverty, and his mother's death. After the events of 1870, he developed an addiction to alcohol which he struggled with for the remainder of his life.

Becoming increasingly belligerent toward his father, Riley moved out of the family home and briefly took a job painting houses before leaving Greenfield in November 1870. He was recruited as a Bible salesman and began working in the nearby town of Rushville. The job provided little income and he returned to Greenfield in March 1871 where he started an apprenticeship under a painter. He completed the study and opened a business in Greenfield creating and maintaining signs. His earliest known poems are verses he wrote as clever advertisements for his customers.

Riley began taking part in local theater productions with the Adelphians to earn a side income, and during the winter months, when the demand for painting declined, Riley began writing poetry which he mailed to his brother living in Indianapolis. His brother began acting as his agent and offered the poems to the Indianapolis Mirror for free. His first poem was featured on March 30, 1872 under the pseudonym "Jay Whit." Riley wrote over twenty poems to the paper, including one that was featured on the front page.

In July 1872, after becoming convinced sales would provide more income than sign painting, he joined the McCrillus Company based in Anderson. The company sold patent medicines that they marketed in small traveling shows around Indiana. Riley joined the act as a huckster, calling himself the "Painter Poet". He traveled with the act composing poetry and performing at the shows. After his act he sold tonics to his audience, sometimes employing dishonesty. During one stop, Riley presented himself as a formerly blind painter who had been cured by a tonic, using himself as evidence to encourage the audience to purchase his product.

Riley began sending poems to his brother again in February 1873. About the same time he and several friends began an advertisement company. The men traveled around Indiana creating large billboard-like signs on the sides of buildings and barns and in high places that would be viewable from a distance. The company was financially successful, but Riley was continually drawn to poetry. In October he traveled to South Bend where he took a job at Stockford & Blowney painting verses on signs for a month; the short duration of his job may have been due to his frequent drunkenness at that time.

In early 1874, Riley returned to Greenfield to focus exclusively on writing. In February he submitted a poem entitled "At Last" to the Danbury News, a Connecticut Newspaper. The editors accepted his poem, paid him for it, and wrote him a letter encouraging him to submit more. Riley found the note and his first payment began regularly submitting poems to the editors, but after the paper shutdown in 1875, Riley was left without a paying publisher. He began traveling and performing with the Adelprians around central Indiana to earn an income while he searched for a new publisher. In August 1875 he joined another traveling tonic show ran by the Wizard Oil Company.

Early Career

Newspaper Work

Riley began sending correspondence to the famous American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow during late 1875 seeking his endorsement to help him start a career as a poet. He submitted many poems to Longfellow, who he considered the greatest living poet. Not receiving a prompt response, he sent similar letters to John Townsend Trowbridge, and several other prominent writers looking for an endorsement. Longfellow finally replied in a brief letter, telling Riley that "I have read [the poems] in great pleasure, and think they show a true poetic faculty and insight." Riley carried the letter with him everywhere and, hoping to receive a job offer and to create a market for his poetry, he began sending poems to dozens of papers touting Longfellow's endorsement. Among the papers to take an interest in the poems was the Indianapolis Journal, a major Republican metropolitan newspaper in Indiana. Among the first poems the paper purchased from Riley were "Song of the New Year," "An Empty Nest," and a short story entitled "A Remarkable Man."

The editors of the Anderson Democrat discovered Riley's poems in the Indianapolis Journal and offered him a job as a reporter in February 1877. Riley accepted. He worked as a normal reporter gathering local news, writing articles, and assisting in setting the typecast on the printing press. He continued to

regularly wrote poems for the paper and to sell other poems to larger papers. During the year Riley spent working in Anderson, he met and began to court Edora Myers. The couple became engaged, but terminated the relationship after they decided against marriage in August.

After a rejection of his poems by an eastern periodical, Riley began to formulate a plot to prove his work was of high quality and that it was only being rejected because his name was unknown in the east. Riley authored a poem imitating the style of [Edgar Allan Poe](http://www.poemhunter.com/edgar-allan-poe/) and submitted it to the Kokomo Dispatch under a fictitious name claiming it was a long lost Poe poem. The Dispatch ran the poem and reported it as such. Riley and two other men who were part of the plot waited two weeks for the poem to be picked up by major papers in Chicago, Boston, and New York to gauge their reaction; they were disappointed. While a few papers believed the poem to be authentic, the majority did not, claiming the quality was too poor to be authored by Poe. An employee of the Dispatch learned the truth of the incident, and reported it to the Kokomo Tribune who published an expose that outed Riley as a conspirator behind the hoax. The revelation damaged the credibility of the Dispatch and harmed Riley's reputation.

In the aftermath of the Poe plot, Riley was fired from the Democrat, so he returned to Greenfield to spend time writing poetry. Back home, he met Clara Louise Bottsford, a school teacher boarding in his father's home. They found they had much in common, particularly their love of literature. The couple began a twelve year off-and-on relationship which would be Riley's longest lasting. In mid-1878 the couple had their first breakup, caused in part by Riley's alcohol addiction. The event led Riley to make his first attempt to give up liquor. He joined a local temperance organization, but quit after a few weeks.

Performing poet

Without a steady income, his financial situation began to deteriorate. He began submitting his poems to more prominent literary magazines, including Scribner's Monthly, but was informed that although he showed promise, his work was still short of the standards required for use in their publications. Locally, he was still dealing with the stigma of the Poe plot. The Indianapolis Journal and other papers refused to accept his poetry, leaving Riley desperate for income. In January 1878 on the advice of a friend, Riley paid an entrance fee to join a traveling lecture circuit where he could give poetry readings. In exchange, he received a portion of the profit his performances earned. Such circuits were popular at the time, and Riley quickly earned a local reputation for his entertaining readings.

In August 1878, Riley followed Indiana Governor James D. Williams as speaker at a civic event in a small town near Indianapolis. He recited a recently composed poem, "A Childhood Home of Long Ago," telling of life in pioneer Indiana. The poem was well received and was given glowing reviews in several newspapers.

"Flying Islands of the Night" is the only play that Riley wrote and published. It was authored while Riley was traveling with the Adelpheans, but was never performed. With similarities to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Riley may have used it as a model. The play concerns a kingdom under siege by evil forces led by a sinister queen who is eventually defeated by an angel-like heroine. Most reviews were positive. Riley published the play and it became popular in the central Indiana area during late 1878, helping Riley to convince newspapers to again accept his poetry. In November 1879 he was offered a position as a columnist at the *Indianapolis Journal* and accepted after being encouraged by E.B. Matindale, the paper's chief editor.

Although the play and his newspaper work helped expose him to a wider audience, the chief source of his growing popularity arose from his performances on the lecture circuit. He made both dramatic and comedic readings of his poetry, and by early 1879 could guarantee large crowds whenever he performed. In an 1894 article, Hamlin Garland wrote that Riley's celebrity sprang from his reading talent, saying "his vibrant individual voice, his flexible lips, his droll glance, united to make him at once poet and comedian - comedian in the sense in which makes for tears as well as for laughter." Although he was a good performer, his acts were not entirely original in style; he frequently played to his caricature and copied practices developed by Samuel Clemens and Will Carleton. His tour in 1880 took him to every city in Indiana where he was introduced by local dignitaries and other popular figures, including Maurice Thompson with whom he began to develop a close friendship.

Developing and maintaining his public image became a constant job, and received more of his focus as his fame grew. Keeping his alcohol addiction secret, maintaining the persona of a simple rural poet, and creating the image of a friendly common person became most important. Riley identified these traits as the key to his popularity during the mid-1880s, and wrote of his need to maintain a fictional persona. He fed the caricature by focusing on authoring poetry he thought would help build his identity. He was aided by editorials he authored and submitted to the *Indianapolis Journal* offering observations on events from his perspective as a "humble rural poet". He changed his appearance to look more mainstream, and began by shaving his mustache off and abandoning the flamboyant dress he employed in his early circuit tours.

By 1880 his poems were beginning to be published nationally and were receiving positive reviews. "Tom Johnson's Quit" was carried by papers in twenty states, thanks in part to the careful cultivation of his popularity. Riley became frustrated that despite his growing acclaim, he found it difficult to achieve financial success. In the early 1880s, on top of his steady performing, Riley began producing a many poems to increase his income. Half of his poems were written during the period. The constant labor had adverse effects on his health, which was worsened by his drinking. At the urging of Maurice Thompson, he again attempted to stop drinking liquor, but was only able to give it up for a few months.

Indianapolis Journal

Newspaper Poet

Riley moved to Indianapolis at the end of 1879 to begin his employment with the Journal. It was the only metropolitan paper in Indianapolis with daily editions, and had wide readership. At the paper he wrote a regular society column that often included verses of poetry. At the paper, Riley came into contact with many prominent figures, and began a close friendship with Eugene V. Debs. Debs enjoyed Riley's works and often complimented his sentiments. Riley has been using the pen name "Jay Whit" since he started authoring poetry, but finally began to write under his own name in April 1881.

Riley renewed his relationship with Bottsford in 1880, and the two corresponded frequently. Their relationship remained unstable, but Riley became deeply attached to her. She inspired his poem "The Werewife," which told of a perfect wife who could suddenly turn into a demonic monster. Bottsford pressed Riley for marriage several times, but Riley refused. They broke off their relationship a second time in 1881 when she discovered his correspondence with two other women, and found that he had taken a secret vacation to Wisconsin with one of them.

Riley's alcohol addiction influenced some of his poems during his time working at the Journal, including "On Quitting California," "John Gollither's Third Womern," [sic] and "The Dismal Fate of Tit." Each made references to the delirium caused by drinking. Although Riley rarely published anything controversial, some of his poems published from the same period, including "Afterwhiles", elude to drug usage and make vague sexual references. Throughout the early 1880s, Riley still made submissions to the elite literary periodicals, but continued to be rejected. Riley found the rejection depressing, but persevered. He believed he would never be recognized as a true literary figure until one of the prestigious periodicals

published his work.

Lyceum Circuit

Riley made occasional reading tours around Indiana, and in August 1880 was invited to perform at Asbury University. His performance there so impressed the local Phi Kappa Psi chapter, he was invited to join as an honorary member. Through the fraternity he met Robert Jones Burdette, a writer and minister in the Indianapolis area. Burdette was a member of the Redpath Lyceum Bureau of Boston, a prominent lecture circuit whose regular speakers included Ralph Waldo Emerson. Burdette encouraged Riley to join the circuit through its Chicago branch. Riley's accumulated debt and low income began causing him trouble in 1881 and he decided rejoining a lecture circuit would provide much needed funds. His agreement for continued employment with the circuit depended on his ability to draw audiences during the first season, beginning in April 1881. He succeeded, drawing the largest crowds in Chicago and Indianapolis.

Because of his success in the midwest, the circuit leaders invited him to make an east coast tour, starting in Boston at the Tremont Temple in February 1882. Riley agreed, signing a ten year agreement and granting half his receipts to his agent. Before his performance, he traveled to Longfellow's home in Massachusetts and convinced him to agree to a meeting. Their brief meeting was one of Riley's fondest memories, and he wrote a lengthy article on it after Longfellow's death only a month later. Longfellow encouraged Riley to focus on poetry, and gave him advice for his upcoming performance. At the performance, Riley was well received and his poems were greeted with laughter and given praise in the city's newspaper reviews. Boston was the literary center of the United States at the time, and Riley's impression on the city's literary community helped him to finally get his work accepted in the prestigious periodicals he had long sought acceptance from. The Century Magazine was the first such periodical to accept his work, running "In Swimming-Time" in its September 1883 issue. Until the 1890s, it remained the only major literary magazine to publish Riley's work. Knowing the high standards of the magazine, Riley reserved his best work each year to submit, including one of his favorites, "The Old Man and Jim" in 1887.

By the end of 1882, Riley's finances began to improve dramatically, thanks largely to the income from his performances. During 1883 he began writing his "Boone County" poems under the pen name "Benjamin F. Johnson of Boone." The poems were almost entirely written in dialect and focused on topics of rural life during the early nineteenth century, often employing nostalgia and the simplicity of country life as key elements. The Old Swimmin'-Hole and When the

Frost Is on the Punkin' were the most popular, and helped earn the entire series critical acclaim. The topics were popular to readers, reminding them of their childhood. Merrill, Meigs & Company (later renamed Bobbs-Merrill Company) approached Riley to compile the poems into a book. Riley agreed and printing of his first book began in August 1883, titled "The Old Swimmin'-Hole and 'Leven More Poems". The book's popularity necessitated a second printing before the end of the year. During this period Riley determined that his most popular poems were those on topics of rural life, and he began to use that as a common theme throughout his future work.

The income from Riley's book allowed him to ease his busy work schedule; he began submitting fewer articles to the Journal and made fewer lecture stops. The amount of poems he authored slowed, but the quality of his poetry increased; he wrote his most famous poems during mid-1880s, including "Little Orphant Annie". Riley attempted to secure a new job at a periodical and leave the Journal, but all the magazines he submitted to would not hire him unless he was willing to move. Riley was steadfast in his refusal to leave Indiana, and told reporters that his rural home was his inspiration and to leave would ruin his poetry.

Riley renewed his relationship with Bottsworth for a third and final time in 1883. The two corresponded frequently and had secret lovers' rendezvouses. He stopped seeing other women and their relationship became more dedicated and stable. Bottsworth, however, became convinced Riley was seeing another woman, and they terminated their relationship for the last time in January 1885. Riley's sister, Mary, had become close friends with Bottsworth and scolded him for his mistreatment of her. Her reputation was largely tarnished by the affair and she found it difficult to find employment once their relationship ended.

In 1884, Riley made another tour of the major cities in the eastern United States. Following the lectures, he began compiling a second book of poetry. He completed it during July and Bowen-Merrill published it in December under the title *The Boss Girl, A Christmas Story and Other Sketches*. The book, which contained humorous poetry and short stories, received mixed reviews. It was popular around Indiana, where the majority of its copies were sold. One reviewer, however, called the poems "weird, nightmarish, and eerie," and compared them to Edgar Allan Poe's works.

While Riley was working on his book, he was unexpectedly invited by James B. Pond, the agent for many of the nations top performers, to join a one-hundred nights' engagement in New York City in a show that included Samuel Clemens and Dudley Warner. Riley, however, was unable to reach an agreement with the Redpath Bureau who had to authorize any other performance under the terms of

their contract. Riley believed his contact with Redpath Bureau was limiting his opportunities, and began to have a strained relationship with his agent.

Western Association of Writers

In part due to the limited success of his latest book outside Indiana, Riley was persuaded to begin working with other midwestern writers to attempt to form an association to promote their work. Popular Hoosier writer Lew Wallace, author of *Ben-Hur*, was a driving force in the effort. During 1885, over one-hundred writers joined the group. They held their first meeting in July, naming themselves the Western Association of Writers. At the meeting Maurice Thompson was named president, and Riley vice president. The association never succeeded in its goals of creating a powerful advertising force, but became a social club and a rival literary community to the eastern writing establishment. Riley was disappointed in the shortcomings of the group, but came to depend on its regular meetings as an escape from his normally hectic schedule.

Through the association, Riley became acquainted with most of the notable writers in the midwestern United States, including humorist Edgar Wilson Nye of Chicago. After completing his lecture circuit in 1885, Riley formed a partnership with Nye and his agent to begin a new tour. The Redpath Bureau agreed to allow Riley to tour with Nye, provided he maintained his financial agreements with them. In addition to touring, Riley and Nye collaborated to write a book, *Nye and Riley's Railway Guide*, a collection of humorous anecdotes and poems intended to parody popular tourist literature of the day. Published in 1888, the book was somewhat successful and went through three reprints.

In October 1887, Riley and the association joined with other writers to petition the United States Congress to attempt to negotiate international treaties to protect American copyrights abroad. The group became known as the International Copyright League and had significant success in its efforts. When traveling to one of the league's meetings in New York City that year, Riley was struck by Bell's palsy. He recovered after three weeks, but remained secluded to hide the effects of the sickness which he believed was caused by his alcohol addiction. He made another attempt to stop drinking with the help of a minister, but again soon returned to his old habit.

After recovering, Riley remained briefly in New York to participate in a show at Chickering Hall with Edgar Nye, Samuel Clemens, and several others. Riley was introduced by James Russell Lowell before his performance, and Lowell gave Riley a glowing endorsement to the crowd. Riley's poetry brought both tears and laughter according to *The New York Sun*. Critic Edmund Clarence Stedman, one of the foremost literary critics of the era, was present and wrote that Riley's

dialect poems were the finest he had ever heard, "in which a homely dramatic [sic] persona's heart is laid open by subtle indirect, absolutely sure and tender" poetry. As a result of his New York performance, his name and picture were carried in all the major eastern papers and he quickly became well known throughout the United States. Sales of *The Boss Girl* picked up, leading to the fifth and largest printing, and Riley finally began to achieve the widespread fame he sought.

Clemens disliked being upstaged by Riley, and thereafter attempted to avoid any future joint performances with him. According to one review, Clemens "shriveled up into a bitter patch of melancholy in the fierce light of Mr. Riley's humour." After returning home from his tour in early-1888, Riley finished compiling his third book, titled *Old-Fashioned Roses*. The book was arranged to appeal to British readers. It included only a few of his dialect poems and consisted mostly of sonnets. The book reprinted many poems Riley had already published, but included some new ones he wrote specifically for the book, including "The Days Gone By," "The Little White Hearse," and "The Serenade." The book was Riley's favorite because it contained his finest works and was published by the prestigious Longmans, Green Publishers in a high quality binding and print.

In late-1888 he finished work on a fourth book, *Pipes o' Pan at Zekesbury* which was released to great acclaim in the United States. Based on a fictional town in Indiana, Riley presented many sketches and poems about its citizens and way of life. It received mixed reviews among literary critics who wrote of it that Riley's stories were not of the same quality as his poetry. The book was very popular with the public and went through numerous reprints.

Riley was quickly becoming wealthy from his books and touring, earning nearly \$20,000 in 1888. He no longer needed his job at the journal, and he left the job near the end of that year. The paper had served as the vehicle taking him to prominence and had published hundreds of his articles, stories, and poems.

National Fame

Politics

In March 1888, Riley traveled to Washington, D.C. where he had dinner at the White House with other members of the International Copyright League President of the United States Grover Cleveland. Riley made a brief performance for the dignitaries at the event before speaking about the need for international copyright protections. Cleveland was enamored by Riley's performance and invited him back for a private meeting where the two men discussed cultural

topics. In the 1888 Presidential Election campaign, Riley's acquaintance Benjamin Harrison was nominated as the Republican Candidate. Although Riley had shunned politics for most of his life, he gave Harrison a personal endorsement and participated in fund-raising events and vote stumping. The election was exceptionally partisan in Indiana, and Riley found the atmosphere of the campaign stressful; he vowed to never become involved in politics again.

Upon Harrison's election, he suggested Riley be named the national poet laureate, but Congress failed to act on the request. Riley was still honored by Harrison and visited him at the White House on several occasions to perform at civic events.

Pay Problems and Scandal

Riley and Nye made arrangements with James Pond to make two national tours during 1888 and 1889. The tours were popular and generally sold out, with hundreds having to be turned away. The shows were usually forty-five minutes to an hour long and featured Riley reading often humorous poetry interspersed by sketches and jokes from Nye. The shows were very flexible and the two men adjusted their performances based on their audiences reactions. Riley memorized forty of his poems for the shows to add to his own flexibility. Many prominent literary and theatrical figures attended the shows. At a New York City show in March 1888, Augustin Daly was so enthralled by the show he insisted on hosting the two men at a banquet with several leading Broadway Theatre actors.

Despite Riley serving as the act's main draw, he was not permitted to become an equal partner in the venture. Nye and Pond both received a percentage of the net profit, while Riley was paid a flat rate for each performance. In addition, because of Riley's past agreements with the Redpath Lyceum Bureau, he was required to pay half of his fee to his agent Amos Walker. This led the other men to profit more than Riley from his own work.

To remedy this situation, Riley hired his brother-in-law Henry Eitel, an Indianapolis banker, to manage his finances and act on his behalf to try and extricate him from his contract. Despite discussions and assurances from Pond that he would work to address the problem, Eitel had no success. Pond ultimately made the situation worse by booking months of solid performances, not allowing Riley and Nye a day of rest. These events took a physical and emotional toll on Riley who sank into depression and began his worst period of drinking. During November 1889, the tour was forced to cancel several shows after Riley became severely inebriated at a stop in Madison, Wisconsin.

Walker began monitoring Riley and denying him access to liquor, but Riley found ways to evade Walker. At a stop at the Masonic Temple Theatre in Louisville, Kentucky in January 1890, Riley paid the hotel's bartender to sneak whiskey to his room. He became so drunken, he was not only unable to perform, but unable to travel to the next stop. Nye terminated the partnership and tour in response. The reason for the breakup could not be kept secret, and hotel staff reported to the Louisville Courier-Journal that they saw Riley in a drunken stupor walking around the hotel. The story made national news and Riley feared his career was ruined.

He secretly left Louisville at night and returned to Indianapolis by train. Eitel vociferously defended Riley to the press in an effort to gain sympathy for Riley, explaining the abusive financial arrangements his partners had put him in. Riley however refused to speak to reporters and hid himself away for weeks. Much to Riley's surprise, the news reports made him more popular than ever. Many people thought the stories were exaggerated, and Riley's carefully cultivated image made it difficult for the public to believe he was an alcoholic. Riley had stopped sending poetry to newspapers and magazines in the aftermath, but they soon began corresponding with him requesting that he resume writing. This encouraged Riley, and he made another attempt to give up liquor as he returned to his public career.

The negative press did not end however, as Nye and Pond threatened to sue Riley for causing their tour to end prematurely. They claimed to have lost \$20,000. Walker threatened a separate suit demanding \$1,000. Riley hired Indianapolis lawyer William P. Fishback to represent him and the men settled out of court. The full details of the settlement were never disclosed, but whatever the case, Riley finally extricated himself from his old contracts and became a free agent. The exorbitant amount Riley was being sued for only reinforced public opinion that Riley had been mistreated by his partners, and helped him maintain his image. Nye and Riley remained good friends, and Riley later wrote that Pond and Walker were the source of the problems.

Riley's poetry had become popular in Britain, in large part due to his book *Old-Fashioned Roses*. In May 1891 he traveled to England to make a tour and what he considered a literary pilgrimage. He landed in Liverpool and traveled first to Dumfries, Scotland, the home and burial place of Robert Burns. Riley had long been compared to Burns by critics because they both used dialect in their poetry and drew inspiration from their rural homes. He then traveled to Edinburgh, York, and London, reciting poetry for gatherings at each stop. Augustin Daly arranged for him to give a poetry reading to prominent British actors in London. Riley was warmly welcomed by its literary and theatrical community and he

toured places that Shakespeare had frequented.

Riley quickly tired of traveling abroad and began longing for home, writing to his nephew that he regretted having left the United States. He cut his trip short and returned to New York City in August. He spent the next months in his Greenfield home attempting to write an epic poem, but after several attempts gave up, believing he did not possess the ability.

By 1890, Riley had authored almost all of his famous poems. The few poems he did write during the 1890s were generally less well received by the public. As a solution, Riley and his publishers began reusing poetry from other books and printing some of his earliest works. When *Neighborly Poems* was published in 1891, a critic working for the *Chicago Tribune* pointed out the use of Riley's earliest works, commenting that Riley was using his popularity to push his crude earlier works onto the public only to make money. Riley's newest poems published in the 1894 book *Armazindy* received very negative reviews that referred to poems like "The Little Dog-Woggy" and "Jargon-Jingle" as "drivel" and to Riley as a "worn out genius." Most of his growing number of critics suggested that he ignored the quality of the poems for the sake of making money.

Last Tours

Although Riley was wealthy from his books, he was able to triple his annual income by touring. He found the lure hard to resist and decided to return to the lecture circuit in 1892. He hired William C. Glass to assist Henry Eitel in managing his affairs. While Eitel handled the finances, Glass worked to organize his lecture tours. Glass worked closely with Riley's publishers to have his tours coincide with the release of new books, and ensured his tours were geographically varied enough to maintain his popularity in all regions of the nation. He was careful not to book busy schedules; Riley only performed four times a week and the tours were short, lasting only three months.

During his 1893 tour, Riley lectured mostly in the western United States, and in his 1894 in the east. His performances were major events, and generally sold out within days of their announcements. In 1894 he allowed author Douglass Sherley to join his tour. Sherley was a millionaire who published his own books. The literary community had dismissed his work, but Riley was instrumental in helping him to be accepted.

In 1895 Riley made his last tour, making stops in most of the major cities in the United States. Advertised as his final performances, there was incredible demand for tickets and Riley performed before his largest audiences during the tour. He and Sherley continued a show very similar to those that he and Nye had

done. Riley often lamented the lack of change in the program, but found when he tried to introduce new material, or left out any of his most popular poems, the crowds would demand encores until he agreed to recite their favorites.

Children's Poet

Following the death of his father in 1894, Riley began regretting his choice to never marry or have children. To compensate for the lack of his own children, he became a doting uncle, showering gifts on his nieces and nephews. He had repurchased his childhood home in 1893 and allowed his divorced sister, Mary, his widowed sister-in-law, Julia, and their daughters to live in the home. He provided for all their needs and spent the summer months of 1893 living with them. He took his nephew Edmund Eital as a personal secretary and gave him a \$50,000 wedding gift in 1912. Riley was well loved by his family.

Riley returned to live near Indianapolis later in 1893, boarding in a private home in the Lockerbie district, then a small suburb. He developed a close friendship with his landlords, the Nickum and Holstein families. The home became a destination for local schoolchildren to whom Riley would regularly recite poetry and tell stories. Riley's friends frequently visited his home, and he developed a closer relationship with Eugene Debs.

The same year, he began compiling his poems of most interest to children into a new book entitled *Rhymes of Childhood*. The book was richly illustrated by Howard Chandler Christy and Riley authored a few new poems for the book under the pseudonym "Uncle Sydney." *Rhymes of Childhood* became Riley's best selling book, and sold millions of copies. It has remained in print continually since 1912, and helped earn Riley the nickname the "Children's Poet." Even Riley's rival, Clemens, commented that the book was "charming" and made him weep for his "lost youth."

Later Life

National Poet

Riley had grown very wealthy by the time he ended touring in 1895, and was earning \$1,000 a week (\$27,040 in 2011 chained dollars). Although he retired, he continued to make minor appearances. In 1896, Riley performed four shows in Denver. Most of the performances in his later life were at civic celebrations. He was a regular speaker at Decoration Day events and delivered poetry before the unveiling of monuments in Washington, D.C. Newspapers began referring to him as the "National Poet", "the poet laureate of America", and "the people's

poet laureate". Riley wrote many of his patriotic poems for such events, including "The Soldier", "The Name of Old Glory", and his most famous such poem, "America!". The 1902 poem "America, Messiah of Nations" was written and read by Riley for the dedication of the Indianapolis Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument.

The only new poetry Riley published after the turn of the century were elegies for famous friends. The poetic qualities of the poems were often poor, but they contained many popularly held sentiments concerning the deceased. Among those he eulogized were Benjamin Harrison, Lew Wallace, and Henry Lawton. Because of the poor quality of the poems, his friends and publishers requested that he stop writing them, but he refused.

In 1897, Riley's publishers suggested that he create a multi-volume series of books containing his complete life works. With the help of his nephew, Riley began working to compile the books, which eventually totaled sixteen volumes and were finally completed in 1914. Such works were uncommon during the lives of writers, attesting to the uncommon level of popularity Riley had achieved.

His works had become staples for Ivy League literature courses and universities began offering him honorary degrees. The first was Yale in 1902, followed by a Doctorate of Letters from the University of Pennsylvania in 1904. Wabash College and Indiana University granted him similar awards. In 1908 he was elected member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and in 1912 they conferred upon him a special medal for poetry.

Riley was influential in helping other poets start their careers, having particularly strong influences on Hamlin Garland, William Allen White, and Edgar Lee Masters. He discovered aspiring African American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar in 1892. Riley thought Dunbar's work was "worthy of applause", and wrote him letters of recommendation to help him get his work published.

Declining Health

In 1901, Riley's doctor diagnosed him with neurasthenia, a nervous disorder. They recommended long periods of rest as a cure. Riley remained ill for the rest of his life and relied on his landlords and family to aid in his care. During the winter months he moved to Miami, Florida, and during summer spent time with his family in Greenfield. He made only a few trips during the decade, including one to Mexico in 1906. He became very depressed by his condition, writing to his friends that he thought he could die at any moment, and often turned to alcohol for relief.

In March 1909, Riley was stricken a second time with Bell's palsy, and partial deafness, the symptoms only gradually eased over the course of the year. Riley was a difficult patient, and generally refused to take any medicine except the patent medicines he had sold in his earlier years; the medicines often worsened his conditions, but his doctors could not sway his opinion. On July 10, 1910 he suffered a stroke that paralyzed the right side of his body. Hoping for a quick recovery, his family kept the news from the press until September. Riley found the loss of use of his writing hand the worst part of the stroke, which served only to further depress him. With his health so poor, he decided to work on a legacy by which to be remembered in Indianapolis. In 1911 he donated land and funds to build a new library on Pennsylvania Avenue. By 1913, with the aid of a cane, Riley began to recover his ability to walk. His inability to write, however, nearly ended his production of poems. George Ade worked with him from 1910 through 1916 to write his last five poems and several short autobiographical sketches as Riley dictated. His publisher continued recycling old works into new books, which remained in high demand.

Since the mid-1880s, Riley had been the nation's most read poet, a trend that accelerated at the turn of the century. Demand for his works was so large that the level of popularity he achieved has not since been surpassed by any poet in their lifetime. In 1912 Riley recorded readings of his most popular poetry to be sold by Edison Records. Riley was the subject of three paintings by T. C. Steele. The Indianapolis Arts Association commissioned a portrait of Riley to be created by world famous painter John Singer Sargent. Riley's image became a nationally known icon and many businesses capitalized on his popularity to sell their products; Hoosier Poet brand vegetables became a major brand in the midwest.

In 1912, the governor of Indiana instituted Riley Day on the poet's birthday. Schools were required to teach Riley's poems to their children, and banquet events were held in his honor around the state. In 1915 and 1916 the celebration was national after being proclaimed in most states. The annual celebration continued in Indiana until 1968. In early 1916 Riley was filmed as part of a movie to celebrate Indiana's centennial, the video is on display at the Indiana State Library.

Death and Legacy

On July 22, 1916, Riley suffered a second stroke. He recovered enough during the day to speak and joke with his companions. He died before dawn the following morning, July 23. Riley's death shocked the nation and made front page headlines in all the major newspapers. President Woodrow Wilson wrote a brief note to Riley's family offering condolences on behalf the entire nation. Indiana

Governor Samuel M. Ralston offered to allow Riley to lie in state at the Indiana Statehouse—Abraham Lincoln being the only other person to have previously received such an honor. During the ten hours he lay in state on July 24, over thirty-five thousand filed past his bronze casket; the line was still miles long at the end of the day and thousands were turned away. The following day a private funeral ceremony was held and attended by many dignitaries. A large funeral procession then carried him to Crown Hill Cemetery where he was buried in a tomb at the top of the hill, the highest point in the city of Indianapolis.

Within a year of Riley's death many memorials were created, including several by the James Whitcomb Riley Memorial Association. The James Whitcomb Riley Hospital for Children was created and named in his honor by a group of wealthy benefactors and opened in 1924. In the following years, other memorials aimed at benefiting children were created, including Camp Riley for youth with disabilities.

The memorial foundation purchased the poet's Lockerbie home in Indianapolis and it is now maintained as a museum. The James Whitcomb Riley Museum Home is the only late-Victorian home in Indiana that is open to the public and the United States' only late-Victorian preservation, featuring authentic furniture and decor from that era. His birthplace and boyhood home, now the James Whitcomb Riley House, is preserved as a historical site. A Liberty ship, commissioned April 23, 1942, was christened the SS James Whitcomb Riley. It served with the United States Maritime Commission until being scrapped in 1971.

James Whitcomb Riley High School opened in South Bend, Indiana in 1924. In 1950, there was a James Whitcomb Riley Elementary School in Hammond, Indiana, but it was torn down in 2006. East Chicago, Indiana had a Riley School at one time, as did neighboring Gary, Indiana and Anderson, Indiana. One of New Castle, Indiana's elementary schools is named for Riley as is the road on which it is located. The former Greenfield High School was converted to Riley Elementary School and listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986.

As a lasting tribute, the citizens of Greenfield hold a festival every year in Riley's honor. Taking place the first or second weekend of October, the "Riley Days" festival traditionally commences with a flower parade in which local school children place flowers around Myra Reynolds Richards statue of Riley on the county courthouse lawn, while a band plays lively music in honor of the poet. Weeks before the festival, the festival board has a queen contest. The 2010-2011 queen was Corinne Butler. The pageant has been going on many years in honor of the Hoosier poet

According to historian Elizabeth Van Allen, Riley was instrumental in helping form a midwestern cultural identity. Before the 1880s, the midwestern United States had no significant literary community and was largely shaped by the cultural influences of other regions of the United States. The works of the Western Association of Writers, most notably those of Riley and Wallace, helped create the midwest's cultural identity and create a rival literary community to the established eastern literari. For this reason, and the publicity Riley's work created, he was most commonly known as the "Hoosier Poet."

Critical Reception and Style

Riley was among the most popular and best-loved writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, known for his "uncomplicated, sentimental, and humorous" writing. Often writing his verses in dialect, his poetry caused readers to recall a nostalgic and simpler time in earlier American history. This gave his poetry a unique appeal during a period of rapid industrialization and urbanization in the United States. Riley was a prolific writer who "achieved mass appeal partly due to his canny sense of marketing and publicity." He published more than fifty books, mostly of poetry and humorous short stories, and sold millions of copies.

Riley is often remembered for his most famous poems, including the "The Raggedy Man" and "Little Orphant Annie". Many of his poems, including those, were partially autobiographical, as he used events and people from his childhood as an inspiration for subject matter. His poems often contained morals and warnings for children, containing messages telling children to care for the less fortunate in society. David Galens and Van Allen both see these messages as Riley's subtle response to the turbulent economic times of the Gilded Age and the growing progressive movement. Riley believed that the urbanization in the nation robbed children of their innocence and sincerity, and in his poems he attempted to introduce and idolize characters who had not lost those qualities. His children's poems are "exuberant, performative, and often display Riley's penchant for using humorous characterization, repetition, and dialect to make his poetry accessible to a wide-ranging audience."

Although indirectly hinted at in some poems, Riley wrote very little on serious subject matter, and actually mocked attempts at serious poetry. Only a few of his sentimental poems touched on serious subjects. "Little Mandy's Christmas-Tree", "The Absence of Little Wesley" and "The Happy Little Cripple" spoke about poverty, the death of a child, and disabilities. Like his children's poems, they too contained morals, suggesting society should take pity on the downtrodden and be charitable.

Riley wrote gentle and romantic poems that were not in dialect. They generally consisted of sonnets and were heavily influenced by the works of John Greenleaf Whittier, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Alfred, Lord Tennyson. His standard English poetry was never as popular as his Hoosier dialect poems. Still less popular were the poems Riley authored in his later years; most were to commemorate important events in American history and to eulogize the dead.

Riley's contemporaries acclaimed him "America's best-loved poet". In 1920, Henry Beers lauded the works of Riley "as natural and unaffected, with none of the discontent and deep thought of cultured song." Samuel Clemens, William Dean Howells, and Hamlin Garland, each praised Riley's work and the idealism he expressed in his poetry. Only a few critics of the period found fault with Riley's works. Ambrose Bierce criticized Riley for his frequent use of dialect. Bierce accused Riley of using dialect to "cover up [the] faulty construction" of his poems. Edgar Lee Masters found Riley's work to be superficial, claiming it lacked irony and that he had only a "narrow emotional range". By the 1930s popular critical opinion towards Riley's works began to shift in favor of the negative reviews. In 1951, James T. Farrell said Riley's works were "cliched." Galens wrote that modern critics consider Riley to be a "minor poet, whose work—provincial, sentimental, and superficial though it may have been—nevertheless struck a chord with a mass audience in a time of enormous cultural change." Thomas C. Johnson wrote that what most interests modern critics was Riley's ability to market his work, saying he had a unique understanding of "how to commodify his own image and the nostalgic dreams of an anxious nation."

Among the earliest widespread criticisms to rise against Riley was opinions that his dialect writing did not actually reflect the true dialect of central Indiana. In 1970 Peter Revell wrote that Riley's dialect was more similar to the poor speech of a child rather than the dialect of his region. Revell made extensive comparison to historical texts and Riley's dialect usage. Philip Greasley wrote that while "some critics have dismissed him as sub-literary, insincere, and an artificial entertainer, his defenders reply that an author so popular with millions of people in different walks of life must contribute something of value, and that his faults, if any, can be ignored."

A Ballad

With A Serious Conclusion

Crowd about me, little children--
Come and cluster 'round my knee
While I tell a little story
That happened once with me.

My father he had gone away
A-sailing on the foam,
Leaving me--the merest infant--
And my mother dear at home;

For my father was a sailor,
And he sailed the ocean o'er
For full five years ere yet again
He reached his native shore.

And I had grown up rugged
And healthy day by day,
Though I was but a puny babe
When father went away.

Poor mother she would kiss me
And look at me and sigh
So strangely, oft I wondered
And would ask the reason why.

And she would answer sadly,
Between her sobs and tears,--
'You look so like your father,
Far away so many years!'

And then she would caress me
And brush my hair away,
And tell me not to question,
But to run about my play.

Thus I went playing thoughtfully--
For that my mother said,--

'YOU LOOK SO LIKE YOUR FATHER!'
Kept ringing in my head.

So, ranging once the golden sands
That looked out on the sea,
I called aloud, 'My father dear,
Come back to ma and me!'

Then I saw a glancing shadow
On the sand, and heard the shriek
Of a sea-gull flying seaward,
And I heard a gruff voice speak:--

'Ay, ay, my little shipmate,
I thought I heard you hail;
Were you trumpeting that sea-gull,
Or do you see a sail?'

And as rough and gruff a sailor
As ever sailed the sea
Was standing near grotesquely
And leering dreadfully.

I replied, though I was frightened,
'It was my father dear
I was calling for across the sea--
I think he didn't hear.'

And then the sailor leered again
In such a frightful way,
And made so many faces
I was little loath to stay:

But he started fiercely toward me--
Then made a sudden halt
And roared, '_I_ think he heard you!'
And turned a somersault.

Then a wild fear overcame me,
And I flew off like the wind,
Shrieking 'MOTHER!'--and the sailor
Just a little way behind!

And then my mother heard me,
And I saw her shade her eyes,
Looking toward me from the doorway,
Transfixed with pale surprise

For a moment--then her features
Glowed with all their wonted charms
As the sailor overtook me,
And I fainted in her arms.

When I awoke to reason
I shuddered with affright
Till I felt my mother's presence
With a thrill of wild delight--

Till, amid a shower of kisses
Falling glad as summer rain,
A muffled thunder rumbled,--
'Is he coming 'round again?'

Then I shrieked and clung unto her,
While her features flushed and burned
As she told me it was father
From a foreign land returned.

.

I said--when I was calm again,
And thoughtfully once more
Had dwelt upon my mother's words
Of just the day before,--

'I DON'T look like my father,
As you told me yesterday--
I know I don't--or father
Would have run the other way.'

James Whitcomb Riley

A Barefoot Boy

A barefoot boy! I mark him at his play --
For May is here once more, and so is he, --
His dusty trousers, rolled half to the knee,
And his bare ankles grimy, too, as they:
Cross-hatchings of the nettle, in array
Of feverish stripes, hint vividly to me
Of woody pathways winding endlessly
Along the creek, where even yesterday
He plunged his shrinking body -- gasped and shook --
Yet called the water 'warm,' with never lack
Of joy. And so, half enviously I look
Upon this graceless barefoot and his track, --
His toe stubbed -- ay, his big toe-nail knocked back
Like unto the clasp of an old pocketbook.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Bear Family

Wunst, 'way West in Illinois,
Wuz two Bears an' their two boys:
An' the two boys' names, you know,
Wuz--like _ours_ is,--Jim an' Jo;
An' their _parunts'_ names wuz same's,
All big grown-up people's names,--
Ist _Miz_ Bear, the neighbors call
'Em, an' _Mister_ Bear--'at's all.
Yes--an' Miz Bear scold him, too,
Ist like grown folks _shouldn't_ do!

Wuz a grea'-big river there,
An', 'crosst that, 's a mountain where
Old Bear said some day he'd go,
Ef she don't quit scoldin'so!
So, one day when he been down
The river, fishin', 'most to town,
An' come back 'thout no fish a-tall,
An' Jim an' Jo they run an' bawl
An' tell their ma their pa hain't fetch'
No fish,--she scold again an' ketch
Her old broom up an' biff him, too.--

An' he ist cry, an' say, '_Boo-hoo_!
I _told_ you what I 'd do some day'.
An' he ist turned an' runned away
To where's the grea'-big river there,
An' ist _splunged_ in an' swum to where
The mountain's at, 'way th'other side,
An' clumbed up there. An' Miz Bear _cried_--
An' little Jo an' little Jim--
Ist like their ma--bofe cried fer him!--
But he clumbed on, _clean out o' sight_,
He wuz so mad!--An' served 'em right!

Nen--when the Bear got 'way on top
The mountain, he heerd somepin' flop
Its wings--an' somepin' else he heerd
A-rattlin'-like.--An' he wuz _skeerd_,

An' looked 'way up, an'--_Mercy sake!_--

It wuz a' Eagul an' a SNAKE!

An'-sir! the Snake, he bite an' kill'

The Eagul, an' they bofe fall till

They strike the ground--_k'spang-k'spat!_--

Wite where the Bear wuz standin' at!

An' when here come the Snake at him,

The Bear he think o' little Jim

An' Jo, he did--an' their ma, too,--

All safe at home; an' he ist flew

Back down the mountain--an' could hear

The old Snake rattlin', sharp an' clear,

Wite clos't behind!--An' Bear he's so

All tired out, by time, you know,

He git down to the river there,

He know' he can't _swim_ back to where

His folks is at. But ist wite nen

He see a boat an' six big men

'At's been a-shootin' ducks: An' so

He skeerd them out the boat, you know,

An' ist jumped in--an' Snake _he_ tried

To jump in, too, but failed outside

Where all the water wuz; an' so

The Bear grabs one the things you row

The boat wiv an' ist whacks the head

Of the old Snake an' kills him dead!--

An' when he's killed him dead, w'y, nen

The old Snake's drownded dead again!

Nen Bear set in the boat an' bowed

His back an' rowed--an' rowed--an' rowed--

Till he's safe home--so tired he can't

Do nothin' but lay there an' pant

An' tell his childern, 'Bresh my coat!'

An' tell his wife, 'Go chain my boat!'

An' they're so glad he's back, they say

'They _knowed_ he's comin' thataway

To ist surprise the dear ones there!'

An' Jim an' Jo they dried his hair

An' pulled the burrs out; an' their ma
She ist set there an' helt his paw
Till he wuz sound asleep, an' nen
She tell' him she won't scold again--
Never--never--never--
Ferever an' ferever!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Brave Refrain

When snow is here, and the trees look weird,
And the knuckled twigs are gloved with frost;
When the breath congeals in the drover's beard,
And the old pathway to the barn is lost;
When the rooster's crow is sad to hear,
And the stamp of the stabled horse is vain,
And the tone of the cow-bell grieves the ear--
O then is the time for a brave refrain!

When the gears hang stiff on the harness-peg,
And the tallow gleams in frozen streaks;
And the old hen stands on a lonesome leg,
And the pump sounds hoarse and the handle squeaks;
When the woodpile lies in a shrouded heap,
And the frost is scratched from the window-pane
And anxious eyes from the inside peep--
O then is the time for a brave refrain!

When the ax-helve warms at the chimney-jamb,
And hob-nailed shoes on the hearth below,
And the house-cat curls in a slumber calm,
And the eight-day clock ticks loud and slow;
When the harsh broom-handle jabs the ceil
'Neath the kitchen-loft, and the drowsy brain
Sniffs the breath of the morning meal--
O then is the time for a brave refrain!

ENVOI

When the skillet seethes, and a blubbering hot
Tilts the lid of the coffee-pot,
And the scent of the buckwheat cake grows plain--
O then is the time for a brave refrain!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Bride

'O I am weary!' she sighed, as her billowy
Hair she unloosed in a torrent of gold
That rippled and fell o'er a figure as willowy,
Graceful and fair as a goddess of old:
Over her jewels she flung herself drearily,
Crumpled the laces that snowed on her breast,
Crushed with her fingers the lily that wearily
Clung in her hair like a dove in its nest--.
And naught but her shadowy form in the mirror
To kneel in dumb agony down and weep near her!

'Weary--?' Of what? Could we fathom the mystery--?
Lift up the lashes weighed down by her tears
And wash with their dew one white face from her history,
Set like a gem in the red rust of years?
Nothing will rest her-- unless he who died of her
Strayed from his grave, and in place of the groom,
Tipping her face, kneeling there by the side of her,
Drained the old kiss to the dregs of his doom--.
And naught but that shadowy form in the mirror
To heel in dumb agony down and weep near her!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Canary At The Farm

Folks has be'n to town, and Sahry
Fetched 'er home a pet canary--,
And of all the blame', contrary,
Aggervatin' things alive!
I love music-- that I love it
When it's free-- and plenty of it--;
But I kindo' git above it,
At a dollar-eighty-five!

Reason's plain as I'm a-sayin'--,
Jes' the idy, now, o' layin'
Out yer money, and a-payin'
Fer a willer-cage and bird,
When the medder-larks is wingin'
Round you, and the woods is ringin'
With the beautifulest singin'
That a mortal ever heard!

Sahry's sot, tho'--. So I tell her
He's a purty little feller,
With his wings o' creamy-yeller,
And his eyes keen as a cat;
And the twitter o' the critter
'Pears to absolutely glitter!
Guess I'll haf to go and git her
A high-priceter cage 'n that!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Child-World

_The Child-World--long and long since lost to view--
A Fairy Paradise!--
How always fair it was and fresh and new--
How every affluent hour heaped heart and eyes
With treasures of surprise!

Enchantments tangible: The under-brink
Of dawns that launched the sight
Up seas of gold: The dewdrop on the pink,
With all the green earth in it and blue height
Of heavens infinite:

The liquid, dripping songs of orchard-birds--
The wee bass of the bees,--
With lucent deeps of silence afterwards;
The gay, clandestine whisperings of the breeze
And glad leaves of the trees.

* * * * *

O Child-World: After this world--just as when
I found you first sufficed
My soulmost need--if I found you again,
With all my childish dream so realised,
I should not be surprised._

James Whitcomb Riley

A Christmas Memory

Pa he bringed me here to stay
'Til my Ma she's well.--An' nen
He's go' hitch up, Chris'mus-day,
An' come take me back again
Wher' my Ma's at! Won't I be
Tickled when he comes fer me!

My Ma an' my A'nty they
'Uz each-uvver's sisters. Pa--
A'nty telled me, th' other day,--
He comed here an' married Ma....
A'nty said nen, 'Go run play,
I must work now!' ... An' I saw,
When she turn' her face away,
She 'uz cryin'.--An' nen I
'Tend-like I 'run play'--an' cry.

This-here house o' A'nty's wher'
They 'uz borned--my Ma an' her!--
An' her Ma 'uz my Ma's Ma,
An' her Pa 'uz my Ma's Pa--

Ain't that funny?--An' they're dead:
An' this-here's 'th' ole Homestead.'--
An' my A'nty said, an' cried,
It's mine, too, ef my Ma died--
Don't know what she mean--'cause my
Ma she's nuvver go' to die!

When Pa bringed me here 't 'uz night--
'Way dark night! An' A'nty spread
Me a piece--an' light the light
An' say I must go to bed.--
I cry not to---but Pa said,
'Be good boy now, like you telled
Mommy 'at you're go' to be!'
An', when he 'uz kissin' me
My good night, his cheeks' all wet
An' taste salty.--An' he held

Wite close to me an' rocked some
An' langhed-like--'til A'nty come
Git me while he's rockin' yet.

A'nty he'p me, 'til I be
Purt'-nigh strip-pud--nen hug me
In bofe arms an' lif' me 'way
Up in her high bed--an' pray
Wiv me,--'bout my Ma--an' Pa--
An' ole Santy Claus--an' Sleigh--
An' Reindeers an' little Drum--
Yes, an' Picture-books, 'Tom Thumb,'
An' 'Three Bears,' an' ole 'Fee-Faw'--

Yes, an' 'Tweedle-Dee' an' 'Dum,'
An' 'White Knight' an' 'Squidjicum,'
An' most things you ever saw!--
An' when A'nty kissed me, she
'Uz all cryin' over me!

Don't want Santy Claus--ner things
Any kind he ever brings!--
Don't want A'nty!--Don't want Pa!--
I ist only want my Ma!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Country Pathway

I come upon it suddenly, alone--
A little pathway winding in the weeds
That fringe the roadside; and with dreams my own,
I wander as it leads.

Full wistfully along the slender way,
Through summer tan of freckled shade and shine,
I take the path that leads me as it may--
Its every choice is mine.

A chipmunk, or a sudden-whirring quail,
Is startled by my step as on I fare--
A garter-snake across the dusty trail
Glances and--is not there.

Above the arching jimson-weeds flare twos
And twos of sallow-yellow butterflies,
Like blooms of lorn primroses blowing loose
When autumn winds arise.

The trail dips--dwindles--broadens then, and lifts
Itself astride a cross-road dubiously,
And, from the fennel marge beyond it, drifts
Still onward, beckoning me.

And though it needs must lure me mile on mile
Out of the public highway, still I go,
My thoughts, far in advance in Indian file,
Allure me even so.

Why, I am as a long-lost boy that went
At dusk to bring the cattle to the bars,
And was not found again, though Heaven lent
His mother all the stars

With which to seek him through that awful night
O years of nights as vain!--Stars never rise
But well might miss their glitter in the light
Of tears in mother-eyes!

So--on, with quickened breaths, I follow still--
My avant-courier must be obeyed!
Thus am I led, and thus the path, at will,
Invites me to invade

A meadow's precincts, where my daring guide
Clambers the steps of an old-fashioned stile,
And stumbles down again, the other side,
To gambol there a while.

In pranks of hide-and-seek, as on ahead
I see it running, while the clover-stalks
Shake rosy fists at me, as though they said--
'You dog our country walks

'And mutilate us with your walking-stick!--
We will not suffer tamely what you do,
And warn you at your peril,--for we'll sick
Our bumblebees on you!'

But I smile back, in airy nonchalance,--
The more determined on my wayward quest,
As some bright memory a moment dawns
A morning in my breast--

Sending a thrill that hurries me along
In faulty similes of childish skips,
Enthused with lithe contortions of a song
Performing on my lips.

In wild meanderings o'er pasture wealth--
Erratic wanderings through dead'ning lands,
Where sly old brambles, plucking me by stealth,
Put berries in my hands:

Or the path climbs a boulder--wades a slough--
Or, rollicking through buttercups and flags,
Goes gaily dancing o'er a deep bayou
On old tree-trunks and snags:

Or, at the creek, leads o'er a limpid pool

Upon a bridge the stream itself has made,
With some Spring-freshet for the mighty tool
That its foundation laid.

I pause a moment here to bend and muse,
With dreamy eyes, on my reflection, where
A boat-backed bug drifts on a helpless cruise,
Or wildly oars the air,

As, dimly seen, the pirate of the brook--
The pike, whose jaunty hulk denotes his speed--
Swings pivoting about, with wary look
Of low and cunning greed.

Till, filled with other thought, I turn again
To where the pathway enters in a realm
Of lordly woodland, under sovereign reign
Of towering oak and elm.

A puritanic quiet here reviles
The almost whispered warble from the hedge,
And takes a locust's rasping voice and files
The silence to an edge.

In such a solitude my somber way
Strays like a misanthrope within a gloom
Of his own shadows--till the perfect day
Bursts into sudden bloom,

And crowns a long, declining stretch of space,
Where King Corn's armies lie with flags unfurled,
And where the valley's dint in Nature's face
Dimples a smiling world.

And lo! through mists that may not be dispelled,
I see an old farm homestead, as in dreams,
Where, like a gem in costly setting held,
The old log cabin gleams.

.....

O darling Pathway! lead me bravely on

A down your valley-way, and run before
Among the roses crowding up the lawn
And thronging at the door,--

And carry up the echo there that shall
Arouse the drowsy dog, that he may bay
The household out to greet the prodigal
That wanders home to-day.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Cup Of Tea

I have sipped, with drooping lashes,
Dreamy draughts of Verzenay;
I have flourished brandy-smashes
In the wildest sort of way;
I have joked with 'Tom and Jerry'
Till wee hours ayont the twal'--
But I've found my tea the very
Safest tippie of them all!

'Tis a mystical potation
That exceeds in warmth of glow
And divine exhilaration
All the drugs of long ago--
All of old magicians' potions--
Of Medea's filtered spells--
Or of fabled isles and oceans
Where the Lotos-eater dwells!

Though I've reveled o'er late lunches
With _blase_ dramatic stars,
And absorbed their wit and punches
And the fumes of their cigars--
Drank in the latest story,
With a cock-tail either end,--
I have drained a deeper glory
In a cup of tea, my friend.

Green, Black, Moyune, Formosa,
Congou, Amboy, Pingsuey--
No odds the name it knows--ah!
Fill a cup of it for me!
And, as I clink my china
Against your goblet's brim,
My tea in steam shall twine a
Fragrant laurel round its rim.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Delicious Interruption

All were quite gracious in their plaudits of
Bud's Fairy; but another stir above
That murmur was occasioned by a sweet
Young lady-caller, from a neighboring street,
Who rose reluctantly to say good-night
To all the pleasant friends and the delight
Experienced,--as she had promised sure
To be back home by nine. Then paused, demure,
And wondered was it very dark.--Oh, no!--
She had come by herself and she could go
Without an escort. Ah, you sweet girls all!
What young gallant but comes at such a call,
Your most abject of slaves! Why, there were three
Young men, and several men of family,
Contesting for the honor--which at last
Was given to Cousin Rufus; and he cast
A kingly look behind him, as the pair
Vanished with laughter in the darkness there.

As order was restored, with everything
Suggestive, in its way, of 'romancing,'
Some one observed that now would be the chance
For Noey to relate a circumstance
That he--the very specious rumor went--
Had been eye-witness of, by accident.
Noey turned pippin-crimson; then turned pale
As death; then turned to flee, without avail.--
'There! head him off! Now! hold him in his chair!--
Tell us the Serenade-tale, now, Noey.--There!'

James Whitcomb Riley

A Discouraging Model

Just the airiest, fairiest slip of a thing,
With a Gainsborough hat, like a butterfly's wing,
Tilted up at one side with the jauntiest air,
And a knot of red roses sown in under there
Where the shadows are lost in her hair.

Then a cameo face, carven in on a ground
Of that shadowy hair where the roses are wound;
And the gleam of a smile, O as fair and as faint
And as sweet as the master of old used to paint
Round the lips of their favorite saint!

And that lace at her throat-- and fluttering hands
Snowing there, with a grace that no art understands,
The flakes of their touches-- first fluttering at
The bow-- then the roses-- the hair and then that
Little tilt of the Gainsborough hat.

Ah, what artist on earth with a model like this,
Holding not on his palette the tint of a kiss,
Nor a pigment to hint of the hue of her hair
Nor the gold of her smile-- O what artist could dare
To expect a result half so fair?

James Whitcomb Riley

A Ditty Of No Tone

Piped to the Spirit of John Keats.

I.

Would that my lips might pour out in thy praise
A fitting melody--an air sublime,--
A song sun-washed and draped in dreamy haze--
The floss and velvet of luxurious rhyme:
A lay wrought of warm languors, and o'er-brimmed
With balminess, and fragrance of wild flowers
Such as the droning bee ne'er wearies of--
Such thoughts as might be hymned
To thee from this midsummer land of ours
Through shower and sunshine blent for very love.

II.

Deep silences in woody aisles wherethrough
Cool paths go loitering, and where the trill
Of best-remembered birds hath something new
In cadence for the hearing--lingering still
Through all the open day that lies beyond;
Reaches of pasture-lands, vine-wreathen oaks,
Majestic still in pathos of decay,--
The road--the wayside pond
Wherein the dragonfly an instant soaks
His filmy wing-tips ere he flits away.

III.

And I would pluck from out the dank, rich mould,
Thick-shaded from the sun of noon, the long
Lithe stalks of barley, topped with ruddy gold,
And braid them in the meshes of my song;
And with them I would tangle wheat and rye,
And wisps of greenest grass the katydid
Ere crept beneath the blades of, sulkily,

As harvest-hands went by;
And weave of all, as wildest fancy bid,
A crown of mingled song and bloom for thee.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Diverted Tragedy

Gracie wuz allus a careless tot;
But Gracie dearly loved her doll,
An' played wiv it on the winder-sill
'Way up-stairs, when she ought to not,
An' her muvver telled her so an' all;
But she won't mind what she say--till,
First thing she know, her dolly fall
Clean spang out o' the winder plumb
Into the street! An' here Grace come
Down-stairs, two at a time, ist wild
An' a-screamin', 'Oh, my child! my child!'

Jule wuz a-bringin' their basket o' clo'es
Ist then into their hall down there,--
An' she ist stop' when Gracie bawl,
An' Jule she say 'She ist declare
She's ist in time!' An' what you s'pose?
She sets her basket down in the hall,
An' wite on top o' the snowy clo'es
Wuz Gracie's dolly a-layin' there
An' ist ain't bu'st ner hurt a-tall!

Nen Gracie smiled--ist sobbed an' smiled--
An' cried, 'My child! my precious child!'

James Whitcomb Riley

A Dost O' Blues

I' got no patience with blues at all!
And I ust to kindo talk
Against 'em, and claim, 'tel along last Fall,
They was none in the fambly stock;
But a nephew of mine, from Eelinoy,
That visited us last year,
He kindo convinct me differunt
While he was a-stayin' here.

Frum ever'-which way that blues is from,
They'd tackle him ever' ways;
They'd come to him in the night, and come
On Sundays, and rainy days;
They'd tackle him in corn-plantin' time,
And in harvest, and airly Fall,
But a dose 't of blues in the wintertime,
He 'lowed, was the worst of all!

Said all diseases that ever he had--
The mumps, er the rheumatiz--
Er ever'-other-day-aigger's bad
Purt' nigh as anything is!--
Er a cyarbuncle, say, on the back of his neck,
Er a felon on his thumb,--
But you keep the blues away from him,
And all o' the rest could come!

And he'd moan, 'They's nary a leaf below!
Ner a spear o' grass in sight!
And the whole wood-pile's clean under snow!
And the days is dark as night!
You can't go out--ner you can't stay in--
Lay down--stand up--ner set!
And a tetch o' regular tyfoid-blues
Would double him jest clean shet!

I writ his parents a postal-kyard,
He could stay 'tel Spring-time come;
And Aprile first, as I rickollect,

Was the day we shipped him home!
Most o' his relatives, sence then,
Has either give up, er quit,
Er jest died off; but I understand
He's the same old color yit!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Dream

I dreamed I was a spider;
A big, fat, hungry spider;
A lusty, rusty spider
With a dozen palsied limbs;
With a dozen limbs that dangled
Where three wretched flies were tangled
And their buzzing wings were strangled
In the middle of their hymns.

And I mocked them like a demon--
A demoniacal demon
Who delights to be a demon
For the sake of sin alone;
And with fondly false embraces
Did I weave my mystic laces
Round their horror-stricken faces
Till I muffled every groan.

And I smiled to see them weeping,
For to see an insect weeping,
Sadly, sorrowfully weeping,
Fattens every spider's mirth;
And to note a fly's heart quaking,
And with anguish ever aching
Till you see it slowly breaking
Is the sweetest thing on earth.

I experienced a pleasure,
Such a highly-flavored pleasure,
Such intoxicating pleasure,
That I drank of it like wine;
And my mortal soul engages
That no spider on the pages
Of the history of ages
Felt a rapture more divine.

I careened around and capered--
Madly, mystically capered--
For three days and nights I capered

Round my web in wild delight;
Till with fierce ambition burning,
And an inward thirst and yearning
I hastened my returning
With a fiendish appetite.

And I found my victims dying,
'Ha!' they whispered, 'we are dying!'
Faintly whispered, 'we are dying,
And our earthly course is run.'
And the scene was so impressing
That I breathed a special blessing,
As I killed them with caressing
And devoured them one by one.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Dream Of Autumn

Mellow hazes, lowly trailing
Over wood and meadow, veiling
Somber skies, with wildfowl sailing
Sailor-like to foreign lands;
And the north-wind overleaping
Summer's brink, and floodlike sweeping
Wrecks of roses where the weeping
Willows wring their helpless hands.

Flared, like Titan torches flinging
Flakes of flame and embers, springing
From the vale the trees stand swinging
In the moaning atmosphere;
While in dead'ning-lands the lowing
Of the cattle, sadder growing,
Fills the sense to overflowing
With the sorrow of the year.

Sorrowfully, yet the sweeter
Sings the brook in rippled meter
Under boughs that lithely teeter
Lorn birds, answering from the shores
Through the viny, shady-shiny
Interspaces, shot with tiny
Flying motes that fleck the winy
Wave-engraven sycamores.

Fields of ragged stubble, wrangled
With rank weeds, and shocks of tangled
Corn, with crests like rent plumes dangled
Over Harvest's battle-piain;
And the sudden whir and whistle
Of the quail that, like a missile,
Whizzes over thorn and thistle,
And, a missile, drops again.

Muffled voices, hid in thickets
Where the redbird stops to stick its
Ruddy beak betwixt the pickets

Of the truant's rustic trap;
And the sound of laughter ringing
Where, within the wild-vine swinging,
Climb Bacchante's schoolmates, flinging
Purple clusters in her lap.

Rich as wine, the sunset flashes
Round the tilted world, and dashes
Up the sloping west and splashes
Red foam over sky and sea--
Till my dream of Autumn, paling
In the splendor all-prevailing,
Like a fallow leaf goes sailing
Down the silence solemnly.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Dream Of Long Ago

Lying listless in the mosses
Underneath a tree that tosses
Flakes of sunshine, and embosses
Its green shadow with the snow--
Drowsy-eyed, I sink in slumber
Born of fancies without number--
Tangled fancies that encumber
Me with dreams of long ago.

Ripples of the river singing;
And the water-lilies swinging
Bells of Parian, and ringing
Pearly perfume faint and fine,
While old forms and fairy faces
Leap from out their hiding-places
In the past, with glad embraces
Fraught with kisses sweet as wine.

Willows dip their slender fingers
O'er the little fisher's stringers,
While he baits his hook and lingers
Till the shadows gather dim;
And afar off comes a calling
Like the sounds of water falling,
With the lazy echoes drawling
Messages of haste to him.

Little naked feet that tinkle
Through the stubble-fields, and twinkle
Down the winding road, and sprinkle
Little mists of dusty rain,
While in pasture-lands the cattle
Cease their grazing with a rattle
Of the bells whose clappers tattle
To their masters down the lane.

Trees that hold their tempting treasures
O'er the orchard's hedge embrasures,
Furnish their forbidden pleasures

As in Eden lands of old;
And the coming of the master
Indicates a like disaster
To the frightened heart that faster
Beats pulsations manifold.

Puckered lips whose pipings tingle
In staccato notes that mingle
Musically with the jingle-
Haunted winds that lightly fan
Mellow twilights, crimson-tinted
By the sun, and picture-printed
Like a book that sweetly hinted
Of the Nights Arabian.

Porticoes with columns plaited
And entwined with vines and freighted
With a bloom all radiated
With the light of moon and star;
Where some tender voice is winging
In sad flights of song, and singing
To the dancing fingers flinging
Dripping from the sweet guitar.

Would my dreams were never taken
From me: that with faith unshaken
I might sleep and never waken
On a weary world of woe!
Links of love would never sever
As I dreamed them, never, never!
I would glide along forever
Through the dreams of long ago.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Fantasy

A fantasy that came to me
As wild and wantonly designed
As ever any dream might be
Unraveled from a madman's mind,--
A tangle-work of tissue, wrought
By cunning of the spider-brain,
And woven, in an hour of pain,
To trap the giddy flies of thought.

I stood beneath a summer moon
All swollen to uncanny girth,
And hanging, like the sun at noon,
Above the center of the earth;
But with a sad and sallow light,
As it had sickened of the night
And fallen in a pallid swoon.
Around me I could hear the rush
Of sullen winds, and feel the whir
Of unseen wings apast me brush
Like phantoms round a sepulcher;
And, like a carpeting of plush,
A lawn unrolled beneath my feet,
Bespangled o'er with flowers as sweet
To look upon as those that nod
Within the garden-fields of God,
But odorless as those that blow
In ashes in the shades below.

And on my hearing fell a storm
Of gusty music, sadder yet
Than every whimper of regret
That sobbing utterance could form,
And patched with scraps of sound that seemed
Torn out of tunes that demons dreamed,
And pitched to such a piercing key,
It stabbed the ear with agony;
And when at last it lulled and died,
I stood aghast and terrified.
I shuddered and I shut my eyes,

And still could see, and feel aware
Some mystic presence waited there;
And staring, with a dazed surprise,
I saw a creature so divine
That never subtle thought of mine
May reproduce to inner sight
So fair a vision of delight.

A syllable of dew that drips
From out a lily's laughing lips
Could not be sweeter than the word
I listened to, yet never heard.--
For, oh, the woman hiding there
Within the shadows of her hair,
Spoke to me in an undertone
So delicate, my soul alone
But understood it as a moan
Of some weak melody of wind
A heavenward breeze had left behind.

A tracery of trees, grotesque
Against the sky, behind her seen,
Like shapeless shapes of arabesque
Wrought in an Oriental screen;
And tall, austere and statuesque
She loomed before it--e'en as though
The spirit-hand of Angelo
Had chiseled her to life complete,
With chips of moonshine round her feet.
And I grew jealous of the dusk,
To see it softly touch her face,
As lover-like, with fond embrace,
It folded round her like a husk:
But when the glitter of her hand,
Like wasted glory, beckoned me,
My eyes grew blurred and dull and dim--
My vision failed--I could not see--
I could not stir--I could but stand,
Till, quivering in every limb,
I flung me prone, as though to swim
The tide of grass whose waves of green
Went rolling ocean-wide between

My helpless shipwrecked heart and her
Who claimed me for a worshiper.

And writhing thus in my despair,
I heard a weird, unearthly sound,
That seemed to lift me from the ground
And hold me floating in the air.
I looked, and lo! I saw her bow
Above a harp within her hands;
A crown of blossoms bound her brow,
And on her harp were twisted strands
Of silken starlight, rippling o'er
With music never heard before
By mortal ears; and, at the strain,
I felt my Spirit snap its chain
And break away,--and I could see
It as it turned and fled from me
To greet its mistress, where she smiled
To see the phantom dancing wild
And wizard-like before the spell
Her mystic fingers knew so well.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Feel In The Chris'Mas-Air

They's a kind o' _feel_ in the air, to me.
When the Chris'mas-times sets in.
That's about as much of a mystery
As ever I've run ag'in!--
Fer instunce, now, whilse I gain in weight
And gineral health, I swear
They's a _goneness_ somers I can't quite state--
A kind o' _feel_ in the air.

They's a feel in the Chris'mas-air goes right
To the spot where a man _lives_ at!--
It gives a feller a' appetite--
They ain't no doubt about _that_!--
And yit they's _somepin_'--I don't know what--
That follers me, here and there,
And ha'nts and worries and spares me not--
A kind o' feel in the air!

They's a _feel_, as I say, in the air that's jest
As blame-don sad as sweet!--
In the same ra-sho as I feel the best
And am spryest on my feet,
They's allus a kind o' sort of a' _ache_
That I can't lo-cate no-where;--
But it comes with _Chris'mas_, and no mistake!--
A kind o' feel in the air.

Is it the racket the childern raise?--
W'y, _no_!--God bless 'em!--_no_!--
Is it the eyes and the cheeks ablaze--
Like my _own_ wuz, long ago?--
Is it the bleat o' the whistle and beat
O' the little toy-drum and blare
O' the horn?--_No! no!_--it is jest the sweet--
The sad-sweet feel in the air.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Fruit Piece

The afternoon of summer folds
Its warm arms round the marigolds,

And with its gleaming fingers, pets
The watered pinks and violets

That from the casement vases spill,
Over the cottage window-sill,

Their fragrance down the garden walks
Where droop the dry-mouthed hollyhocks.

How vividly the sunshine scrawls
The grape-vine shadows on the walls!

How like a truant swings the breeze
In high boughs of the apple-trees!

The slender 'free-stone' lifts aloof,
Full languidly above the roof,

A hoard of fruitage, stamped with gold
And precious mintings manifold.

High up, through curled green leaves, a pear
Hangs hot with ripeness here and there.

Beneath the sagging trellisings,
In lush, lack-lustre clusterings,

Great torpid grapes, all fattened through
With moon and sunshine, shade and dew,

Until their swollen girths express
But forms of limp deliciousness--

Drugged to an indolence divine
With heaven's own sacramental wine.

A Full Harvest

Seems like a feller'd ort 'o jes' to-day
Git down and roll and waller, don't you know,
In that-air stubble, and flop up and crow,
Seein' sich craps! I'll undertake to say
There're no wheat's ever turned out thataway
Afore this season!--Folks is keerless tho',
And too fergitful--'caze we'd ort 'o show
More thankfulness!--Jes' looky hyonder, hey?--
And watch that little reaper wadin' thue
That last old yaller hunk o' harvest-ground--
Jes' natchur'ly a-slicin' it in-two
Like honey-comb, and gaumin' it around
The field--like it had nothin' else to do
On'y jes' waste it all on me and you!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Glimpse Of Pan

I caught but a glimpse of him. Summer was here.
And I strayed from the town and its dust and heat.
And walked in a wood, while the noon was near,
Where the shadows were cool, and the atmosphere
Was misty with fragrances stirred by my feet
From surges of blossoms that billowed sheer
Of the grasses, green and sweet.

And I peered through a vista of leaning tree,
Tressed with long tangles of vines that swept
To the face of a river, that answered these
With vines in the wave like the vines in the breeze,
Till the yearning lips of the ripples crept
And kissed them, with quavering ecstasies,
And wistfully laughed and wept

And there, like a dream in swoon, I swear
I saw Pan lying-- his limbs in the dew
And the shade, and his face in the dazzle and glare
Of the glad sunshine; while everywhere,
Over across, and around him blew
Filmy dragon-flies hither and there,
And little white butterflies, two and two,
In eddies of odorous air.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Good Man

I

A good man never dies--
In worthy deed and prayer
And helpful hands, and honest eyes,
If smiles or tears be there:
Who lives for you and me--
Lives for the world he tries
To help--he lives eternally.
A good man never dies.

II

Who lives to bravely take
His share of toil and stress,
And, for his weaker fellows' sake,
Makes every burden less,--
He may, at last, seem worn--
Lie fallen--hands and eyes
Folded--yet, though we mourn and mourn,
A good man never dies.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Gustatory Achievement

Last Thanksgivin'-dinner we
Et at Granny's house, an' she

Had--ist like she alluz does--
Most an' best pies ever wuz.

Canned _black_ burry-pie an' _goose_
Burry, squshin'-full o' juice;
An' _roz_ burry--yes, an' plum--
Yes, an' _churry_-pie--_um-yum_!

Peach an' punkin, too, you bet.
Lawzy! I kin taste 'em yet!
Yes, an' _custard_-pie, an' _mince!_

An'--I--_ain't_--et--no--pie--since!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Home-Made Fairy Tale

Bud, come here to your uncle a spell,
And I'll tell you something you mustn't tell--
For it's a secret and shore-'nuf true,
And maybe I oughtn't to tell it to you--!
But out in the garden, under the shade
Of the apple-trees, where we romped and played
Till the moon was up, and you thought I'd gone
Fast asleep--, That was all put on!
For I was a-watchin' something queer
Goin' on there in the grass, my dear--!
'Way down deep in it, there I see
A little dude-Fairy who winked at me,
And snapped his fingers, and laughed as low
And fine as the whine of a mus-kee-to!
I kept still-- watchin' him closer-- and
I noticed a little guitar in his hand,
Which he leant 'ginst a little dead bee-- and laid
His cigarette down on a clean grass-blade,
And then climbed up on the shell of a snail--
Carefully dusting his swallowtail--
And pulling up, by a waxed web-thread,
This little guitar, you remember. I said!
And there he trinkled and trilled a tune--,
'My Love, so Fair, Tans in the Moon!'
Till presently, out of the clover-top
He seemed to be singing to, came k'pop!
The purtiest, daintiest Fairy face
In all this world, or any place!
Then the little ser'nader waved his hand,
As much as to say, 'We'll excuse you!' and
I heard, as I squinted my eyelids to,
A kiss like the drip of a drop of dew!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Leave-Taking

She will not smile;
She will not stir;
I marvel while
I look on her.
The lips are chilly
And will not speak;
The ghost of a lily
In either cheek.

Her hair--ah me!
Her hair--her hair!
How helplessly
My hands go there!
But my caresses
Meet not hers,
O golden tresses
That thread my tears!

I kiss the eyes
On either lid,
Where her love lies
Forever hid.
I cease my weeping
And smile and say:
I will be sleeping
Thus, some day!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Letter To A Friend

The past is like a story
I have listened to in dreams
That vanished in the glory
Of the Morning's early gleams;
And--at my shadow glancing--
I feel a loss of strength,
As the Day of Life advancing
Leaves it shorn of half its length.

But it's all in vain to worry
At the rapid race of Time--
And he flies in such a flurry
When I trip him with a rhyme,
I'll bother him no longer
Than to thank you for the thought
That 'my fame is growing stronger
As you really think it ought.'

And though I fall below it,
I might know as much of mirth
To live and die a poet
Of unacknowledged worth;
For Fame is but a vagrant--
Though a loyal one and brave,
And his laurels ne'er so fragrant
As when scattered o'er the grave.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Life-Lesson

There! little girl; don't cry!
They have broken your doll, I know;
And your tea-set blue,
And your play-house, too,
Are things of the long ago;
But childish troubles will soon pass by. --
There! little girl; don't cry!

There! little girl; don't cry!
They have broken your slate, I know;
And the glad, wild ways
Of your schoolgirl days
Are things of the long ago;
But life and love will soon come by. --
There! little girl; don't cry!

There! little girl; don't cry!
They have broken your heart I know;
And the rainbow gleams
Of your youthful dreams
Are things of the long ago;
But Heaven holds all for which you sigh. --
There! little girl; don't cry!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Liz Town Humorist

Settin' round the stove, last night,
Down at Wess's store, was me
And Mart Strimples, Tunk, and White,
And Doc Bills, and two er three
Fellers o' the Mudsock tribe
No use tryin' to describe!
And says Doc, he says, says he--,
'Talkin' 'bout good things to eat,
Ripe mushmillon's hard to beat!

I chawed on. And Mart he 'lowed
Wortermillon beat the mush--.
'Red,' he says, 'and juicy-- Hush--!
I'll jes' leave it to the crowd!'
Then a Mudsock chap, says he--,
'Punkin's good enough fer me--
Punkin pies, I mean,' he says--,
Them beats millions--! What say, Wess?

I chawed on. And Wess says--, 'Well,
You jes' fetch that wife of mine
All yer wortermillon-rine--,
And she'll bile it down a spell--
In with sorghum, I suppose,
And what else, Lord only knows--!
But I'm here to tell all hands
Them p'serves meets my demands!'

I chawed on. And White he says--,
'Well, I'll jes' stand, in with Wess--
I'm no hog!' And Tunk says--, 'I
Guess I'll pastur' out on pie
With the Mudsock boys!' says he;
'Now what's yourn?' he says to me:
I chawed on-- fer-- quite a spell
Then I speaks up, slow and dry--,
Jes' tobacker!' I-says-I--.
And you'd ort o' heerd 'em yell!

A Lounger

He leant against a lamp-post, lost
In some mysterious reverie:
His head was bowed; his arms were crossed;
He yawned, and glanced evasively:
Uncrossed his arms, and slowly put
Them back again, and scratched his side--
Shifted his weight from foot to foot,
And gazed out no-ward, idle-eyed.

Grotesque of form and face and dress,
And picturesque in every way--
A figure that from day to day
Drooped with a limper laziness;
A figure such as artists lean,
In pictures where distress is seen,
Against low hovels where we guess
No happiness has ever been.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Man Of Many Parts

It was a man of many parts,
Who in his coffer mind
Had stored the Classics and the Arts
And Sciences combined;
The purest gems of poesy
Came flashing from his pen--
The wholesome truths of History
He gave his fellow men.

He knew the stars from 'Dog' to Mars;
And he could tell you, too,
Their distances--as though the cars
Had often checked him through--
And time 'twould take to reach the sun,
Or by the 'Milky Way,'
Drop in upon the moon, or run
The homeward trip, or stay.

With Logic at his fingers' ends,
Theology in mind,
He often entertained his friends
Until they died resigned;
And with inquiring mind intent
Upon Alchemic arts
A dynamite experiment--

.

A man of many parts!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Masque Of The Seasons

Scene.--_A kitchen.--Group of Children, popping corn.--The Fairy Queen of the Seasons discovered in the smoke of the corn-popper.--Waving her wand, and, with eerie, sharp, imperious ejaculations, addressing the bespelled auditors, who neither see nor hear her nor suspect her presence._

QUEEN

Summer or Winter or Spring or Fall,--
Which do you like the best of all?

LITTLE JASPER

When I'm dressed warm as warm can be,
And with boots, to go
Through the deepest snow,
Winter-time is the time for me!

QUEEN

Summer or Winter or Spring or Fall,--
Which do you like the best of all?

LITTLE MILDRED

I like blossoms, and birds that sing;
The grass and the dew,
And the sunshine, too,--
So, best of all I like the Spring.

QUEEN

Summer or Winter or Spring or Fall,--
Which do you like the best of all?

LITTLE MANDEVILLE

O little friends, I most rejoice
When I hear the drums
As the Circus comes,--
So Summer-time's my special choice.

QUEEN

Summer or Winter or Spring or Fall,--
Which do you like the best of all?

LITTLE EDITH

Apples of ruby, and pears of gold,
And grapes of blue
That the bee stings through.--
Fall--it is all that my heart can hold!

QUEEN

Soh! my lovelings and pretty dears,
You've each a favorite, it appears,--
Summer and Winter and Spring and Fall.--
That's the reason I send them all!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Monument For The Soldiers

A monument for the Soldiers!
And what will ye build it of?
Can ye build it of marble, or brass, or bronze,
Outlasting the Soldiers' love?
Can ye glorify it with legends
As grand as their blood hath writ
From the inmost shrine of this land of thine
To the outermost verge of it?

And the answer came: We would build it
Out of our hopes made sure,
And out of our purest prayers and tears,
And out of our faith secure:
We would build it out of the great white truths
Their death hath sanctified,
And the sculptured forms of the men in arms,
And their faces ere they died.

And what heroic figures
Can the sculptor carve in stone?
Can the marble breast be made to bleed,
And the marble lips to moan?
Can the marble brow be fevered?
And the marble eyes be graved
To look their last, as the flag floats past,
On the country they have saved?

And the answer came: The figures
Shall all be fair and brave,
And, as befitting, as pure and white
As the stars above their grave!
The marble lips, and breast and brow
Whereon the laurel lies,
Bequeath us right to guard the flight
Of the old flag in the skies!

A monument for the Soldiers!
Built of a people's love,
And blazoned and decked and panoplied

With the hearts ye build it oft
And see that ye build it stately,
In pillar and niche and gate,
And high in pose as the souls of those
It would commemorate!

James Whitcomb Riley

A New Year's Plaint

In words like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,
Like coarsest clothes against the cold;
But that large grief which these enfold
Is given in outline and no more.
--TENNYSON.

The bells that lift their yawning throats
And lolling tongues with wrangling cries
Flung up in harsh, discordant notes,
As though in anger, at the skies,--
Are filled with echoings replete,
With purest tinkles of delight--
So I would have a something sweet
Ring in the song I sing to-night.

As when a blotch of ugly guise
On some poor artist's naked floor
Becomes a picture in his eyes,
And he forgets that he is poor,--
So I look out upon the night,
That ushers in the dawning year,
And in a vacant blur of light
I see these fantasies appear.

I see a home whose windows gleam
Like facets of a mighty gem
That some poor king's distorted dream
Has fastened in his diadem.
And I behold a throng that reels
In revelry of dance and mirth,
With hearts of love beneath their heels,
And in their bosoms hearts of earth.

O Luxury, as false and grand
As in the mystic tales of old,
When genii answered man's command,
And built of nothing halls of gold!
O Banquet, bright with pallid jets,
And tropic blooms, and vases caught

In palms of naked statuettes,
Ye can not color as ye ought!

For, crouching in the storm without,
I see the figure of a child,
In little ragged roundabout,
Who stares with eyes that never smiled--
And he, in fancy can but taste
The dainties of the kingly fare,
And pick the crumbs that go to waste
Where none have learned to kneel in prayer.

Go, Pride, and throw your goblet down--
The 'merry greeting' best appears
On loving lips that never drown
Its worth but in the wine of tears;
Go, close your coffers like your hearts,
And shut your hearts against the poor,
Go, strut through all your pretty parts
But take the 'Welcome' from your door.

James Whitcomb Riley

A New Year's Time At Willards's

1

The Hired Man Talks

There's old man Willards; an' his wife;
An' Marg'et-- S'repty's sister--; an'
There's me-- an' I'm the hired man;
An' Toms McClure, you better yer life!

Well now, old Willards hain't so bad,
Considerin' the chance he's had.
Of course, he's rich, an' sleeps an' eats
Whenever he's a mind to: Takes
An' leans back in the Amen-seats
An' thanks the Lord fer all he makes--.
That's purty much all folks has got
Ag'inst the old man, like as not!
But there's his woman-- jes the turn
Of them-air two wild girls o' hern--
Marg'et an' S'repty-- allus in
Fer any cuttin'-up concern--
Church festibals, and foolishin'
Round Christmas-trees, an' New Year's sprees--
Set up to watch the Old Year go
An' New Year come-- sich things as these;
An' turkey-dinners, don't you know!
S'repty's younger, an' more gay,
An' purtier, an' finer dressed
Than Marg'et is-- but, lawzy-day!
She hain't the independentest!
'Take care!' old Willards used to say,
'Take care--! Let Marg'et have her way,
An' S'repty, you go off an' play
On your melodeum--!' But, best
Of all, comes Toms! An' I'll be bound,
Ef he hain't jes the beatin'est
Young chap in all the country round!
Ef you knowed Toms you'd like him, shore!
They hain't no man on top o' ground
Walks into my affections more--!

An' all the Settlement'll say
That Tomps was liked jes thataway
By ever'body, till he tuk
A shine to S'repty Willards--. Then
You'd ort'o see the old man buck
An' h'ist hisse'f, an' paw the dirt,
An' hint that 'common workin'-men
That didn't want their feelin's hurt
'Ud better hunt fer 'comp'ny' where
The folks was pore an' didn't care--!
The pine-blank facts is--, the old man,
Last Christmas was a year ago,
Found out some presents Tomps had got
Fer S'repty, an' hit made him hot--
Set down an' tuk his pen in hand
An' writ to Tomps an' told him so
On legal cap, in white an' black,
An' give him jes to understand
'No Christmas-gifts o' 'lily-white'
An' bear's-ile could fix matters right,'
An' wropped 'em up an' sent 'em back!
Well, S'repty cried an' snuffled round
Consid'able. But Marg'et she
Toed out another sock, an' wound
Her knittin' up, an' drewed the tea,
An' then set on the supper-things,
An' went up in the loft an' dressed--
An' through it all you'd never guessed
What she was up to! An' she brings
Her best hat with her an' her shawl,
An' gloves, an' redicule, an' all,
An' injirubbers, an' comes down
An' tells 'em she's a-goin' to town
To he'p the Christmas goin's-on
Her Church got up. An' go she does--
The best hosswoman ever was!
'An' what'll We do while you're gone?'
The old man says, a-tryin' to be
Agreeable. 'Oh! You?' says she--,
'You kin jaw S'repty, like you did,
An' slander Tomps!' An' off she rid!

Now, this is all I'm goin' to tell
Of this-here story-- that is, I
Have done my very level best
As fur as this, an' here I 'dwell,'
As auctioneers says, winkin' sly:
Hit's old man Willards tells the rest.

2

The Old Man Talks

Adzackly jes one year ago,
This New Year's day, Toms comes to me--
In my own house, an' whilse the folks
Was gittin' dinner--, an' he pokes
His nose right in, an' says, says he:
'I got yer note-- an' read it slow!
You don't like me, ner I don't you,'
He says--, 'we're even there, you know!
But you've said, funder that no gal
Of yourn kin marry me, er shall,
An' I'd best shet off comin', too!'
An' then he says--, 'Well, them's Your views--;
But havin' talked with S'repty, we
Have both agreed to disagree
With your peculiar notions-- some;
An', that s the reason, I refuse
To quit a-comin' here, but come--
Not fer to threat, ner raise no skeer
An' spile yer turkey-dinner here--,
But jes fer S'repty's sake, to sheer
Yer New Year's. Shall I take a cheer?'

Well, blame-don! Ef I ever see
Sich impidence! I couldn't say
Not nary word! But Mother she
Sot out a cheer fer Toms, an' they
Shuk hands an' turnt their back on me.
Then I riz-- mad as mad could be--!
But Marg'et says--, 'Now, Pap! You set
Right where you're settin'--! Don't you fret!
An' Toms-- you warm yer feet!' says she,
'An throw yer mitts an' comfert on

The bed there! Where is S'repty gone!
The cabbage is a-scortchin'! Ma,
Stop cryin' there an' stir the slaw!
Well--! What was Mother cryin' fer--?
I half riz up-- but Marg'et's chin
Hit squared-- an' I set down ag'in--
I allus was afeard o' her,
I was, by jucks! So there I set,
Betwixt a sinkin'-chill an' sweat,
An' scuffled with my wrath, an' shet
My teeth to mighty tight, you bet!
An' yit, fer all that I could do,
I eched to jes git up an' whet
The carvin'-knife a rasp er two
On Toms's ribs-- an' so would you--!
Fer he had riz an' faced around,
An' stood there, smilin', as they brung
The turkey in, all stuffed an' browned--
Too sweet fer nose, er tooth, er tongue!
With sniffs o' sage, an' p'r'aps a dash
Of old burnt brandy, steamin'-hot
Mixed kindo' in with apple-mash
An' mince-meat, an' the Lord knows what!
Nobody was a-talkin' then,
To 'filiate any awk'ardness--
No noise o' any kind but jes
The rattle o' the dishes when
They'd fetch 'em in an' set 'em down,
An' fix an' change 'em round an' round,
Like women does-- till Mother says--,
'Vittels is ready; Abner, call
Down S'repty-- she's up-stairs, I guess--.'
And Marg'et she says, 'Ef you bawl
Like that, she'll not come down at all!
Besides, we needn't wait till she
Gits down! Here Temps, set down by me,
An' Pap: say grace...!' Well, there I was--!
What could I do! I drapped my head
Behind my fists an' groaned; an' said--:
'Indulgent Parent! In Thy cause
We bow the head an' bend the knee
An' break the bread, an' pour the wine,

Feelin'--' (The stair-door suddently
Went bang! An' S'repty flounced by me--)
'Feelin',' I says, 'this feast is Thine--
This New Year's feast--' an' rap-rap-rap!
Went Marg'ets case-knife on her plate--
An' next, I heerd a sasser drap--,
Then I looked up, an' strange to state,
There S'repty set in Tomps lap--
An' huggin' him, as shore as fate!
An' Mother kissin' him k-slap!
An' Marg'et-- she chips in to drap
The ruther peert remark to me--:
'That 'grace' o' yourn,' she says, 'won't 'gee'--
This hain't no 'New Year's feast,'" says she--,
'This is a' Infair-Dinner, Pap!'

An' so it was--! Be'n married fer
Purt' nigh a week--! 'Twas Marg'et planned
The whole thing fer 'em, through an' through.
I'm rickonciled; an' understand,
I take things jes as they occur--,
Ef Marg'et liked Tomps, Tomps 'ud do--!
But I-says-I, a-holt his hand--,
'I'm glad you didn't marry Her--
'Cause Marg'et's my guardeen-- yes-sir--!
An' S'repty's good enough fer you!'

James Whitcomb Riley

A Noon Interval

A deep, delicious hush in earth and sky --
A gracious lull--since, from its wakening,
The morn has been a feverish, restless thing
In which the pulse of Summer ran too high
And riotous, as though its heart went nigh
To bursting with delights past uttering:
Now--as an o'erjoyed child may cease to sing
All falteringly at play, with drowsy eye
Draining the pictures of a fairy-tale
To brim his dreams with--there comes o'er the day
A loathful silence wherein all sounds fail
Like loitering sounds of some roundelay . . .
No wakeful effort longer may avail --
The wand waves, and the dozer sinks away.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Noted Traveler

Even in such a scene of senseless play
The children were surprised one summer-day
By a strange man who called across the fence,
Inquiring for their father's residence;
And, being answered that this was the place,
Opened the gate, and with a radiant face,
Came in and sat down with them in the shade
And waited--till the absent father made
His noon appearance, with a warmth and zest
That told he had no ordinary guest
In this man whose low-spoken name he knew
At once, demurring as the stranger drew
A stuffy notebook out and turned and set
A big fat finger on a page and let
The writing thereon testify instead
Of further speech. And as the father read
All silently, the curious children took
Exact ing inventory both of book
And man:--He wore a long-napped white fur-hat
Pulled firmly on his head, and under that
Rather long silvery hair, or iron-gray--
For he was not an old man,--anyway,
Not beyond sixty. And he wore a pair
Of square-framed spectacles--or rather there
Were two more than a pair,--the extra two
Flared at the corners, at the eyes' side-view,
In as redundant vision as the eyes
Of grasshoppers or bees or dragonflies.
Later the children heard the father say
He was 'A Noted Traveler,' and would stay
Some days with them--In which time host and guest
Discussed, alone, in deepest interest,
Some vague, mysterious matter that defied
The wistful children, loitering outside
The spare-room door. There Bud acquired a quite
New list of big words--such as 'Disunite,'
And 'Shibboleth,' and 'Aristocracy,'
And 'Juggernaut,' and 'Squatter Sovereignty,'
And 'Anti-slavery,' 'Emancipate,'

'Irrepressible conflict,' and 'The Great
Battle of Armageddon'--obviously
A pamphlet brought from Washington, D. C.,
And spread among such friends as might occur
Of like views with 'The Noted Traveler.'

James Whitcomb Riley

A' Old Played-Out Song

It's the curiosest thing in creation,
Whenever I hear that old song,
'Do They Miss Me at Home?' I'm so bothered,
My life seems as short as it's long!--
Far ever'thing 'pears like adzackly
It 'peared, in the years past and gone,--
When I started out sparkin', at twenty,
And had my first neckercher on!

Though I'm wrinkelder, older and grayer
Right now than my parents was then,
You strike up that song, 'Do They Miss Me?'
And I'm jest a youngster again!--
I'm a-standin' back there in the furries
A-wishin' far evening to come,
And a-whisperin' over and over
Them words, 'Do They Miss Me at Home?'

You see, Marthy Ellen she sung it
The first time I heerd it; and so,
As she was my very first sweetheart,
It reminds of her, don't you know,--
How her face ust to look, in the twilight,
As I tuck her to spellin'; and she
Kep' a-hummin' that song 'tel I ast her,
Pine-blank, ef she ever missed me!

I can shet my eyes now, as you sing it,
And hear her low answerin' words,
And then the glad chirp of the crickets
As clear as the twitter of birds;
And the dust in the road is like velvet,
And the ragweed, and fennel, and grass
Is as sweet as the scent of the lilies
Of Eden of old, as we pass.

'Do They Miss Me at Home?' Sing it lower--
And softer--and sweet as the breeze
That powdered our path with the snowy

White bloom of the old locus'-trees!
Let the whippoorwills he'p you to sing it,
And the echoes 'way over the hill,
'Tel the moon boolges out, in a chorus
Of stars, and our voices is still.

But, oh! 'They's a chord in the music
That's missed when _her_ voice is away!
Though I listen from midnight 'tel morning,
And dawn, 'tel the dusk of the day;
And I grope through the dark, lookin' up'ards
And on through the heavenly dome,
With my longin' soul singin' and sobbin'
The words, 'Do They Miss Me at Home?'

James Whitcomb Riley

A Parent Reprimanded

Sometimes I think 'at Parents does
Things ist about as bad as _us_--

Wite 'fore our vurry eyes, at that!
Fer one time Pa he scold' my Ma
'Cause he can't find his hat;
An' she ist _cried_, she did! An' I
Says, 'Ef you scold my Ma
Ever again an' make her cry,
Wy, you sha'n't _be_ my Pa!
An' nen he laugh' an' find his hat
Ist wite where Ma she said it's at!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Passing Hail

Let us rest ourselves a bit!
Worry?-- wave your hand to it --
Kiss your finger-tips and smile
It farewell a little while.

Weary of the weary way
We have come from Yesterday,
Let us fret not, instead,
Of the wary way ahead.

Let us pause and catch our breath
On the hither side of death,
While we see the tender shoots
Of the grasses -- not the roots,--

While we yet look down -- not up --
To seek out the buttercup
And the daisy where they wave
O'er the green home of the grave.

Let us launch us smoothly on
The soft billows of the lawn,
And drift out across the main
Of our childish dreams again:

Voyage off, beneath the trees,
O'er the field's enchanted seas,
Where the lilies are our sails,
And our sea-gulls, nightingales:

Where no wilder storm shall beat
Than the wind that waves the wheat,
And no tempest-burst above
The old laughs we used to love:

Lose all troubles -- gain release,
Languor, and exceeding peace,
Cruising idly o'er the vast,
Calm mid-ocean of the Past.

Let us rest ourselves a bit!
Worry? -- Wave your hand to it --
Kiss your finger-tips and smile
It fare well a little while.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Poet's Wooing

*I woo'd a woman once,
But she was sharper than an eastern wind.*
Tennyson

"What may I do to make you glad,
To make you glad and free,
Till your light smiles glance
And your bright eyes dance
Like sunbeams on the sea?
Read some rhyme that is blithe and gay
Of a bright May morn and a marriage day?"
And she sighed in a listless way she had,--
"Do not read--it will make me sad!"

"What shall I do to make you glad--
To make you glad and gay,
Till your eyes gleam bright
As the stars at night
When as light as the light of day
Sing some song as I twang the strings
Of my sweet guitar through its wanderings?"
And she sighed in the weary way she had,--
"Do not sing--it will make me sad!"

"What can I do to make you glad--
As glad as glad can be,
Till your clear eyes seem
Like the rays that gleam
And glint through a dew-decked tree?--
Will it please you, dear, that I now begin
A grand old air on my violin?"
And she spoke again in the following way,--
"Yes, oh yes, it would please me, sir;
I would be so glad you'd play
Some grand old march--in character,--
And then as you march away
I will no longer thus be sad,
But oh, so glad--so glad--so glad!"

A Prospective Visit

While any day was notable and dear
That gave the children Noey, history here
Records his advent emphasized indeed
With sharp italics, as he came to feed
The stock one special morning, fair and bright,
When Johnty and Bud met him, with delight
Unusual even as their extra dress--
Garbed as for holiday, with much excess
Of proud self-consciousness and vain conceit
In their new finery.--Far up the street
They called to Noey, as he came, that they,
As promised, both were going back that day
To his house with him!

And by time that each
Had one of Noey's hands--ceasing their speech
And coyly anxious, in their new attire,
To wake the comment of their mute desire,--
Noey seemed rendered voiceless. Quite a while
They watched him furtively.--He seemed to smile
As though he would conceal it; and they saw
Him look away, and his lips purse and draw
In curious, twitching spasms, as though he might
Be whispering,--while in his eye the white
Predominated strangely.--Then the spell
Gave way, and his pent speech burst audible:
'They wuz two stylish little boys,
and they wuz mighty bold ones,
Had two new pairs o' britches made
out o' their daddy's old ones!'
And at the inspirational outbreak,
Both joker and his victims seemed to take
An equal share of laughter,--and all through
Their morning visit kept recurring to
The funny words and jingle of the rhyme
That just kept getting funnier all the time.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Rough Sketch

I caught, for a second, across the crowd--
Just for a second, and barely that--
A face, pox-pitted and evil-browed,
Hid in the shade of a slouch-rim'd hat--
With small gray eyes, of a look as keen
As the long, sharp nose that grew between.

And I said: 'Tis a sketch of Nature's own,
Drawn i' the dark o' the moon, I swear,
On a tatter of Fate that the winds have blown
Hither and thither and everywhere--
With its keen little sinister eyes of gray,
And nose like the beak of a bird of prey!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Scrawl

I want to sing something-- but this is all--
I try and I try, but the rhymes are dull
As though they were damp, and the echoes fall
Limp and unlovable.

Words will not say what I yearn to say--
They will not walk as I want them to,
But they stumble and fall in the path of the way
Of my telling my love for you.

Simply take what the scrawl is worth--
Knowing I love you as sun the sod
On the ripening side of the great round earth
That swings in the smile of God.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Song

There is ever a song somewhere, my dear;
There is ever a something sings always:
There's the song of the lark when the skies are clear,
And the song of the thrush when the skies are gray.
The sunshine showers across the grain,
And the bluebird trills in the orchard tree;
And in and out, when the eaves dip rain,
The swallows are twittering ceaselessly.

There is ever a song somewhere, my dear,
Be the skies above or dark or fair,
There is ever a song that our hearts may hear--
There is ever a song somewhere, my dear
There is ever a song somewhere!

There is ever a song somewhere, my dear,
In the midnight black, or the mid-day blue:
The robin pipes when the sun is here,
And the cricket chirrups the whole night through.
The buds may blow, and the fruit may grow,
And the autumn leaves drop crisp and sear;
But whether the sun, or the rain, or the snow,
There is ever a song somewhere, my dear.

There is ever a song somewhere, my dear,
Be the skies above or dark or fair,
There is ever a song that our hearts may hear--
There is ever a song somewhere, my dear--
There is ever a song somewhere!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Song Of Long Ago

A song of Long Ago:
Sing it lightly--sing it low--
Sing it softly--like the lispings of the lips we used to know
When our baby-laughter spilled
From the glad hearts ever filled
With music blithe as robin ever trilled!

Let the fragrant summer-breeze,
And the leaves of locust-trees,
And the apple-buds and blossoms, and the wings of honey-bees,
All palpitate with glee,
Till the happy harmony
Brings back each childish joy to you and me.

Let the eyes of fancy turn
Where the tumbled pippins burn
Like embers in the orchard's lap of tangled grass and fern,--
There let the old path wind
In and out and on behind
The cider-press that chuckles as we grind.

Blend in the song the moan
Of the dove that grieves alone,
And the wild whir of the locust, and the bumble's drowsy drone;
And the low of cows that call
Through the pasture-bars when all
The landscape fades away at evenfall.

Then, far away and clear,
Through the dusky atmosphere,
Let the wailing of the kildee be the only sound we hear:
O sad and sweet and low
As the memory may know
Is the glad-pathetic song of Long Ago!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Song Of Singing

Sing! gangling lad, along the brink
Of wild brook-ways of shoal and deep,
Where killdees dip, and cattle drink,
And glinting little minnows leap!
Sing! slimsy lass who trips above
And sets the foot-log quivering!
Sing! bittern, bumble-bee, and dove--
Sing! Sing! Sing!

Sing as you will, O singers all
Who sing because you want to sing!
Sing! peacock on the orchard wall,
Or tree-toad by the trickling spring!
Sing! every bird on every bough--
Sing! every living, loving thing--
Sing any song, and anyhow,
But Sing! Sing! Sing!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Song Of The Road

O I will walk with you, my lad, whichever way you fare,
You'll have me, too, the side o' you, with heart as light as air;
No care for where the road you take's a-leadin' anywhere,--
It can but be a joyful ja'nt whilst you journey there.
The road you take's the path o' love, an' that's the bridth o' two--
An' I will walk with you, my lad -- O I will walk with you.

Ho! I will walk with you, my lad,
Be weather black or blue
Or roadsides frost or dew, my lad --
O I will walk with you.

Aye, glad, my lad, I'll walk with you, whatever winds may blow,
Or summer blossoms stay our steps, or blinding drifts of snow;
The way thay you set face an' foot 's the way that I will go,
An' brave I'll be, abreast o' ye, the Saints and Angels know!
With loyal hand in loyal hand, an' one heart made o' two,
Through summer's gold, or winter's cold, It's I will walk with you.

Sure, I will walk with you, my lad,
A love ordains me to,--
To Heaven's door, an' through, my lad.
O I will walk with you.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Southern Singer

Written In Madison Caweln's 'Lyrics and Idyls.'

Herein are blown from out the South
Songs blithe as those of Pan's pursed mouth--
As sweet in voice as, in perfume,
The night-breath of magnolia-bloom.

Such sumptuous languor lures the sense--
Such luxury of indolence--
The eyes blur as a nymph's might blur,
With water-lilies watching her.

You waken, thrilling at the trill
Of some wild bird that seems to spill
The silence full of winey drips
Of song that Fancy sips and sips.

Betimes, in brambled lanes wherethrough
The chipmunk stripes himself from view,
You pause to lop a creamy spray
Of elder-blossoms by the way.

Or where the morning dew is yet
Gray on the topmost rail, you set
A sudden palm and, vaulting, meet
Your vaulting shadow in the wheat.

On lordly swards, of suave incline,
Entessellate with shade and shine,
You shall misdoubt your lowly birth,
Clad on as one of princely worth:

The falcon on your wrist shall ride--
Your milk-white Arab side by side
With one of raven-black.--You fain
Would kiss the hand that holds the rein.

Nay, nay, Romancer! Poet! Seer!
Sing us back home--from there to here;

Grant your high grace and wit, but we
Most honor your simplicity.--

Herein are blown from out the South
Songs blithe as those of Pan's pursed mouth--
As sweet in voice as, in perfume,
The night-breath of magnolia-bloom.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Spring Song And A Later

She sang a song of May for me,
Wherein once more I heard
The mirth of my glad infancy--
The orchard's earliest bird--
The joyous breeze among the trees
New-clad in leaf and bloom,
And there the happy honey-bees
In dewy gleam and gloom.

So purely, sweetly on the sense
Of heart and spirit fell
Her song of Spring, its influence--
Still irresistible,--
Commands me here--with eyes ablur--
To mate her bright refrain.
Though I but shed a rhyme for her
As dim as Autumn rain.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Sudden Shower

Barefooted boys scud up the street
Or skurry under sheltering sheds;
And schoolgirl faces, pale and sweet,
Gleam from the shawls about their heads.

Doors bang; and mother-voices call
From alien homes; and rusty gates
Are slammed; and high above it all,
The thunder grim reverberates.

And then, abrupt,--the rain! the rain!--
The earth lies gasping; and the eyes
Behind the streaming window-pane
Smile at the trouble of the skies.

The highway smokes; sharp echoes ring;
The cattle bawl and cowbells clank;
And into town comes galloping
The farmer's horse, with streaming flank.

The swallow dips beneath the eaves,
And flirts his plumes and folds his wings;
And under the catawba leaves
The caterpillar curls and clings.

The bumble-bee is pelted down
The wet stem of the hollyhock;
And sullenly, in spattered brown,
The cricket leaps the garden walk.

Within, the baby claps his hands
And crows with rapture strange and vague;
Without, beneath the rosebush stands
A dripping rooster on one leg.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Summer Afternoon

A languid atmosphere, a lazy breeze,
With labored respiration, moves the wheat
From distant reaches, till the golden seas
Break in crisp whispers at my feet.

My book, neglected of an idle mind,
Hides for a moment from the eyes of men;
Or lightly opened by a critic wind,
Affrightedly reviews itself again.

Off through the haze that dances in the shine
The warm sun showers in the open glade,
The forest lies, a silhouette design
Dimmed through and through with shade.

A dreamy day; and tranquilly I lie
At anchor from all storms of mental strain;
With absent vision, gazing at the sky,
"Like one that hears it rain."

The Katydid, so boisterous last night,
Clinging, inverted, in uneasy poise,
Beneath a wheat-blade, has forgotten quite
If "Katy DID or DIDN'T" make a noise.

The twitter, sometimes, of a wayward bird
That checks the song abruptly at the sound,
And mildly, chiding echoes that have stirred,
Sink into silence, all the more profound.

And drowsily I hear the plaintive strain
Of some poor dove . . . Why, I can scarcely keep
My heavy eyelids--there it is again--
"Coo-coo!"--I mustn't--"Coo-coo!"--fall asleep!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Summer Sunrise

AFTER LEE O. HARRIS

The master-hand whose pencils trace
This wondrous landscape of the morn,
Is but the sun, whose glowing face
Reflects the rapture and the grace
Of inspiration Heaven-born.

And yet with vision-dazzled eyes,
I see the lotus-lands of old,
Where odorous breezes fall and rise,
And mountains, peering in the skies,
Stand ankle-deep in lakes of gold.

And, spangled with the shine and shade,
I see the rivers raveled out
In strands of silver, slowly fade
In threads of light along the glade
Where truant roses hide and pout.

The tamarind on gleaming sands
Droops drowsily beneath the heat;
And bowed as though weary, stands
The stately palm, with lazy hands
That fold their shadows round his feet.

And mistily, as through a veil,
I catch the glances of a sea
Of sapphire, dimpled with a gale
Toward Colch's blowing, where the sail
Of Jason's Argo beckons me.

And gazing on and farther yet,
I see the isles enchanted, bright
With fretted spire and parapet,
And gilded mosque and minaret,
That glitter in the crimson light.

But as I gaze, the city's walls

Are keenly smitten with a gleam
Of pallid splendor, that appalls
The fancy as the ruin falls
In ashen embers of a dream.

Yet over all the waking earth
The tears of night are brushed away,
And eyes are lit with love and mirth,
And benisons of richest worth
Go up to bless the new-born day.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Tale Of The Airly Days

Oh! tell me a tale of the airly days--
Of the times as they ust to be;
'Piller of Fi-er' and 'Shakespeare's Plays'
Is a' most too deep fer me!
I want plane facts, and I want plane words,
Of the good old-fashioned ways,
When speech run free as the songs of birds
'Way back in the airly days.

Tell me a tale of the timber-lands--
Of the old-time pioneers;
Somepin' a pore man understands
With his feelins's well as ears.
Tell of the old log house,--about
The loft, and the puncheon flore--
The old fi-er-place, with the crane swung out,
And the latch-string through the door.

Tell of the things jest as they was--
They don't need no excuse!--
Don't tech 'em up like the poets does,
Tel theyr all too fine fer use!--
Say they was 'leven in the fambily--
Two beds, and the chist, below,
And the trundle-beds that each helt three,
And the clock and the old bureau.

Then blow the horn at the old back-door
Tel the echoes all halloo,
And the childern gethers home onc't more,
Jest as they ust to do:
Blow fer Pap tel he hears and comes,
With Tomps and Elias, too,
A-marchin' home, with the fife and drums
And the old Red White and Blue!

Blow and blow tel the sound draps low
As the moan of the whipperwill,
And wake up Mother, and Ruth and Jo,

All sleepin' at Bethel Hill:
Blow and call tel the faces all
Shine out in the back-log's blaze,
And the shadders dance on the old hewed wall
As they did in the airly days.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Test Of Love

'Now who shall say he loves me not.'

He wooed her first in an atmosphere
Of tender and low-breathed sighs;
But the pang of her laugh went cutting clear
To the soul of the enterprise;
'You beg so pert for the kiss you seek
It reminds me, John,' she said,
'Of a poodle pet that jumps to 'speak'
For a crumb or a crust of bread.'

And flashing up, with the blush that flushed
His face like a tableau-light,
Came a bitter threat that his white lips hushed
To a chill, hoarse-voiced 'Good night!
And again her laugh, like a knell that tolled,
And a wide-eyed mock surprise,--
'Why, John,' she said, 'you have taken cold
In the chill air of your sighs!'

And then he turned, and with teeth tight clenched,
He told her he hated her,--
That his love for her from his heart he wrenched
Like a corpse from a sepulcher.
And then she called him 'a ghoul all red
With the quintessence of crimes'--
'But I know you love me now,' she said,
And kissed him a hundred times.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Variation

I am tired of this!
Nothing else but loving!
Nothing else but kiss and kiss,
Coo, and turtle-doving!
Can't you change the order some?
Hate me just a little--come!

Lay aside your 'dears,'
'Darlings,' 'kings,' and 'princes!'--
Call me knave, and dry your tears--
Nothing in me winces,--
Call me something low and base--
Something that will suit the case!

Wish I had your eyes
And their drooping lashes!
I would dry their teary lies
Up with lightning-flashes--
Make your sobbing lips unsheathe
All the glitter of your teeth!

Can't you lift one word--
With some pang of laughter--
Louder than the drowsy bird
Crooning 'neath the rafter?
Just one bitter word, to shriek
Madly at me as I speak!

How I hate the fair
Beauty of your forehead!
How I hate your fragrant hair!
How I hate the torrid
Touches of your splendid lips,
And the kiss that drips and drips!

Ah, you pale at last!
And your face is lifted
Like a white sail to the blast,
And your hands are shifted

Into fists: and, towering thus,
You are simply glorious!

Now before me looms
Something more than human;
Something more than beauty blooms
In the wrath of Woman--
Something to bow down before
Reverently and adore.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Very Youthful Affair

I'm bin a-visitun 'bout a week
To my little Cousin's at Nameless Creek,
An' I'm got the hives an' a new straw hat,
An' I'm come back home where my beau lives at.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Voice From The Farm

It is my dream to have you here with me,
Out of the heated city's dust and din--
Here where the colts have room to gambol in,
And kine to graze, in clover to the knee.
I want to see your wan face happily
Lit with the wholesome smiles that have not been
In use since the old games you used to win
When we pitched horseshoes: And I want to be
At utter loaf with you in this dim land
Of grove and meadow, while the crickets make
Our own talk tedious, and the bat wields
His bulky flight, as we cease converse and
In a dusk like velvet smoothly take
Our way toward home across the dewy fields.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Water-Color

Low hidden in among the forest trees
An artist's tilted easel, ankle-deep
In tousled ferns and mosses, and in these
A fluffy water-spaniel, half asleep
Beside a sketch-book and a fallen hat--
A little wicker flask tossed into that.

A sense of utter carelessness and grace
Of pure abandon in the slumb'rous scene,--
As if the June, all hoydenish of face,
Had romped herself to sleep there on the green,
And brink and sagging bridge and sliding stream
Were just romantic parcels of her dream.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Worn-Out Pencil

Welladay!
Here I lay
You at rest--all worn away,
O my pencil, to the tip
Of our old companionship!

Memory
Sighs to see
What you are, and used to be,
Looking backward to the time
When you wrote your earliest rhyme!--

When I sat
Filing at
Your first point, and dreaming that
Your initial song should be
Worthy of posterity.

With regret
I forget
If the song be living yet,
Yet remember, vaguely now,
It was honest, anyhow.

You have brought
Me a thought--
Truer yet was never taught,--
That the silent song is best,
And the unsung worthiest.

So if I,
When I die,
May as uncomplainingly
Drop aside as now you do,
Write of me, as I of you:--

Here lies one
Who begun
Life a-singing, heard of none;

And he died, satisfied,
With his dead songs by his side.

James Whitcomb Riley

A Wraith Of Summertime

In its color, shade and shine,
'T was a summer warm as wine,
With an effervescent flavoring of flowered bough and vine,
And a fragrance and a taste
Of ripe roses gone to waste,
And a dreamy sense of sun- and moon- and star-light interlaced.

'Twas a summer such as broods
O'er enchanted solitudes,
Where the hand of Fancy leads us through voluptuary moods,
And with lavish love out-pours
All the wealth of out-of-doors,
And woos our feet o'er velvet paths and honeysuckle floors.

'Twas a summertime long dead,--
And its roses, white and red,
And its reeds and water-lilies down along the river-bed,--
O they all are ghostly things--
For the ripple never sings,
And the rocking lily never even rustles as it rings!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Wrangdillion

Dexery-tethery! down in the dike,
Under the ooze and the slime,
Nestles the wraith of a reticent Gryke,
Blubbering bubbles of rhyme:
Though the reeds touch him and tickle his teeth--
Though the Graigroll and the Cheest
Pluck at the leaves of his laureate-wreath,
Nothing affects him the least.

He sinks to the dregs in the dead o' the night,
And he shuffles the shadows about
As he gathers the stars in a nest of delight
And sets there and hatches them out:
The Zhederrill peers from his watery mine
In scorn with the Will-o'-the-wisp,
As he twinkles his eyes in a whisper of shine
That ends in a luminous lisp.

The Morning is born like a baby of gold,
And it lies in a spasm of pink,
And rallies the Cheest for the horrible cold
He has dragged to the willowy brink,
The Gryke blots his tears with a scrap of his grief,
And growls at the wary Graigroll
As he twunkers a tune on a Tiljicum leaf
And hums like a telegraph pole.

James Whitcomb Riley

Almon Keefer

Ah, Almon Keefer! what a boy you were,
With your back-tilted hat and careless hair,
And open, honest, fresh, fair face and eyes
With their all-varying looks of pleased surprise
And joyous interest in flower and tree,
And poising humming-bird, and maundering bee.

The fields and woods he knew; the tireless tramp
With gun and dog; and the night-fisher's camp--
No other boy, save Bee Lineback, had won
Such brilliant mastery of rod and gun.
Even in his earliest childhood had he shown
These traits that marked him as his father's own.
Dogs all paid Almon honor and bow-wowed
Allegiance, let him come in any crowd
Of rabbit-hunting town-boys, even though
His own dog 'Sleuth' rebuked their acting so
With jealous snarls and growlings.

But the best
Of Almon's virtues--leading all the rest--
Was his great love of books, and skill as well
In reading them aloud, and by the spell
Thereof enthralling his mute listeners, as
They grouped about him in the orchard grass,
Hinging their bare shins in the mottled shine
And shade, as they lay prone, or stretched supine
Beneath their favorite tree, with dreamy eyes
And Argo-fandes voyaging the skies.
'Tales of the Ocean' was the name of one
Old dog's-eared book that was surpassed by none
Of all the glorious list.--Its back was gone,
But its vitality went bravely on
In such delicious tales of land and sea
As may not ever perish utterly.
Of still more dubious caste, 'Jack Sheppard' drew
Full admiration; and 'Dick Turpin,' too.
And, painful as the fact is to convey,
In certain lurid tales of their own day,

These boys found thieving heroes and outlaws
They hailed with equal fervor of applause:
'The League of the Miami'--why, the name
Alone was fascinating--is the same,
In memory, this venerable hour
Of moral wisdom shorn of all its power,
As it unblushingly reverts to when
The old barn was 'the Cave,' and hears again
The signal blown, outside the buggy-shed--
The drowsy guard within uplifts his head,
And "_Who goes there?_" is called, in bated breath--
The challenge answered in a hush of death,--
'Sh!--' _Barney Gray!_" And then "_What do you seek?_"
"_Stables of The League!_" the voice comes spent and weak,
For, ha! the _Law_ is on the 'Chieftain's' trail--
Tracked to his very lair!--Well, what avail?
The 'secret entrance' opens--closes.--So
The 'Robber-Captain' thus outwits his foe;
And, safe once more within his 'cavern-halls,'
He shakes his clenched fist at the warped plank-walls
And mutters his defiance through the cracks
At the balked Enemy's retreating backs
As the loud horde flees pell-mell down the lane,
And--_Almon Keefer_ is himself again!

Excepting few, they were not books indeed
Of deep import that Almon chose to read;--
Less fact than fiction.--Much he favored those--
If not in poetry, in hectic prose--
That made our native Indian a wild,
Feathered and fine-preened hero that a child
Could recommend as just about the thing
To make a god of, or at least a king.
Aside from Almon's own books--two or three--
His store of lore The Township Library
Supplied him weekly: All the books with 'or's--
Sub-titled--lured him--after 'Indian Wars,'
And 'Life of Daniel Boone,'--not to include
Some few books spiced with humor,--'Robin Hood'
And rare 'Don Quixote.'--And one time he took
'Dadd's Cattle Doctor.'... How he hugged the book
And hurried homeward, with internal glee

And humorous spasms of expectancy!--
All this confession--as he promptly made
It, the day later, writhing in the shade
Of the old apple-tree with Johnty and
Bud, Noey Bixler, and The Hired Hand--
Was quite as funny as the book was not....
O Wonderland of wayward Childhood! what
An easy, breezy realm of summer calm
And dreamy gleam and gloom and bloom and balm
Thou art!--The Lotus-Land the poet sung,
It is the Child-World while the heart beats young....

While the heart beats young!--O the splendor of the Spring,
With all her dewy jewels on, is not so fair a thing!
The fairest, rarest morning of the blossom-time of May
Is not so sweet a season as the season of to-day
While Youth's diviner climate folds and holds us, close caressed,
As we feel our mothers with us by the touch of face and breast;--
Our bare feet in the meadows, and our fancies up among
The airy clouds of morning--while the heart beats young.

While the heart beats young and our pulses leap and dance.
With every day a holiday and life a glad romance,--
We hear the birds with wonder, and with wonder watch their flight--
Standing still the more enchanted, both of hearing and of sight,
When they have vanished wholly,--for, in fancy, wing-to-wing
We fly to Heaven with them; and, returning, still we sing
The praises of this lower Heaven with tireless voice and tongue,
Even as the Master sanctions--while the heart beats young.

While the heart beats young!--While the heart beats young!
O green and gold old Earth of ours, with azure overhung
And looped with rainbows!--grant us yet this grassy lap of thine--
We would be still thy children, through the shower and the shine!
So pray we, lisping, whispering, in childish love and trust
With our beseeching hands and faces lifted from the dust
By fervor of the poem, all unwritten and unsung,
Thou givest us in answer, while the heart beats young.

James Whitcomb Riley

An Autumnal Extravaganza

With a sweeter voice than birds
Dare to twitter in their sleep,
Pipe for me a tune of words,
Till my dancing fancies leap
Into freedom vaster far
Than the realms of Reason are!
Sing for me with wilder fire
Than the lover ever sung,
From the time he twanged the lyre
When the world was baby-young.

O my maiden Autumn, you--
You have filled me through and through
With a passion so intense,
All of earthly eloquence
Fails, and falls, and swoons away
In your presence. Like as one
Who essays to look the sun
Fairly in the face, I say,
Though my eyes you dazzle blind
Greater dazzled is my mind.
So, my Autumn, let me kneel
At your feet and worship you!
Be my sweetheart; let me feel
Your caress; and tell me too
Why your smiles bewilder me--
Glancing into laughter, then
Trancing into calm again,
Till your meaning drowning lies
In the dim depths of your eyes.
Let me see the things you see
Down the depths of mystery!
Blow aside the hazy veil
From the daylight of your face
With the fragrance-laden gale
Of your spicy breath and chase
Every dimple to its place.
Lift your gipsy finger-tips
To the roses of your lips,

And fling down to me a bud--
But an unblown kiss--but one--
It shall blossom in my blood,
Even after life is done--
When I dare to touch the brow
Your rare hair is veiling now--
When the rich, red-golden strands
Of the treasure in my hands
Shall be all of worldly worth
Heaven lifted from the earth,
Like a banner to have set
On its highest minaret.

James Whitcomb Riley

An Empty Nest

I find an old deserted nest,
Half-hidden in the underbrush:
A withered leaf, in phantom jest,
Has nestled in it like a thrush
With weary, palpitating breast.

I muse as one in sad surprise
Who seeks his childhood's home once more,
And finds it in a strange disguise
Of vacant rooms and naked floor,
With sudden tear-drops in his eyes.

An empty nest! It used to bear
A happy burden, when the breeze
Of summer rocked it, and a pair
Of merry tattlers told the trees
What treasures they had hidden there.

But Fancy, flitting through the gleams
Of youth's sunshiny atmosphere,
Has fallen in the past, and seems,
Like this poor leaflet nestled here,--
A phantom guest of empty dreams.

James Whitcomb Riley

An Impetuous Resolve

When little Dickie Swope's a man,
He's go' to be a Sailor;
An' little Hamey Tincher, he's
A-go' to be a Tailor:
Bud Mitchell, he's a-go' to be
A stylish Carriage-Maker;
An' when I grow a grea'-big man,
I'm go' to be a Baker!

An' Dick'll buy his sailor-suit
O' Hame; and Hame'll take it
An' buy as fine a double-rigg
As ever Bud can make it:
An' nen all three'll drive roun' fer me
An' we'll drive off togevver,
A-slingin' pie-crust 'long the road
Ferever an' ferever!

James Whitcomb Riley

An Old Friend

Hey, Old Midsummer! are you here again,
With all your harvest-store of olden joys,--
Vast overhanging meadow-lands of rain,
And drowsy dawns, and noons when golden grain
Nods in the sun, and lazy truant boys
Drift ever listlessly adown the day,
Too full of joy to rest, and dreams to play.

The same old Summer, with the same old smile
Beaming upon us in the same old way
We knew in childhood! Though a weary while
Since that far time, yet memories reconcile
The heart with odorous breaths of clover hay;
And again I hear the doves, and the sun streams through
The old barn door just as it used to do.

And so it seems like welcoming a friend--
An old, OLD friend, upon his coming home
From some far country--coming home to spend
Long, loitering days with me: And I extend
My hand in rapturous glee:--And so you've come!--
Ho, I'm so glad! Come in and take a chair:
Well, this is just like OLD times, I declare!

James Whitcomb Riley

An Old Sweetheart Of Mine

As one who cons at evening o'er an album all alone,
And muses on the faces of the friends that he has known,
So I turn the leaves of Fancy, till in shadowy design
I find the smiling features of an old sweetheart of mine.

The lamplight seems to glimmer with a flicker of surprise,
As I turn it low, to rest me of the dazzle in my eyes,
And light my pipe in silence, save a sigh that seems to yoke
Its fate with my tobacco, and to vanish with the smoke.

'Tis a fragrant retrospection, for the loving thoughts that start
Into being are like perfumes from the blossom of the heart;
And to dream the old dreams over is a luxury divine—
When my truant fancies wander with that old sweetheart of mine.

Though I hear, beneath my study, like a fluttering of wings,
The voices of my children and the mother as she sings,
I feel no twinge of conscience to deny me any theme
When Care has cast her anchor in the harbor of a dream.

In fact, to speak in earnest, I believe it adds a charm
To spice the good a trifle with a little dust of harm;
For I find an extra flavor in Memory's mellow wine
That makes me drink the deeper to that old sweetheart of mine.

A face of lily-beauty, with a form of airy grace,
Floats out of my tobacco as the genii from the vase;
And I thrill beneath the glances of a pair of azure eyes,
As glowing as the summer and as tender as the skies.

I can see the pink sunbonnet and the little checkered dress
She wore when first I kissed her, and she answered the caress
With the written declaration that, 'as surely as the vine
Grew round the stump,' she loved me,—that old sweetheart of mine!

And again I feel the pressure of her slender little hand,
As we used to talk together of the future we had planned:
When I should be a poet, and with nothing else to do
But write the tender verses that she set the music to;

When we should live together in a cozy little cot,
Hid in a nest of roses, with a fairy garden-spot,
Where the vines were ever fruited, and the weather ever fine,
And the birds were ever singing for that old sweetheart of mine;

And I should be her lover forever and a day,
And she my faithful sweetheart till the golden hair was gray;
And we should be so happy that when either's lips were dumb
They would not smile in heaven till the other's kiss had come.

But ah! my dream is broken by a step upon the stair,
And the door is softly opened, and my wife is standing there!
Yet with eagerness and rapture all my visions I resign
To greet the living presence of that old sweetheart of mine.

James Whitcomb Riley

An Old Year's Address

'I have twanked the strings of the twinkering rain;
I have burnished the meteor's mail;
I have bridled the wind
When he whinnied and whined
With a bunch of stars tied to his tail;
But my sky-rocket hopes, hanging over the past,
Must fuzzle and fazzle and fizzle at last!'

I had waded far out in a drizzling dream,
And my fancies had spattered my eyes
With a vision of dread,
With a number ten head,
And a form of diminutive size--
That wavered and wagged in a singular way
As he wound himself up and proceeded to say,--

'I have trimmed all my corns with the blade of the moon;
I have picked every tooth with a star:
And I thrill to recall
That I went through it all
Like a tune through a tickled guitar.
I have ripped up the rainbow and raveled the ends
When the sun and myself were particular friends.'

And pausing again, and producing a sponge
And wiping the tears from his eyes,
He sank in a chair
With a technical air
That he struggled in vain to disguise,--
For a sigh that he breathed, as I over him leant,
Was haunted and hot with a peppermint scent.

'Alas!' he continued in quavering tones
As a pang rippled over his face,
'The life was too fast
For the pleasure to last
In my very unfortunate case;
And I'm going'--he said as he turned to adjust
A fuse in his bosom,--'I'm going to--BUST!'

I shrieked and awoke with the sullen che-boom
Of a five-pounder filling my ears;
And a roseate bloom
Of a light in the room
I saw through the mist of my tears,--
But my guest of the night never saw the display,
He had fuzzled and fazzled and fizzled away!

James Whitcomb Riley

An Out-Worn Sappho

How tired I am! I sink down all alone
Here by the wayside of the Present. Lo,
Even as a child I hide my face and moan--
A little girl that may no farther go;
The path above me only seems to grow
More rugged, climbing still, and ever briered
With keener thorns of pain than these below;
And O the bleeding feet that falter so
And are so very tired!

Why, I have journeyed from the far-off Lands
Of Babyhood--where baby-lilies blew
Their trumpets in mine ears, and filled my hands
With treasures of perfume and honey-dew,
And where the orchard shadows ever drew
Their cool arms round me when my cheeks were fired
With too much joy, and lulled mine eyelids to,
And only let the starshine trickle through
In sprays, when I was tired!

Yet I remember, when the butterfly
Went flickering about me like a flame
That quenched itself in roses suddenly,
How oft I wished that I might blaze the same,
And in some rose-wreath nestle with my name,
While all the world looked on it and admired.--
Poor moth!--Along my wavering flight toward fame
The winds drive backward, and my wings are lame
And broken, bruised and tired!

I hardly know the path from those old times;
I know at first it was a smoother one
Than this that hurries past me now, and climbs
So high, its far cliffs even hide the sun
And shroud in gloom my journey scarce begun.
I could not do quite all the world required--
I could not do quite all I should have done,
And in my eagerness I have outrun
My strength--and I am tired....

Just tired! But when of old I had the stay
Of mother-hands, O very sweet indeed
It was to dream that all the weary way
I should but follow where I now must lead--
For long ago they left me in my need,
And, groping on alone, I tripped and mired
Among rank grasses where the serpents breed
In knotted coils about the feet of speed.--
There first it was I tired.

And yet I staggered on, and bore my load
Right gallantly: The sun, in summer-time,
In lazy belts came slipping down the road
To woo me on, with many a glimmering rhyme
Rained from the golden rim of some fair clime,
That, hovering beyond the clouds, inspired
My failing heart with fancies so sublime
I half forgot my path of dust and grime,
Though I was growing tired.

And there were many voices cheering me:
I listened to sweet praises where the wind
Went laughing o'er my shoulders gleefully
And scattering my love-songs far behind;--
Until, at last, I thought the world so kind--
So rich in all my yearning soul desired--
So generous--so loyally inclined,
I grew to love and trust it.... I was blind--
Yea, blind as I was tired!

And yet one hand held me in creature-touch:
And O, how fair it was, how true and strong,
How it did hold my heart up like a crutch,
Till, in my dreams, I joyed to walk along
The toilsome way, contented with a song--
'Twas all of earthly things I had acquired,
And 'twas enough, I feigned, or right or wrong,
Since, binding me to man--a mortal thong--
It stayed me, growing tired....

Yea, I had e'en resigned me to the strait

Of earthly rulership--had bowed my head
Acceptant of the master-mind--the great
One lover--lord of all,--the perfected
Kiss-comrade of my soul;--had stammering said
My prayers to him;--all--all that he desired
I rendered sacredly as we were wed.--
Nay--nay!--'twas but a myth I worshipped.--
And--God of love!--how tired!

For, O my friends, to lose the latest grasp--
To feel the last hope slipping from its hold--
To feel the one fond hand within your clasp
Fall slack, and loosen with a touch so cold
Its pressure may not warm you as of old
Before the light of love had thus expired--
To know your tears are worthless, though they rolled
Their torrents out in molten drops of gold.--
God's pity! I am tired!

And I must rest.--Yet do not say 'She _died_,'
In speaking of me, sleeping here alone.
I kiss the grassy grave I sink beside,
And close mine eyes in slumber all mine own:
Hereafter I shall neither sob nor moan
Nor murmur one complaint;--all I desired,
And failed in life to find, will now be known--
So let me dream. Good night! And on the stone
Say simply: She was tired.

James Whitcomb Riley

Anselmo

Years did I vainly seek the good Lord's grace--,
Prayed, fasted, and did penance dire and dread;
Did kneel, with bleeding knees and rainy face,
And mouth the dust, with ashes on my head;
Yea, still with knotted scourge the flesh I flayed,
Rent fresh the wounds, and moaned and shrieked insanely;
And froth oozed with the pleadings that I made,
And yet I prayed on vainly, vainly, vainly!

A time, from out of swoon I lifted eye,
To find a wretched outcast, gray and grim,
Bathing my brow, with many a pitying sigh,
And I did pray God's grace might rest on him--.
Then, lo! A gentle voice fell on mine ears--
'Thou shalt not sob in suppliance hereafter;
Take up thy prayers and wring them dry of tears,
And lift them, white and pure with love and laughter!'

So is it now for all men else I pray;
So is it I am blest and glad alway.

James Whitcomb Riley

Art And Love

He faced his canvas (as a seer whose ken
Pierces the crust of this existence through)
And smiled beyond on that his genius knew
Ere mated with his being. Conscious then
Of his high theme alone, he smiled again
Straight back upon himself in many a hue
And tint, and light and shade, which slowly grew
Enfeatured of a fair girl's face, as when
First time she smiles for love's sake with no fear.
So wrought he, witless that behind him leant
A woman, with old features, dim and sear,
And glamoured eyes that felt the brimming tear,
And with a voice, like some sad instrument,
That sighing said, 'I'm dead there; love me here!'

James Whitcomb Riley

As Created

There's a space for good to bloom in
Every heart of man or woman,--
And however wild or human,
Or however brimmed with gall,
Never heart may beat without it;
And the darkest heart to doubt it
Has something good about it
After all.

James Whitcomb Riley

As My Uncle Used To Say

I've thought a power on men and things,
As my uncle ust to say,--
And ef folks don't work as they pray, i jings!
W'y, they ain't no use to pray!
Ef you want somepin', and jes dead-set
A-pleadin' fer it with both eyes wet,
And _tears_ won't bring it, w'y, you try _sweat_,
As my uncle ust to say.

They's some don't know their A, B, Cs,
As my uncle ust to say,
And yit don't waste no candle-grease,
Ner whistle their lives away!
But ef they can't write no book, ner rhyme
No ringin' song fer to last all time,
They can blaze the way fer the march sublime,
As my uncle ust to say.

Whoever's Foreman of all things here,
As my uncle ust to say,
He knows each job 'at we 're best fit fer,
And our round-up, night and day:
And a-sizin' _His_ work, east and west,
And north and south, and worst and best
I ain't got nothin' to suggest,
As my uncle ust to say.

James Whitcomb Riley

At Broad Ripple

Oh luxury! Beyond the heat
And dust of town, with dangling feet
Astride the rock below the dam,
In the cool shadows where the calm
Rests on the stream again, and all
Is silent save the waterfall,--
I bait my hook and cast my line,
And feel the best of life is mine.

No high ambition can I claim --
I angle not for lordly game
Of trout, or bass, or wary bream --
A black perch reaches the extreme
Of my desires; and "goggle-eyes"
Are not a thing that I despise;
A sunfish, or a "chub," or a "cat"--
A "silver-side"-- yea, even that!

In eloquent tranquility
The waters lisp and talk to me.
Sometimes, far out, the surface breaks,
As some proud bass an instant shakes
His glittering armor in the sun,
And romping ripples, one by one,
Come dallying across the space
Where undulates my smiling face.

The river's story flowing by,
Forever sweet to ear and eye,
Forever tenderly begun --
Forever new and never done.
Thus lulled and sheltered in a shade
Where never feverish cares invade,
I bait my hook and cast my line,
And feel the best of life is mine.

James Whitcomb Riley

At Crown Hill

Leave him here in the fresh
greening grasses and trees
And the symbols of love, and the solace of these-
The saintly white lilies and blossoms he keeps
In endless caress as
he breathlessly sleeps.
The tears of our eyes wrong the scene of his rest,
For the sky's at its clearest-the sun's at its best-
The earth at its greenest- its wild bud and bloom
At its sweetest-and sweetest its honey'd perfume.
Home! Home!-Leave him here in his lordly estate,
And with never a tear as we turn from the gate!
Turn back to the home that will know him no more,-
The vines at the window-the sun through the door,-
Nor sound of his voice, nor the light of his face!...
But the birds will sing on, and the rose, in his place,
Will tenderly smile til we daringly feign
He is home with us still, though the tremulous rain
Of our tears reappear, and again all is bloom,
And all prayerless we sob in the long-darkened room.
Heaven portions it thus-the old mystery dim,-
It is midnight to us-it is morning to him

James Whitcomb Riley

At Last

A dark, tempestuous night; the stars shut in
With shrouds of fog; an inky, jet-black blot
The firmament; and where the moon has been
An hour ago seems like the darkest spot.
The weird wind--furious at its demon game--
Rattles one's fancy like a window-frame.

A care-worn face peers out into the dark,
And childish faces--frightened at the gloom--
Grow awed and vacant as they turn to mark
The father's as he passes through the room:
The gate latch clatters, and wee baby Bess
Whispers, 'The doctor's tummin' now, I dess!'

The father turns; a sharp, swift flash of pain
Flits o'er his face: 'Amanda, child! I said
A moment since--I see I must AGAIN--
Go take your little sisters off to bed!
There, Effie, Rose, and CLARA MUSTN'T CRY!
'I tan't he'p it--I'm fyaid 'at mama'll die!'

What are his feelings, when this man alone
Sits in the silence, glaring in the grate
That sobs and sighs on in an undertone
As stoical--immovable as Fate,
While muffled voices from the sick one's room
Come in like heralds of a dreaded doom?

The door-latch jingles: in the doorway stands
The doctor, while the draft puffs in a breath--
The dead coals leap to life, and clap their hands,
The flames flash up. A face as pale as death
Turns slowly--teeth tight clenched, and with a look
The doctor, through his specs, reads like a book.

'Come, brace up, Major!--'Let me know the worst!'
'W'y you're the biggest fool I ever saw--
Here, Major--take a little brandy first--
There! She's a BOY--I mean HE is--hurrah!'

'Wake up the other girls--and shout for joy--
Eureka is his name--I've found A BOY!'

James Whitcomb Riley

At Noey's House

At Noey's house--when they arrived with him--
How snug seemed everything, and neat and trim:
The little picket-fence, and little gate--
It's little pulley, and its little weight,--
All glib as clock-work, as it clicked behind
Them, on the little red brick pathway, lined
With little paint-keg-vases and teapots
Of wee moss-blossoms and forgetmenots:
And in the windows, either side the door,
Were ranged as many little boxes more
Of like old-fashioned larkspurs, pinks and moss
And fern and phlox; while up and down across
Them rioted the morning-glory-vines
On taut-set cotton-strings, whose snowy lines
Whipt in and out and under the bright green
Like basting-threads; and, here and there between,
A showy, shiny hollyhock would flare
Its pink among the white and purple there.--
And still behind the vines, the children saw
A strange, bleached, wistful face that seemed to draw
A vague, indefinite sympathy. A face
It was of some newcomer to the place.--
In explanation, Noey, briefly, said
That it was 'Jason,' as he turned and led
The little fellows 'round the house to show
Them his menagerie of pets. And so
For quite a time the face of the strange guest
Was partially forgotten, as they pressed
About the squirrel-cage and roused both
The lazy inmates out, though wholly loath
To whirl the wheel for them.--And then with awe
They walked 'round Noey's big pet owl, and saw
Him film his great, clear, liquid eyes and stare
And turn and turn and turn his head 'round there
The same way they kept circling--as though he
Could turn it one way thus eternally.

Behind the kitchen, then, with special pride
Noey stirred up a terrapin inside

The rain-barrel where he lived, with three or four
Little mud-turtles of a size not more
In neat circumference than the tiny toy
Dumb-watches worn by every little boy.

Then, back of the old shop, beneath the tree
Of 'rusty-coats,' as Noey called them, he
Next took the boys, to show his favorite new
Pet 'coon--pulled rather coyly into view
Up through a square hole in the bottom of
An old inverted tub he bent above,
Yanking a little chain, with 'Hey! you, sir!
Here's _comp'ny_ come to see you, Bolivur!'
Explanatory, he went on to say,
'I named him '_Bolivur_' jes thisaway,--
He looks so _round_ and _ovalish_ and _fat_,
'Peared like no other name 'ud fit but that.'

Here Noey's father called and sent him on
Some errand. 'Wait,' he said--'I won't be gone
A half a' hour.--Take Bud, and go on in
Where Jason is, tel I git back agin.'

Whoever _Jason_ was, they found him there
Still at the front-room window.--By his chair
Leaned a new pair of crutches; and from one
Knee down, a leg was bandaged.--'Jason done
That-air with one o' these-'ere tools _we_ call
A '_shin-hoe_'--but a _foot-adz_ mostly all
Hardware-store-keepers calls 'em.'--(_Noey_ made
This explanation later.)

Jason paid
But little notice to the boys as they
Came in the room:--An idle volume lay
Upon his lap--the only book in sight--
And Johnty read the title,--'Light, More Light,
There's Danger in the Dark,'--though _first_ and best--
In fact, the _whole_ of Jason's interest
Seemed centered on a little _dog_--one pet
Of Noey's all uncelebrated yet--
Though _Jason_, certainly, avowed his worth,

And niched him over all the pets on earth--
As the observant Johnty would relate
The _Jason_-episode, and imitate
The all-enthusiastic speech and air
Of Noey's kinsman and his tribute there:--

James Whitcomb Riley

At Noon--And Midnight

Far in the night, and yet no rest for him! The pillow next his own
The wife's sweet face in slumber pressed--yet he awake--alone!
alone!

In vain he courted sleep;--one thought would ever in his heart
arise,--

The harsh words that at noon had brought the teardrops to her eyes.

Slowly on lifted arm he raised and listened. All was still as death;
He touched her forehead as he gazed, and listened yet, with bated
breath:

Still silently, as though he prayed, his lips moved lightly as she
slept--

For God was with him, and he laid his face with hers and wept.

James Whitcomb Riley

At Sea

O we go down to sea in ships--
But Hope remains behind,
And Love, with laughter on his lips,
And Peace, of passive mind;
While out across the deeps of night,
With lifted sails of prayer,
We voyage off in quest of light,
Nor find it anywhere.

O Thou who wroughtest earth and sea,
Yet keepest from our eyes
The shores of an eternity
In calms of Paradise,
Blow back upon our foolish quest
With all the driving rain
Of blinding tears and wild unrest,
And waft us home again.

James Whitcomb Riley

At Utter Loaf

I.

An afternoon as ripe with heat
As might the golden pippin be
With mellowness if at my feet
It dropped now from the apple-tree
My hammock swings in lazily.

II.

The boughs about me spread a shade
That shields me from the sun, but weaves
With breezy shuttles through the leaves
Blue rifts of skies, to gleam and fade
Upon the eyes that only see
Just of themselves, all drowsily.

III.

Above me drifts the fallen skein
Of some tired spider, looped and blown,
As fragile as a strand of rain,
Across the air, and upward thrown
By breaths of hayfields newly mown--
So glimmering it is and fine,
I doubt these drowsy eyes of mine.

IV.

Far-off and faint as voices pent
In mines, and heard from underground,
Come murmurs as of discontent,
And clamorings of sullen sound
The city sends me, as, I guess,
To vex me, though they do but bless
Me in my drowsy fastnesses.

V.

I have no care. I only know
My hammock hides and holds me here
In lands of shade a prisoner:
While lazily the breezes blow
Light leaves of sunshine over me,
And back and forth and to and fro
I swing, enwrapped in some hushed glee,
Smiling at all things drowsily.

James Whitcomb Riley

August

A day of torpor in the sullen heat
Of Summer's passion: In the sluggish stream
The panting cattle lave their lazy feet,
With drowsy eyes, and dream.

Long since the winds have died, and in the sky
There lives no cloud to hint of Nature's grief;
The sun glares ever like an evil eye,
And withers flower and leaf.

Upon the gleaming harvest-field remote
The thresher lies deserted, like some old
Dismantled galleon that hangs afloat
Upon a sea of gold.

The yearning cry of some bewildered bird
Above an empty nest, and truant boys
Along the river's shady margin heard--
A harmony of noise--

A melody of wrangling voices blent
With liquid laughter, and with rippling calls
Of piping lips and thrilling echoes sent
To mimic waterfalls.

And through the hazy veil the atmosphere
Has draped about the gleaming face of Day,
The sifted glances of the sun appear
In splinterings of spray.

The dusty highway, like a cloud of dawn,
Trails o'er the hillside, and the passer-by,
A tired ghost in misty shroud, toils on
His journey to the sky.

And down across the valley's drooping sweep,
Withdrawn to farthest limit of the glade,
The forest stands in silence, drinking deep
Its purple wine of shade.

The gossamer floats up on phantom wing;
The sailor-vision voyages the skies
And carries into chaos everything
That freights the weary eyes:

Till, throbbing on and on, the pulse of heat
Increases--reaches--passes fever's height,
And Day sinks into slumber, cool and sweet,
Within the arms of Night.

James Whitcomb Riley

Autumn

As a harvester, at dusk,
Faring down some woody trail
Leading homeward through the musk
Of may-apple and pawpaw,
Hazel-bush, and spice and haw,--
So comes Autumn, swart and hale,
Drooped of frame and slow of stride.
But withal an air of pride
Looming up in stature far
Higher than his shoulders are;
Weary both in arm and limb,
Yet the wholesome heart of him
Sheer at rest and satisfied.

Greet him as with glee of drums
And glad cymbals, as he comes!
Robe him fair, O Rain and Shine.
He the Emperor--the King--
Royal lord of everything
Sagging Plenty's granary floors
And out-bulging all her doors;
He the god of corn and wine,
Honey, milk, and fruit and oil--
Lord of feast, as lord of toil--
Jocund host of yours and mine!

Ho! the revel of his laugh!--
Half is sound of winds, and half
Roar of ruddy blazes drawn
Up the throats of chimneys wide,
Circling which, from side to side,
Faces--lit as by the Dawn,
With her highest tintings on
Tip of nose, and cheek, and chin--
Smile at some old fairy-tale
Of enchanted lovers, in
Silken gown and coat of mail,
With a retinue of elves
Merry as their very selves,

Trooping ever, hand in hand,
Down the dales of Wonderland.

Then the glory of his song!--
Lifting up his dreamy eyes--
Singing haze across the skies;
Singing clouds that trail along
Towering tops of trees that seize
Tufts of them to stanch the breeze;
Singing slanted strands of rain
In between the sky and earth,
For the lyre to mate the mirth
And the might of his refrain:
Singing southward-flying birds
Down to us, and afterwards
Singing them to flight again;
Singing blushes to the cheeks
Of the leaves upon the trees--
Singing on and changing these
Into pallor, slowly wrought,
Till the little, moaning creeks
Bear them to their last farewell,
As Elaine, the lovable,
Was borne down to Lancelot.--
Singing drip of tears, and then
Drying them with smiles again.

Singing apple, peach and grape,
Into roundest, plumpest shape,
Rosy ripeness to the face
Of the pippin; and the grace
Of the dainty stamin-tip
To the huge bulk of the pear,
Pendant in the green caress
Of the leaves, and glowing through
With the tawny laziness
Of the gold that Ophir knew,--
Haply, too, within its rind
Such a cleft as bees may find,
Bungling on it half aware.
And wherein to see them sip
Fancy lifts an oozy lip,

And the singer's falter there.

Sweet as swallows swimming through
Eddyings of dusk and dew,
Singing happy scenes of home
Back to sight of eager eyes
That have longed for them to come,
Till their coming is surprise
Uttered only by the rush
Of quick tears and prayerful hush;
Singing on, in clearer key,
Hearty palms of you and me
Into grasps that tingle still
Rapturous, and ever will!
Singing twank and twang of strings--
Trill of flute and clarinet
In a melody that rings
Like the tunes we used to play,
And our dreams are playing yet!
Singing lovers, long astray,
Each to each, and, sweeter things--
Singing in their marriage-day,
And a banquet holding all
These delights for festival.

James Whitcomb Riley

Away

I cannot say, and I will not say
That he is dead- . He is just away!

With a cheery smile, and a wave of the hand
He has wandered into an unknown land,

And left us dreaming how very fair
It needs must be, since he lingers there.

And you- O you, who the wildest yearn
For the old-time step and the glad return- ,

Think of him faring on, as dear
In the love of There as the love of Here;

And loyal still, as he gave the blows
Of his warrior-strength to his country's foes- .

Mild and gentle, as he was brave- ,
When the sweetest love of his life he gave

To simple things- : Where the violets grew
Blue as the eyes they were likened to,

The touches of his hands have strayed
As reverently as his lips have prayed:

When the little brown thrush that harshly chirred
Was dear to him as the mocking-bird;

And he pitied as much as a man in pain
A writhing honey-bee wet with rain- .

Think of him still as the same, I say:
He is not dead- he is just away!

James Whitcomb Riley

Babyhood

Heigh-ho! Babyhood! Tell me where you linger:
Let's toddle home again, for we have gone astray;
Take this eager hand of mine and lead me by the finger
Back to the Lotus lands of the far-away.

Turn back the leaves of life; don't read the story,--
Let's find the _pictures_, and fancy all the rest:--
We can fill the written pages with a brighter glory
Than Old Time, the story-teller, at his very best!

Turn to the brook, where the honeysuckle, tipping
O'er its vase of perfume spills it on the breeze,
And the bee and humming-bird in ecstasy are sipping
From the fairy flagons of the blooming locust trees.

Turn to the lane, where we used to 'teeter-totter,'
Printing little foot-palms in the mellow mold,
Laughing at the lazy cattle wading in the water
Where the ripples dimple round the buttercups of gold:

Where the dusky turtle lies basking on the gravel
Of the sunny sandbar in the middle-tide,
And the ghostly dragonfly pauses in his travel
To rest like a blossom where the water-lily died.

Heigh-ho! Babyhood! Tell me where you linger:
Let's toddle home again, for we have gone astray;
Take this eager hand of mine and lead me by the finger
Back to the Lotus lands of the far-away.

James Whitcomb Riley

Back From A Two-Years' Sentence

Back from a two-years' sentence!
And though it had been ten,
You think, I were scarred no deeper
In the eyes of my fellow-men.
'My fellow-men--?' Sounds like a satire,
You think-- and I so allow,
Here in my home since childhood,
Yet more than a stranger now!

Pardon--! Not wholly a stranger--,
For I have a wife and child:
That woman has wept for two long years,
And yet last night she smiled--!
Smiled, as I leapt from the platform
Of the midnight train, and then--
All that I knew was that smile of hers,
And our babe in my arms again!

Back from a two-years' sentence--
But I've thought the whole thing through--,
A hint of it came when the bars swung back
And I looked straight up in the blue
Of the blessed skies with my hat off!
O-ho! I've a wife and child:
That woman has wept for two long years,
And yet last night she smiled!

James Whitcomb Riley

Becalmed

1

Would that the winds might only blow
As they blew in the golden long ago--!
Laden with odors of Orient isles
Where ever and ever the sunshine smiles,
And the bright sands blend with the shady trees,
And the lotus blooms in the midst of these.

2

Warm winds won from the midland vales
To where the tress of the Siren trails
O'er the flossy tip of the mountain phlox
And the bare limbs twined in the crested rocks,
High above as the seagulls flap
Their lopping wings at the thunder-clap.

3

Ah! That the winds might rise and blow
The great surge up from the port below,
Bloating the sad, lank, silken sails
Of the Argo out with the swift, sweet gales
That blew from Colchis when Jason had
His love's full will and his heart was glad--
When Medea's voice was soft and low.
Ah! That the winds might rise and blow!

James Whitcomb Riley

Bedouin

O love is like an untamed steed!--
So hot of heart and wild of speed,
And with fierce freedom so in love,
The desert is not vast enough,
With all its leagues of glimmering sands,
To pasture it! Ah, that my hands
Were more than human in their strength,
That my deft lariat at length
Might safely noose this splendid thing
That so defies all conquering!
Ho! but to see it whirl and reel--
The sands spurt forward--and to feel
The quivering tension of the thong
That throned me high, with shriek and song!
To grapple tufts of tossing mane--
To spurn it to its feet again,
And then, sans saddle, rein or bit,
To lash the mad life out of it!

James Whitcomb Riley

Being His Mother

Being his mother--when he goes away
I would not hold him overlong, and so
Sometimes my yielding sight of him grows O
So quick of tears, I joy he did not stay
To catch the faintest rumor of them! Nay,
Leave always his eyes clear and glad, although
Mine own, dear Lord, do fill to overflow;
Let his remembered features, as I pray,
Smile ever on me! Ah! what stress of love
Thou givest me to guard with Thee thiswise:
Its fullest speech ever to be denied
Mine own--being his mother! All thereof
Thou knowest only, looking from the skies
As when not Christ alone was crucified.

James Whitcomb Riley

Bewildering Emotions

The merriment that followed was subdued--
As though the story-teller's attitude
Were dual, in a sense, appealing quite
As much to sorrow as to mere delight,
According, haply, to the listener's bent
Either of sad or merry temperament.--
'And of your two appeals I much prefer
The pathos,' said 'The Noted Traveler,'--
'For should I live to twice my present years,
I know I could not quite forget the tears
That child-eyes bleed, the little palms nailed wide,
And quivering soul and body crucified....
But, bless 'em! there are no such children here
To-night, thank God!--Come here to me, my dear!
He said to little Alex, in a tone
So winning that the sound of it alone
Had drawn a child more lothful to his knee:--
'And, now-sir, _I'll_ agree if _you'll_ agree,--
You tell us all a story, and then _I_
Will tell one.'

'_But I can't._'

'Well, can't you _try?_'
'Yes, Mister: he _kin_ tell _one_. Alex, tell
The one, you know, 'at you made up so well,
About the _Bear_. He allus tells that one,'
Said Bud,--'He gits it mixed some 'bout the _gun_
An' _ax_ the Little Boy had, an' _apples_, too.'--
Then Uncle Mart said--'There, now! that'll do!--
Let _Alex_ tell his story his own way!'
And Alex, prompted thus, without delay
Began.

James Whitcomb Riley

Billy And His Drum

Ho! it's come, kids, come!
'With a bim! bam! bum!
Here's little Billy bangin' on his big bass drum!
He's a-marchin' round the room,
With his feather-duster plume
A-noddin' an' a-bobbin' with his bim! bom! boom!

Looky, little Jane an' Jim!
Will you only look at him,
A-humpin' an' a-thumpin' with his bam! bom! bim!
Has the Day o' Judgment come
Er the New Mi-len-nee-um?
Er is it only Billy with his bim! bam! bim!

I 'm a-comin'; yes, I am--
Jim an' Sis, an' Jane an' Sam!
We'll all march off with Billy an' his bom! bim! bam!
Come _hurrawin'_ as you come,
Er they'll think you're deaf-an'-dumb
Ef you don't hear little Billy an' his big bass drum!

James Whitcomb Riley

Billy's Alphabetical Animal Show

A was an elegant Ape
Who tied up his ears with red tape,
And wore a long veil
Half revealing his tail
Which was trimmed with jet bugles and crape.

B was a boastful old Bear
Who used to say,--'Hoomh! I declare
I can eat--if you'll get me
The children, and let me--
Ten babies, teeth, toenails and hair!'

C was a Codfish who sighed
When snatched from the home of his pride,
But could he, embrined,
Guess this fragrance behind,
How glad he would be that he died!

D was a dandified Dog
Who said,--'Though it's raining like fog
I wear no umbrellah,
Me boy, for a fellah
Might just as well travel incog!'

E was an elderly Eel
Who would say,--'Well, I really feel--
As my grandchildren wriggle
And shout 'I should giggle'--
A trifle run down at the heel!'

F was a Fowl who conceded
Some hens might hatch more eggs than _she_ did,--
But she'd children as plenty
As eighteen or twenty,
And that was quite all that she needed.

G was a gluttonous Goat
Who, dining one day, _table-d'hote_,
Ordered soup-bone, _au fait_,

And fish, _papier-mache_,
And a _filet_ of Spring overcoat.

H was a high-cultured Hound
Who could clear forty feet at a bound,
And a coon once averred
That his howl could be heard
For five miles and three-quarters around.

I was an Ibex ambitious
To dive over chasms auspicious;
He would leap down a peak
And not light for a week,
And swear that the jump was delicious.

J was a Jackass who said
He had such a bad cold in his head,
If it wasn't for leaving
The rest of us grieving,
He'd really rather be dead.

K was a profligate Kite
Who would haunt the saloons every night;
And often he ust
To reel back to his roost
Too full to set up on it right.

L was a wary old Lynx
Who would say,--'Do you know wot I thinks?--
I thinks ef you happen
To ketch me a-nappin'
I'm ready to set up the drinks!'

M was a merry old Mole,
Who would snooze all the day in his hole,
Then--all night, a-rootin'
Around and galootin'--
He'd sing 'Johnny, Fill up the Bowl!'

N was a caustical Nautilus
Who sneered, 'I suppose, when they've _caught_ all us,
Like oysters they'll serve us,

And can us, preserve us,
And barrel, and pickle, and bottle us!'

O was an autocrat Owl--
Such a wise--such a wonderful fowl!
Why, for all the night through
He would hoot and hoo-hoo,
And hoot and hoo-hooter and howl!

P was a Pelican pet,
Who gobbled up all he could get;
He could eat on until
He was full to the bill,
And there he had lodgings to let!

Q was a querulous Quail,
Who said: 'It will little avail
The efforts of those
Of my foes who propose
To attempt to put salt on my tail!'

R was a ring-tailed Raccoon,
With eyes of the tinge of the moon,
And his nose a blue-black,
And the fur on his back
A sad sort of sallow maroon.

S is a Sculpin--you'll wish
Very much to have one on your dish,
Since all his bones grow
On the outside, and so
He's a very desirable fish.

T was a Turtle, of wealth,
Who went round with particular stealth,--
'Why,' said he, 'I'm afraid
Of being waylaid
When I even walk out for my health!'

U was a Unicorn curious,
With one horn, of a growth so luxurious,
He could level and stab it--

If you didn't grab it--
Clean through you, he was so blamed furious!

V was a vagabond Vulture
Who said: 'I don't want to insult yer,
But when you intrude
Where in lone solitude
I'm a-preyin', you're no man o' culture!'

W was a wild _Wood_chuck,
And you can just bet that he _could_ 'chuck'
He'd eat raw potatoes,
Green corn, and tomatoes,
And tree roots, and call it all '_good_ chuck!'

X was a kind of X-cuse
Of a some-sort-o'-thing that got loose
Before we could name it,
And cage it, and tame it,
And bring it in general use.

Y is the Yellowbird,--bright
As a petrified lump of star-light,
Or a handful of lightning-
Bugs, squeezed in the tight'ning
Pink fist of a boy, at night.

Z is the Zebra, of course!--
A kind of a clown-of-a-horse,--
Each other despising,
Yet neither devising
A way to obtain a divorce!

& here is the famous--what-is-it?
Walk up, Master Billy, and quiz it:
You've seen the _rest_ of 'em--
Ain't this the _best_ of 'em,
Right at the end of your visit?

James Whitcomb Riley

Blind

You think it is a sorry thing
That I am blind. Your pitying
Is welcome to me; yet indeed,
I think I have but little need
Of it. Though you may marvel much
That we, who see by sense of touch
And taste and hearing, see things you
May never look upon; and true
Is it that even in the scent
Of blossoms we find something meant
No eyes have in their faces read,
Or wept to see interpreted.

And you might think it strange if now
I told you you were smiling. How
Do I know that? I hold your hand--
Its language I can understand--
Give both to me, and I will show
You many other things I know.
Listen: We never met before
Till now?--Well, you are something lower
Than five-feet-eight in height; and you
Are slender; and your eyes are blue--

Your mother's eyes--your mother's hair--
Your mother's likeness everywhere
Save in your walk--and that is quite
Your father's; nervous.--Am I right?
I thought so. And you used to sing,
But have neglected everything
Of vocalism--though you may
Still thrum on the guitar, and play
A little on the violin,--
I know that by the callous in
The finger-tips of your left hand--
And, by-the-bye, though nature planned
You as most men, you are, I see,
'Left-handed,' too,--the mystery
Is clear, though,--your right arm has been

Broken, to 'break' the left one in.
And so, you see, though blind of sight,
I still have ways of seeing quite
Too well for you to sympathize
Excessively, with your good eyes.--
Though _once_, perhaps, to be sincere,
Within the whole asylum here,
From cupola to basement hall,
I was the blindest of them all!

Let us move further down the walk--
The man here waiting hears my talk,
And is disturbed; besides, he may
Not be quite friendly anyway.
In fact--(this will be far enough;
Sit down)--the man just spoken of
Was once a friend of mine. He came
For treatment here from Burlingame--
A rich though brilliant student there,
Who read his eyes out of repair,
And groped his way up here, where we
Became acquainted, and where he
Met one of our girl-teachers, and,
If you 'll believe me, asked her hand
In marriage, though the girl was blind
As I am--and the girl _declined_.
Odd, wasn't it? Look, you can see
Him waiting there. Fine, isn't he?
And handsome, eloquently wide
And high of brow, and dignified
With every outward grace, his sight
Restored to him, clear and bright
As day-dawn; waiting, waiting still
For the blind girl that never will
Be wife of his. How do I know?
You will recall a while ago
I told you he and I were friends.
In all that friendship comprehends,
I was his friend, I swear! why now,
Remembering his love, and how
His confidence was all my own,
I hear, in fancy, the low tone

Of his deep voice, so full of pride
And passion, yet so pacified
With his affliction, that it seems
An utterance sent out of dreams
Of saddest melody, withal
So sorrowfully musical
It was, and is, must ever be--
But I'm digressing, pardon me.
I knew not anything of love
In those days, but of that above
All worldly passion,--for my art--
Music,--and that, with all my heart
And soul, blent in a love too great
For words of mine to estimate.
And though among my pupils she
Whose love my friend sought came to me
I only knew her fingers' touch
Because they loitered overmuch
In simple scales, and needs must be
Untangled almost constantly.
But she was bright in other ways,
And quick of thought, with ready plays
Of wit, and with a voice as sweet
To listen to as one might meet
In any oratorio--
And once I gravely told her so,--
And, at my words, her limpid tone
Of laughter faltered to a moan,
And fell from that into a sigh
That quavered all so wearily,
That I, without the tear that crept
Between the keys, had known she wept;
And yet the hand I reached for then
She caught away, and laughed again.
And when that evening I strolled
With my old friend, I, smiling, told
Him I believed the girl and he
Were matched and mated perfectly:
He was so noble; she, so fair
Of speech, and womanly of air;
He, strong, ambitious; she, as mild
And artless even as a child;

And with a nature, I was sure,
As worshipful as it was pure
And sweet, and brimmed with tender things
Beyond his rarest fancyings.
He stopped me solemnly. He knew,
He said, how good, and just, and true
Was all I said of her; but as
For his own virtues, let them pass,
Since they were nothing to the one
That he had set his heart upon;
For but that morning she had turned
Forever from him. Then I learned
That for a month he had delayed
His going from us, with no aid
Of hope to hold him,--meeting still
Her ever firm denial, till
Not even in his new-found sight
He found one comfort or delight.
And as his voice broke there, I felt
The brother-heart within me melt
In warm compassion for his own
That throbbed so utterly alone.
And then a sudden fancy hit
Along my brain; and coupling it
With a belief that I, indeed,
Might help my friend in his great need,
I warmly said that I would go
Myself, if he decided so,
And see her for him--that I knew
My pleadings would be listened to
Most seriously, and that she
Should love him, listening to me.
Go; bless me! And that was the last--
The last time his warm hand shut fast
Within my own--so empty since,
That the remembered finger-prints
I 've kissed a thousand times, and wet
Them with the tears of all regret!

I know not how to rightly tell
How fared my quest, and what befell
Me, coming in the presence of

That blind girl, and her blinder love.
I know but little else than that
Above the chair in which she sat
I leant--reached for, and found her hand,
And held it for a moment, and
Took up the other--held them both--
As might a friend, I will take oath:
Spoke leisurely, as might a man
Praying for no thing other than
He thinks Heaven's justice;--She was blind,
I said, and yet a noble mind
Most truly loved her; one whose fond
Clear-sighted vision looked beyond
The bounds of her infirmity,
And saw the woman, perfectly
Modeled, and wrought out pure and true
And lovable. She quailed, and drew
Her hands away, but closer still
I caught them. 'Rack me as you will!'
She cried out sharply--'Call me 'blind'--
Love ever is--I am resigned!
Blind is your friend; as blind as he
Am I--but blindest of the three--
Yea, blind as death--you will not see
My love for you is killing me!'

There is a memory that may
Not ever wholly fade away
From out my heart, so bright and fair
The light of it still glimmers there.
Why, it did seem as though my sight
Flamed back upon me, dazzling white
And godlike. Not one other word
Of hers I listened for or heard,
But I saw songs sung in her eyes
Till they did swoon up drowning-wise,
As my mad lips did strike her own
And we flashed one and one alone!
Ah! was it treachery for me
To kneel there, drinking eagerly
That torrent-flow of words that swept
Out laughingly the tears she wept?--

Sweet words! O sweeter far, maybe,
Than light of day to those that see,--
God knows, who did the rapture send
To me, and hold it from my friend.

And we were married half a year
Ago,--and he is--waiting here,
Heedless of that--or anything,
But just that he is lingering
To say good-bye to her, and bow--
As you may see him doing now,--
For there's her footstep in the hall;
God bless her!--help him!--save us all!

James Whitcomb Riley

Blooms Of May

But yesterday!...
O blooms of May,
And summer roses--Where-away?
O stars above,
And lips of love
And all the honeyed sweets thereof!

O lad and lass
And orchard-pass,
And briered lane, and daisied grass!
O gleam and gloom,
And woodland bloom,
And breezy breaths of all perfume!--

No more for me
Or mine shall be
Thy raptures--save in memory,--
No more--no more--
Till through the Door
Of Glory gleam the days of yore.

James Whitcomb Riley

Bryant

The harp has fallen from the master's hand;
Mute is the music, voiceless are the strings,
Save such faint discord as the wild wind flings
In sad aeolian murmurs through the land.
The tide of melody, whose billows grand
Flowed o'er the world in clearest utterings,
Now, in receding current, sobs and sings
That song we never wholly understand.
* * O, eyes where glorious prophecies belong,
And gracious reverence to humbly bow,
And kingly spirit, proud, and pure, and strong;
O, pallid minstrel with the laureled brow,
And lips so long attuned to sacred song,
How sweet must be the Heavenly anthem now!

James Whitcomb Riley

By Her White Bed

By her white bed I muse a little space:
She fell asleep--not very long ago,--
And yet the grass was here and not the snow--
The leaf, the bud, the blossom, and--her face!--
Midsummer's heaven above us, and the grace
Of Lovers own day, from dawn to afterglow;
The fireflies' glimmering, and the sweet and low
Plaint of the whip-poor-wills, and every place
In thicker twilight for the roses' scent.
Then _night_--She slept--in such tranquility,
I walk atiptoe still, nor _dare_ to weep,
Feeling, in all this hush, she rests content--
That though God stood to wake her for me, she
Would mutely plead: 'Nay, Lord! Let _him_ so sleep.'

James Whitcomb Riley

Climatic Sorcery

When frost's all on our winder, an' the snow's
All out-o'-doors, our 'Old-Kriss'-milkman goes
A-drivin' round, ist purt'-nigh froze to death,
With his old white mustache froze full o' breath.

But when it's summer an' all warm ag'in,
He comes a-whistlin' an' a-drivin in
Our alley, 'thout no coat on, ner ain't cold,
Ner his mustache ain't white, ner he ain't old.

James Whitcomb Riley

Company Manners

When Bess gave her Dollies a Tea, said she,--
'It's unpolite, when they's Company,
To say you've dranked _two_ cups, you see,--
But say you've dranked _a couple_ of tea.'

James Whitcomb Riley

Cousin Rufus' Story

My little story, Cousin Rufus said,
Is not so much a story as a fact.
It is about a certain willful boy--
An aggrieved, unappreciated boy,
Grown to dislike his own home very much,
By reason of his parents being not
At all up to his rigid standard and
Requirements and exactions as a son
And disciplinarian.

So, sullenly
He brooded over his disheartening
Environments and limitations, till,
At last, well knowing that the outside world
Would yield him favors never found at home,
He rose determinedly one July dawn--
Even before the call for breakfast--and,
Climbing the alley-fence, and bitterly
Shaking his clenched fist at the woodpile, he
Evanished down the turnpike.--Yes: he had,
Once and for all, put into execution
His long low-muttered threatenings--He had
Run off!--He had--had run away from home!

His parents, at discovery of his flight,
Bore up first-rate--especially his Pa,--
Quite possibly recalling his own youth,
And therefrom predicating, by high noon,
The absent one was very probably
Disporting his nude self in the delights
Of the old swimmin'-hole, some hundred yards
Below the slaughter-house, just east of town.
The stoic father, too, in his surmise
Was accurate--For, lo! the boy was there!

And there, too, he remained throughout the day--
Save at one starving interval in which
He clad his sunburnt shoulders long enough
To shy across a wheatfield, shadow-like,

And raid a neighboring orchard--bitterly,
And with spasmodic twitchings of the lip,
Bethinking him how all the other boys
Had _homes_ to go to at the dinner-hour--
While _he_--alas!--_he_ had no home!--At least
These very words seemed rising mockingly,
Until his every thought smacked raw and sour
And green and bitter as the apples he
In vain essayed to stay his hunger with.
Nor did he join the glad shouts when the boys
Returned rejuvenated for the long
Wet revel of the feverish afternoon.--
Yet, bravely, as his comrades splashed and swam
And spluttered, in their weltering merriment,
He tried to laugh, too,--but his voice was hoarse
And sounded to him like some other boy's.
And then he felt a sudden, poking sort
Of sickness at the heart, as though some cold
And scaly pain were blindly nosing it
Down in the dreggy darkness of his breast.
The tensioned pucker of his purple lips
Grew ever chillier and yet more tense--
The central hurt of it slow spreading till
It did possess the little face entire.
And then there grew to be a knuckled knot--
An aching kind of core within his throat--
An ache, all dry and swallowless, which seemed
To ache on just as bad when he'd pretend
He didn't notice it as when he did.
It was a kind of a conceited pain--
An overbearing, self-assertive and
Barbaric sort of pain that clean outhurt
A boy's capacity for suffering--
So, many times, the little martyr needs
Must turn himself all suddenly and dive
From sight of his hilarious playmates and
Surreptitiously weep under water.

Thus
He wrestled with his awful agony
Till almost dark; and then, at last--then, with
The very latest lingering group of his

Companions, he moved turgidly toward home--
Nay, rather _oozed_ that way, so slow he went,--
With lothful, hesitating, loitering,
Reluctant, late-election-returns air,
Heightened somewhat by the conscience-made resolve
Of chopping a double-armful of wood
As he went in by rear way of the kitchen.
And this resolve he executed;--yet
The hired girl made no comment whatsoever,
But went on washing up the supper-things,
Crooning the unutterably sad song, '_Then think,
Oh, think how lonely this heart must ever be!_'
Still, with affected carelessness, the boy
Ranged through the pantry; but the cupboard-door
Was locked. He sighed then like a wet fore-stick
And went out on the porch.--At least the pump,
He prophesied, would meet him kindly and
Shake hands with him and welcome his return!
And long he held the old tin dipper up--
And oh, how fresh and pure and sweet the draught!
Over the upturned brim, with grateful eyes
He saw the back-yard, in the gathering night,
Vague, dim and lonesome, but it all looked good:
The lightning-bugs, against the grape-vines, blinked
A sort of sallow gladness over his
Home-coming, with this softening of the heart.
He did not leave the dipper carelessly
In the milk-trough.--No: he hung it back upon
Its old nail thoughtfully--even tenderly.
All slowly then he turned and sauntered toward
The rain-barrel at the corner of the house,
And, pausing, peered into it at the few
Faint stars reflected there. Then--moved by some
Strange impulse new to him--he washed his feet.
He then went in the house--straight on into
The very room where sat his parents by
The evening lamp.--The father all intent
Reading his paper, and the mother quite
As intent with her sewing. Neither looked
Up at his entrance--even reproachfully,--
And neither spoke.

The wistful runaway

Drew a long, quavering breath, and then sat down
Upon the extreme edge of a chair. And all
Was very still there for a long, long while.--
Yet everything, somehow, seemed _restful_-like
And _homey_ and old-fashioned, good and kind,
And sort of _kin_ to him!--Only too _still!_
If somebody would say something--just _speak_--
Or even rise up suddenly and come
And lift him by the ear sheer off his chair--
Or box his jaws--Lord bless 'em!--_any_thing!--
Was he not there to thankfully accept
Any reception from parental source
Save this incomprehensible _voicelessness_.
O but the silence held its very breath!
If but the ticking clock would only _strike_
And for an instant drown the whispering,
Lisping, sifting sound the katydids
Made outside in the grassy nowhere.

Far

Down some back-street he heard the faint halloo
Of boys at their night-game of 'Town-fox,'
But now with no desire at all to be
Participating in their sport--No; no;--
Never again in this world would he want
To join them there!--he only wanted just
To stay in home of nights--Always--always--
Forever and a day!

He moved; and coughed--

Coughed hoarsely, too, through his rolled tongue; and yet
No vaguest of parental notice or
Solicitude in answer--no response--
No word--no look. O it was deathly still!--
So still it was that really he could not
Remember any prior silence that
At all approached it in profundity
And depth and density of utter hush.
He felt that he himself must break it: So,
Summoning every subtle artifice
Of seeming nonchalance and native ease

And naturalness of utterance to his aid,
And gazing raptly at the house-cat where
She lay curled in her wonted corner of
The hearth-rug, dozing, he spoke airily
And said: 'I see you've got the same old cat!'

James Whitcomb Riley

Craqueodoom

The Crankadox leaned o'er the edge of the moon
And wistfully gazed on the sea
Where the Gryxabodill madly whistled a tune
To the air of 'Ti-fol-de-ding-dee.'
The quavering shriek of the Fly-up-the-creek
Was fitfully wafted afar
To the Queen of the Wunks as she powdered her cheek
With the pulverized rays of a star.

The Gool closed his ear on the voice of the Grig,
And his heart it grew heavy as lead
As he marked the Baldekin adjusting his wing
On the opposite side of his head,
And the air it grew chill as the Gryxabodill
Raised his dank, dripping fins to the skies,
And plead with the Plunk for the use of her bill
To pick the tears out of his eyes.

The ghost of the Zhack flitted by in a trance,
And the Squidjum hid under a tub
As he heard the loud hooves of the Hooken advance
With a rub-a-dub--dub-a-dub--dub!
And the Crankadox cried, as he lay down and died,
'My fate there is none to bewail,'
While the Queen of the Wunks drifted over the tide
With a long piece of crape to her tail.

James Whitcomb Riley

Curly Locks

_Curly Locks! Curly Locks! wilt thou be mine?
Thou shalt not wash the dishes, nor yet feed the swine,--
But sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam,
And feast upon strawberries, sugar and cream._

Curly Locks! Curly Locks! wilt thou be mine?
The throb of my heart is in every line,
And the pulse of a passion as airy and glad
In its musical beat as the little Prince had!

Thou shalt not wash the dishes, nor yet feed the swine!--
O I'll dapple thy hands with these kisses of mine
Till the pink of the nail of each finger shall be
As a little pet blush in full blossom for me.

But sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam,
And thou shalt have fabric as fair as a dream,--
The red of my veins, and the white of my love,
And the gold of my joy for the braiding thereof.

And feast upon strawberries, sugar and cream
From a service of silver, with jewels a gleam,--
At thy feet will I bide, at thy beck will I rise,
And twinkle my soul in the night of thine eyes!

_Curly Locks! Curly Locks! wilt thou be mine?
Thou shalt not wash the dishes, nor yet feed the swine.--
But sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam,
And feast upon strawberries, sugar and cream._

James Whitcomb Riley

Dan Paine

Old friend of mine, whose chiming name
Has been the burthen of a rhyme
Within my heart since first I came
To know thee in thy mellow prime;
With warm emotions in my breast
That can but coldly be expressed,
And hopes and wishes wild and vain,
I reach my hand to thee, Dan Paine.

In fancy, as I sit alone
In gloomy fellowship with care,
I hear again thy cheery tone,
And wheel for thee an easy chair;
And from my hand the pencil falls--
My book upon the carpet sprawls,
As eager soul and heart and brain,
Leap up to welcome thee, Dan Paine.

A something gentle in thy mein,
A something tender in thy voice,
Has made my trouble so serene,
I can but weep, from very choice.
And even then my tears, I guess,
Hold more of sweet than bitterness,
And more of gleaming shine than rain,
Because of thy bright smile, Dan Paine.

The wrinkles that the years have spun
And tangled round thy tawny face,
Are kinked with laughter, every one,
And fashioned in a mirthful grace.
And though the twinkle of thine eyes
Is keen as frost when Summer dies,
It can not long as frost remain
While thy warm soul shines out, Dan Paine.

And so I drain a health to thee;--
May merry Joy and jolly Mirth
Like children clamber on thy knee,

And ride thee round the happy earth!
And when, at last, the hand of Fate
Shall lift the latch of Canaan's gate,
And usher me in thy domain,
Smile on me just as now, Dan Paine.

James Whitcomb Riley

Das Krist Kindel

I had fed the fire and stirred it, till the sparkles in delight
Snapped their saucy little fingers at the chill December night;
And in dressing-gown and slippers, I had tilted back 'my
throne'--

The old split-bottomed rocker--and was musing all alone.

I could hear the hungry Winter prowling round the outer door,
And the tread of muffled footsteps on the white piazza floor;
But the sounds came to me only as the murmur of a stream
That mingled with the current of a lazy-flowing dream.

Like a fragrant incense rising, curled the smoke of my cigar,
With the lamplight gleaming through it like a mist-enfolded
star;--

And as I gazed, the vapor like a curtain rolled away,
With a sound of bells that tinkled, and the clatter of a sleigh.

And in a vision, painted like a picture in the air,
I saw the elfish figure of a man with frosty hair--
A quaint old man that chuckled with a laugh as he appeared,
And with ruddy cheeks like embers in the ashes of his beard.

He poised himself grotesquely, in an attitude of mirth,
On a damask-covered hassock that was sitting on the hearth;
And at a magic signal of his stubby little thumb,
I saw the fireplace changing to a bright proscenium.

And looking there, I marveled as I saw a mimic stage
Alive with little actors of a very tender age;
And some so very tiny that they tottered as they walked,
And lisped and purred and gurgled like the brooklets, when they
talked.

And their faces were like lilies, and their eyes like purest dew,
And their tresses like the shadows that the shine is woven
through;

And they each had little burdens, and a little tale to tell
Of fairy lore, and giants, and delights delectable.

And they mixed and intermingled, weaving melody with joy,
Till the magic circle clustered round a blooming baby-boy;
And they threw aside their treasures in an ecstasy of glee,
And bent, with dazzled faces and with parted lips, to see.

'Twas a wondrous little fellow, with a dainty double-chin,
And chubby cheeks, and dimples for the smiles to blossom in;
And he looked as ripe and rosy, on his bed of straw and reeds,
As a mellow little pippin that had tumbled in the weeds.

And I saw the happy mother, and a group surrounding her
That knelt with costly presents of frankincense and myrrh;
And I thrilled with awe and wonder, as a murmur on the air
Came drifting o'er the hearing in a melody of prayer:--

'By the splendor in the heavens, and the hush upon the sea,
And the majesty of silence reigning over Galilee,--
We feel Thy kingly presence, and we humbly bow the knee
And lift our hearts and voices in gratefulness to Thee.

Thy messenger has spoken, and our doubts have fled and gone
As the dark and spectral shadows of the night before the dawn;
And, in the kindly shelter of the light around us drawn,
We would nestle down forever in the breast we lean upon.

You have given us a shepherd--You have given us a guide,
And the light of Heaven grew dimmer when You sent him from Your
side,--
But he comes to lead Thy children where the gates will open wide
To welcome his returning when his works are glorified.

By the splendor in the heavens, and the hush upon the sea,
And the majesty of silence reigning over Galilee,--
We feel Thy kingly presence, and we humbly bow the knee
And lift our hearts and voices in gratefulness to Thee.'

Then the vision, slowly failing, with the words of the refrain,
Fell swooning in the moonlight through the frosty window-pane;
And I heard the clock proclaiming, like an eager sentinel
Who brings the world good tidings,--'It is Christmas--all is
well!'

Dawn, Noon And Dewfall

I.

Dawn, noon and dewfall! Bluebird and robin
Up and at it airly, and the orchard-blossoms bobbin'!
Peekin' from the winder, half-awake, and wishin'
I could go to sleep agin as well as go a-fishin'!

II.

On the apern o' the dam, legs a-danglin' over,
Drowsy-like with sound o' worter and the smell o' clover:
Fish all out a visitin'--'cept some dratted minnor!
Yes, and mill shet down at last and hands is gone to dinner.

III.

Trompin' home acrost the fields: Lightnin'-bugs a-blinkin'
In the wheat like sparks o' things feller keeps a-thinkin':--
Mother waitin' supper, and the childern there to cherr me!
And fiddle on the kitchen-wall a-jist a-eechin' fer me!

James Whitcomb Riley

Dead In Sight Of Fame

DIED--Early morning of September 5, 1876, and
in the gleaming dawn of 'name and fame,'
Hamilton J. Dunbar.

Dead! Dead! Dead!
We thought him ours alone;
And were so proud to see him tread
The rounds of fame, and lift his head
Where sunlight ever shone;
But now our aching eyes are dim,
And look through tears in vain for him.

Name! Name! Name!
It was his diadem;
Nor ever tarnish-taint of shame
Could dim its luster--like a flame
Reflected in a gem,
He wears it blazing on his brow
Within the courts of Heaven now.

Tears! Tears! Tears!
Like dew upon the leaf
That bursts at last--from out the years
The blossom of a trust appears
That blooms above the grief;
And mother, brother, wife and child
Will see it and be reconciled.

James Whitcomb Riley

Dead Leaves

DAWN

As though a gipsy maiden with dim look,
Sat crooning by the roadside of the year,
So, Autumn, in thy strangeness, thou art here
To read dark fortunes for us from the book
Of fate; thou flingest in the crinkled brook
The trembling maple's gold, and frosty-clear
Thy mocking laughter thrills the atmosphere,
And drifting on its current calls the rook
To other lands. As one who wades, alone,
Deep in the dusk, and hears the minor talk
Of distant melody, and finds the tone,
In some wierd way compelling him to stalk
The paths of childhood over,--so I moan,
And like a troubled sleeper, groping, walk.

DUSK

The frightened herds of clouds across the sky
Trample the sunshine down, and chase the day
Into the dusky forest-lands of gray
And somber twilight. Far, and faint, and high
The wild goose trails his harrow, with a cry
Sad as the wail of some poor castaway
Who sees a vessel drifting far astray
Of his last hope, and lays him down to die.
The children, riotous from school, grow bold
And quarrel with the wind, whose angry gust
Plucks off the summer hat, and flaps the fold
Of many a crimson cloak, and twirls the dust
In spiral shapes grotesque, and dims the gold
Of gleaming tresses with the blur of rust.

NIGHT

Funereal Darkness, drear and desolate,
Muffles the world. The moaning of the wind
Is piteous with sobs of saddest kind;

And laughter is a phantom at the gate
Of memory. The long-neglected grate
Within sprouts into flame and lights the mind
With hopes and wishes long ago refined
To ashes,--long departed friends await
Our words of welcome: and our lips are dumb
And powerless to greet the ones that press
Old kisses there. The baby beats its drum,
And fancy marches to the dear caress
Of mother-arms, and all the gleeful hum
Of home intrudes upon our loneliness.

James Whitcomb Riley

Dead Selves

How many of my selves are dead?
The ghosts of many haunt me: Lo,
The baby in the tiny bed
With rockers on, is blanketed
And sleeping in the long ago;
And so I ask, with shaking head,
How many of my selves are dead?

A little face with drowsy eyes
And lisping lips comes mistily
From out the faded past, and tries
The prayers a mother breathed with sighs
Of anxious care in teaching me;
But face and form and prayers have fled--
How many of my selves are dead?

The little naked feet that slipped
In truant paths, and led the way
Through dead'ning pasture-lands, and tripped
O'er tangled poison-vines, and dipped
In streams forbidden--where are they?
In vain I listen for their tread--
How many of my selves are dead?

The awkward boy the teacher caught
Inditing letters filled with love,
Who was compelled, for all he fought,
To read aloud each tender thought
Of 'Sugar Lump' and 'Turtle Dove.'
I wonder where he hides his head--
How many of my selves are dead?

The earnest features of a youth
With manly fringe on lip and chin,
With eager tongue to tell the truth,
To offer love and life, forsooth,
So brave was he to woo and win;
A prouder man was never wed--
How many of my selves are dead?

The great, strong hands so all-inclined
To welcome toil, or smooth the care
From mother-brows, or quick to find
A leisure-scrap of any kind,
To toss the baby in the air,
Or clap at babbling things it said--
How many of my selves are dead?

The pact of brawn and scheming brain--
Conspiring in the plots of wealth,
Still delving, till the lengthened chain,
Unwindlassed in the mines of gain,
Recoils with dregs of ruined health
And pain and poverty instead--
How many of my selves are dead?

The faltering step, the faded hair--
Head, heart and soul, all echoing
With maundering fancies that declare
That life and love were never there,
Nor ever joy in anything,
Nor wounded heart that ever bled--
How many of my selves are dead?

So many of my selves are dead,
That, bending here above the brink
Of my last grave, with dizzy head,
I find my spirit comforted,
For all the idle things I think:
It can but be a peaceful bed,
Since all my other selves are dead.

James Whitcomb Riley

Dear Hands

The touches of her hands are like the fall
Of velvet snowflakes; like the touch of down
The peach just brushes 'gainst the garden wall;
The flossy fondlings of the thistle-wisp
Caught in the crinkle of a leaf of brown
The blighting frost hath turned from green to crisp.

Soft as the falling of the dusk at night,
The touches of her hands, and the delight--
The touches of her hands!
The touches of her hands are like the dew
That falls so softly down no one e'er knew
The touch thereof save lovers like to one
Astray in lights where ranged Endymion.

O rarely soft, the touches of her hands,
As drowsy zephyrs in enchanted lands;
Or pulse of dying fay; or fairy sighs,
Or--in between the midnight and the dawn,
When long unrest and tears and fears are gone--
Sleep, smoothing down the lids of weary eyes.

James Whitcomb Riley

Dearth

I hold your trembling hand to-night-- and yet
I may not know what wealth of bliss is mine,
My heart is such a curious design
Of trust and jealousy! Your eyes are wet--
So must I think they jewel some regret--,
And lo, the loving arms that round me twine
Cling only as the tendrils of a vine
Whose fruit has long been gathered: I forget,
While crimson clusters of your kisses press
Their wine out on my lips, my royal fair
Of rapture, since blind fancy needs must guess
They once poured out their sweetness elsewhere,
With fuller flavoring of happiness
Than e'en your broken sobs may now declare.

James Whitcomb Riley

Doc Sifers

Of all the doctors I could cite you to in this-'ere town
Doc Sifers is my favorite, jes' take him up and down!
Count in the Bethel Neighborhood, and Rollins, and Big Bear,
And Sifers' standin's jes' as good as ary doctor's there!

There's old Doc Wick, and Glenn, and Hall, and Wurgler, and McVeigh,
But I'll buck Sifers 'ginst 'em all and down 'em any day!
Most old Wick ever knowed, I s'pose, was _whisky!_ Wurgler--well,
He et morphine--ef actions shows, and facts' reliable!

But Sifers--though he ain't no sot, he's got his faults; and yit
When you _git_ Sifers one't, you've got _a doctor_, don't fergit!
He ain't much at his office, er his house, er anywhere
You'd natchurly think certain far to ketch the feller there.--

But don't blame Doc: he's got all sorts o' cur'ous notions--as
The feller says; his odd-come-shorts, like smart men mostly has.
He'll more'n like be potter'n 'round the Blacksmith Shop; er in
Some back lot, spadin' up the ground, er gradin' it agin.

Er at the workbench, planin' things; er buildin' little traps
To ketch birds; galvenizin' rings; er graftin' plums, perhaps.
Make anything! good as the best!--a gunstock--er a flute;
He whittled out a set o' chesstmen one't o' laurel root,

Durin' the Army--got his trade o' surgeon there--I own
To-day a finger-ring Doc made out of a Sesesh bone!
An' glued a fiddle one't far me--jes' all so busted you
'D a throwed the thing away, but he fixed her as good as new!

And take Doc, now, in _ager_, say, er _biles_, er _rheumatiz_,
And all afflictions thataway, and he's the best they is!
Er janders--milksick--I don't keer--k-yore anything he tries--
A abscess; getherin' in yer year; er granilated eyes!

There was the Widder Daubenspeck they all give up far dead;
A blame cowbuncle on her neck, and clean out of her head!
First had this doctor, what's-his-name, from 'Puddlesburg,' and then
This little red-head, 'Burnin' Shame' they call him--Dr. Glenn.

And they 'consulted' on the case, and claimed she'd haf to die,--
I jes' was joggin' by the place, and heerd her dorter cry,
And stops and calls her to the fence; and I-says-I, 'Let me
Send Sifers--bet you fifteen cents he'll k-yore her!' 'Well,' says
she,

'Light out!' she says: And, lipp-tee-cut! I loped in town, and rid
'Bout two hours more to find him, but I kussed him when I did!
He was down at the Gunsmith Shop a-stuffin' birds! Says he,
'My sulky's broke.' Says I, 'You hop right on and ride with me!'

I got him there.--'Well, Aunty, ten days k-yores you,' Sifers said,
'But what's yer idy livin' when yer jes' as good as dead?'
And there's Dave Banks--jes' back from war without a scratch--one
day
Got ketched up in a sickle-bar, a reaper runaway.--

His shoulders, arms, and hands and legs jes' sawed in strips! And
Jake
Dunn starts far Sifers--feller begs to shoot him far God-sake.
Doc, 'course, was gone, but he had penned the notice, 'At Big Bear--
Be back to-morry; Gone to 'tend the Bee Convention there.'

But Jake, he tracked him--rid and rode the whole endurin' night!
And 'bout the time the roosters crowed they both hove into sight.
Doc had to amputate, but 'greed to save Dave's arms, and swore
He could a-saved his legs ef he'd ben there the day before.

Like when his wife's own mother died 'fore Sifers could be found,
And all the neighbors far and wide a' all jes' chasin' round;
Tel finally--I had to laugh--it's jes' like Doc, you know,--
Was learnin' far to telegraph, down at the old deepo.

But all they're faultin' Sifers far, there's none of 'em kin say
He's biggoty, er keerless, er not posted anyway;
He ain't built on the common plan of doctors now-a-days,
He's jes' a great, big, brainy man--that's where the trouble lays!

James Whitcomb Riley

Donn Piatt Of Mac-O-Chee

Donn Piatt--of Mac-o-chee,--
Not the one of History,
Who, with flaming tongue and pen,
Scathes the vanities of men;
Not the one whose biting wit
Cuts pretense and etches it
On the brazen brow that dares
Filch the laurel that it wears:
Not the Donn Piatt whose praise
Echoes in the noisy ways
Of the faction, onward led
By the statesman!--But, instead,
Give the simple man to me,--
Donn Piatt of Mac-o-chee!

II.

Donn Piatt of Mac-o-chee!
Branches of the old oak tree,
Drape him royally in fine
Purple shade and golden shine!
Emerald plush of sloping lawn
Be the throne he sits upon!
And, O Summer sunset, thou
Be his crown, and gild a brow
Softly smoothed and soothed and calmed
By the breezes, mellow-palmed
As Erata's white hand agleam
On the forehead of a dream.--
So forever rule o'er me,
Donn Piatt of Mac-o-chee!

III.

Donn Piatt of Mac-o-chee:
Through a liliated memory
Plays the wayward little creek

Round thy home at hide-and-see--
As I see and hear it, still
Romping round the wooded hill,
Till its laugh-and-babble blends
With the silence while it sends
Glances back to kiss the sight,
In its babyish delight,
Ere it strays amid the gloom
Of the glens that burst in bloom
Of the rarest rhyme for thee,
Donn Piatt of Mac-o-chee!

IV.

Donn Piatt of Mac-o-chee!
What a darling destiny
Has been mine--to meet him there--
Lolling in an easy chair
On the terrace, while he told
Reminiscences of old--
Letting my cigar die out,
Hearing poems talked about;
And entranced to hear him say
Gentle things of Thackeray,
Dickens, Hawthorne, and the rest,
Known to him as host and guest--
Known to him as he to me--
Donn Piatt of Mac-o-chee!

James Whitcomb Riley

Dot Leedle Boy

Ot's a leedle Gristmas story
Dot I told der leedle folks--
Und I vant you stop dot laughin'
Und grackin' funny jokes!--
So help me Peter-Moses!
Ot's no time for monkey-shine,
Ober I vast told you somedings
Of dot leedle boy of mine!

Ot vas von cold Vinter vedder,
Ven der snow vas all about--
Dot you have to chop der hatchet
Eef you got der sauerkraut!
Und der cheekens on der hind leg
Vas standin' in der shine
Der sun shmile out dot morning
On dot leedle boy of mine.

He vas yoost a leedle baby
Not bigger as a doll
Dot time I got acquaintet--
Ach! you ought to heard 'im squall!--
I grackys! dot's der moosic
Ot make me feel so fine
Ven first I vas been marriet--
Oh, dot leedle boy of mine!

He look yoost like his fader!--
So, ven der vimmen said,
'Vot a purty leedle baby!'
Katrina shake der head. . . .
I dink she must 'a' notice
Dot der baby vas a-gryin',
Und she cover up der blankets
Of dot leedle boy of mine.

Vel, ven he vas got bigger,
Dot he grawl und bump his nose,
Und make der table over,

Und molasses on his clothes--
Dot make 'im all der sveeter,--
So I say to my Katrine,
'Better you vas quit a-shpankin'
Dot leedle boy of mine!

No more he vas older
As about a dozen months
He speak der English language
Und der German--bote at vonce!
Und he dringk his glass of lager
Like a Londsman fon der Rhine--
Und I klingk my glass togeder
Mit dot leedle boy of mine!

I vish you could 'a' seen id--
Ven he glimb up on der chair
Und shmash der lookin'-glasses
Ven he try to comb his hair
Mit a hammer!--Und Katrina
Say, 'Dot's an ugly sign!'
But I laugh und vink my fingers
At dot leedle boy of mine.

But vonce, dot Vinter morning,
He shlip out in der snow
Mitout no stockin's on 'im.--
He say he 'vant to go
Und fly some mit der birdies!
Und ve give 'im medi-cine
Ven he catch der 'parrygoric'--
Dot leedle boy of mine!

Und so I set und nurse 'im,
Vile der Gristmas vas come roun',
Und I told 'im 'bout 'Kriss Kringle,'
How he come der chimbly down:
Und I ask 'im eef he love 'im
Eef he bring 'im someding fine?
'Nicht besser as mein fader,'
Say dot leedle boy of mine.--

Und he put his arms aroun' me
Und hug so close und tight,
I hear der gclock a-tickin'
All der balance of der night! . . .
Someding make me feel so funny
Ven I say to my Katrine,
'Let us go und fill der stockin's
Of dot leedle boy of mine.'

Vell.--Ve buyed a leedle horses
Dot you pull 'im mit a shtring,
Und a leedle fancy jay-bird--
Eef you vant to hear 'im sing
You took 'im by der topknot
Und yoost blow in behine--
Und dot make much spektakel
For dot leedle boy of mine!

Und gandies, nuts und raizens--
Und I buy a leedle drum
Dot I vant to hear 'im rattle
Ven der Gristmas morning come!
Und a leedle shmall tin rooster
Dot vould crow so loud und fine
Ven he sqveeze 'im in der morning,
Dot leedle boy of mine!

Und--vile ve vas a-fixin'--
Dot leedle boy vake out!
I t'ought he been a-dreamin'
'Kriss Kringle' vas about,--
For he say--'DOT'S HIM!--I SEE 'IM
MIT DER SHTARS DOT MAKE DER SHINE!
Und he yoost keep on a-gryin'--
Dot leedle boy of mine,--
Und gottin' vorse und vorser--
Und tumble on der bed!
So--ven der doctor seen id,
He kindo' shake his head,
Und feel his pulse--und visper,
'Der boy is a-dyin'.
You dink I could BELIEVE id?--

DOT LEEDLE BOY OF MINE?

I told you, friends--dot's someding,
Der last time dot he speak
Und say, 'GOOT-BY, KRISS KRINGLE!'
--Dot make me feel so veak
I yoost kneel down und drimble,
Und bur-sed out a-gryin',
'MEIN GOTT, MEIN GOTT IN HIMMEL!--
DOT LEEDLE BOY OF MINE!'

.....

Der sun don't shine DOT Gristmas!
. . . Eef dot leedle boy vould LIFF'D--
No deefer-en'! for HEAVEN vas
His leedle Gristmas gift!
Und der ROOSTER, und der GANDY,
Und me--und my Katrine--
Und der jay-bird--is awaiting
For dot leedle boy of mine.

James Whitcomb Riley

Down Around The River

Noon-time and June-time, down around the river!
Have to furse with 'Lizey Ann--but lawzy! I fergive her!
Drives me off the place, and says 'at all 'at she's a-wishin',
Land o' gracious! time'll come I'll git enough o' fishin'!
Little Dave, a-choppin' wood, never 'pears to notice;
Don't know where she's hid his hat, er keerin' where his coat is,--
Specalatin', more 'n like, he haint a-goin' to mind me,
And guessin' where, say twelve o'clock, a feller'd likely find me.

Noon-time and June-time, down around the river!
Clean out o' sight o' home, and skulkin' under kivver
Of the sycamores, jack-oaks, and swamp-ash and ellum--
Idies all so jumbled up, you kin hardly tell 'em!--
Tired, you know, but _lovin'_ it, and smilin' jest to think 'at
Any sweeter tiredness you'd fairly want to _drink_ it.
Tired o' fishin'--tired o' fun--line out slack and slacker--
All you want in all the world's a little more tobacker!

Hungry, but _a-hidin'_ it, er jes' a-not a-keerin':-
Kingfisher gittin' up and skootin' out o' hearin';
Snipes on the t'other side, where the County Ditch is,
Wadin' up and down the aidge like they'd rolled their britches!
Old turkle on the root kindo-sorto drappin'
Intoo th' worter like he don't know how it happen!
Worter, shade and all so mixed, don't know which you'd orter
Say, th' _worter_ in the shadder--_shadder_ in the _worter!_

Somebody hollerin'--'way around the bend in
Upper Fork--where yer eye kin jes' ketch the endin'
Of the shiney wedge o' wake some muss-rat's a-makin'
With that pesky nose o' his! Then a sniff o' bacon,
Corn-bread and 'dock-greens--and little Dave a-shinnin'
'Crost the rocks and mussel-shells, a-limpin' and a-grinnin',
With yer dinner far ye, and a blessin' from the giver.
Noon-time and June-time down around the river!

James Whitcomb Riley

Down On Wriggle Crick

'Best time to kill a hog's when he's fat.' --Old Saw.

Mostly folks is law-abidin'
Down on Wriggle Crick--,
Seein' they's no Squire residin'
In our bailywick;
No grand juries, no suppeenies,
Ner no vested rights to pick
Out yer man, jerk up and jail ef
He's outragin' Wriggle Crick!

Wriggle Crick hain't got no lawin',
Ner no suits to beat;
Ner no court-house gee-and-hawin'
Like a County-seat;
Hain't no waitin' round fer verdick,
Ner non-gittin' witness-fees;
Ner no thieves 'at gits 'new heain's,'
By some lawyer slick as grease!

Wriggle Cricks's leadin' spirit
Is old Johnts Culwell--,
Keeps post-office, and right near it
Owns what's called 'The Grand Hotel--'
(Warehouse now--) buys wheat and ships it;
Gits out ties, and trades in stock,
And knows all the high-toned drummers
'Twixt South Bend and Mishawauk'

Last year comes along a feller--
Sharper 'an a lance--
Stovepipe-hat and silk umbreller,
And a boughten all-wool pants--,
Tinkerin of clocks and watches:
Says a trial's all he wants--
And rents out the tavern-office
Next to Uncle Johnts.

Well--. He tacked up his k'dentials,
And got down to biz--.
Captured Johnts by cuttin' stenchils
Fer them old wheat-sacks o' his--.

Fixed his clock, in the post-office--
Painted fer him, clean and slick,
'Crost his safe, in gold-leaf letters,
'J. Culwells's Wriggle Crick.'

Any kindo' job you keered to
Resk him with, and bring,
He'd fix fer you-- jest appeared to
Turn his hand to anything--!
Rings, er earbobs, er umbrellers--
Glue a cheer er chany doll--,
W'y, of all the beatin' fellers,
He Jest beat 'em all!

Made his friends, but wouldn't stop there--,
One mistake he learnt,
That was, sleepin' in his shop there--.
And one Sund'y night it burnt!
Come in one o' jest a-sweepin'
All the whole town high and dry--
And that feller, when they waked him,
Suffocatin', mighty nigh!

Johnts he drug him from the buildin',
He'pless-- 'peared to be--,
And the women and the childern
Drenchin' him with sympathy!
But I noticed Johnts helt on him
With a' extry lovin' grip,
And the men-folks gethered round him
In most warmest pardership!

That's the whole mess, grease-and-dopin'!
Johnt's safe was saved--,
But the lock was found sprung open,
And the inside caved.
Was no trial-- ner no jury--

Ner no jedge ner court-house-click--.
Circumstances alters cases
Down on Wriggle Crick!

James Whitcomb Riley

Dream

Because her eyes were far too deep
And holy for a laugh to leap
Across the brink where sorrow tried
To drown within the amber tide;
Because the looks, whose ripples kissed
The trembling lids through tender mist,
Were dazzled with a radiant gleam--
Because of this I called her 'Dream.'

Because the roses growing wild
About her features when she smiled
Were ever dewed with tears that fell
With tenderness ineffable;
Because her lips might spill a kiss
That, dripping in a world like this,
Would tincture death's myrrh-bitter stream
To sweetness--so I called her 'Dream.'

Because I could not understand
The magic touches of a hand
That seemed, beneath her strange control,
To smooth the plumage of the soul
And calm it, till, with folded wings,
It half forgot its flutterings,
And, nestled in her palm, did seem
To trill a song that called her 'Dream.'

Because I saw her, in a sleep
As dark and desolate and deep
And fleeting as the taunting night
That flings a vision of delight
To some lorn martyr as he lies
In slumber ere the day he dies--
Because she vanished like a gleam
Of glory, do I call her 'Dream.'

James Whitcomb Riley

Dreamer, Say

Dreamer, say, will you dream for me
A wild sweet dream of a foreign land,
Whose border sips of a foaming sea
With lips of coral and silver sand;
Where warm winds loll on the shady deeps,
Or lave themselves in the tearful mist
The great wild wave of the breaker weeps
O'er crags of opal and amethyst?

Dreamer, say, will you dream a dream
Of tropic shades in the lands of shine,
Where the lily leans o'er an amber stream
That flows like a rill of wasted wine,--
Where the palm-trees, lifting their shields of green,
Parry the shafts of the Indian sun
Whose splintering vengeance falls between
The reeds below where the waters run?

Dreamer, say, will you dream of love
That lives in a land of sweet perfume,
Where the stars drip down from the skies above
In molten spatters of bud and bloom?
Where never the weary eyes are wet,
And never a sob in the balmy air,
And only the laugh of the paroquet
Breaks the sleep of the silence there?

James Whitcomb Riley

Dream-March

'Wasn't it a funny dream!--perfectly bewild'rin'!--
Last night, and night before, and night before that,
Seemed like I saw the march o' regiments o' children,
Marching to the robin's fife and cricket's rat-ta-tat!
Lily-banners overhead, with the dew upon 'em,
On flashed the little army, as with sword and flame;
Like the buzz o' bumble-wings, with the honey on 'em,
Came an eerie, cheery chant, chiming as it came:--

Where go the children? Travelling! Travelling
Where go the children, travelling ahead
Some go to kindergarten; some go to day-school
Some go to night-school; and some go to bed!

Smooth roads or rough roads, warm or winter weather,
On go the children, tow-head and brown,
Brave boys and brave girls, rank and file together,
Marching out of Morning-Land, over dale and down:

Some go a-gypsying out in country places--
Out through the orchards, with blossoms on the boughs
Wild, sweet, and pink and white as their own glad faces;
And some go, at evening, calling home the cows.

Where go the children? Travelling! Travelling
Where go the children, travelling ahead
_Some go to foreign wars, and camps by the firelight--
Some go to glory so; and some go to bed!

Some go through grassy lanes leading to the city--
Thinner grow the green trees and thicker grows the dust;
Ever, though, to little people any path is pretty
So it leads to newer lands, as they know it must.
Some go to singing less; some go to list'ning;

Some go to thinking over ever-nobler themes;
Some go anhungered, but ever bravely whistling,
Turning never home again only in their dreams.

Where go the children? Travelling! Travelling
Where go the children, travelling ahead
Some go to conquer things; some go to try them
Some go to dream them; and some go to bed!

James Whitcomb Riley

Dusk

The frightened herds of clouds across the sky
Trample the sunshine down, and chase the day
Into the dusky forest-lands of gray
And sombre twilight. Far and faint, and high,
The wild goose trails his harrow, with a cry
Sad as the wail of some poor castaway
Who sees a vessel drifting far astray
Of his last hope, and lays him down to die.
The children, riotous from school, grow bold
And quarrel with the wind whose angry gust
Plucks off the summer-hat, and flaps the fold
Of many a crimson cloak, and twirls the dust
In spiral shapes grotesque, and dims the gold
Of gleaming tresses with the blur of rust.

James Whitcomb Riley

Elizabeth

May 1, 1891.

I.

Elizabeth! Elizabeth!
The first May-morning whispereth
Thy gentle name in every breeze
That lispeth through the young-leaved trees,
New raimented in white and green
Of bloom and leaf to crown thee queen;--
And, as in odorous chorus, all
The orchard-blossoms sweetly call
Even as a singing voice that saith
Elizabeth! Elizabeth!

II.

Elizabeth! Lo, lily-fair,
In deep, cool shadows of thy hair,
Thy face maintaineth its repose.--
Is it, O sister of the rose,
So better, sweeter, blooming thus
Than in this briery world with us?--
Where frost o'ertaketh, and the breath
Of biting winter harrieth
With sleeted rains and blighting snows
All fairest blooms--Elizabeth!

III.

Nay, then!--So reign, Elizabeth,
Crowned, in thy May-day realm of death!
Put forth the scepter of thy love
In every star-tipped blossom of
The grassy dais of thy throne!
Sadder are we, thus left alone,
But gladder they that thrill to see
Thy mother's rapture, greeting thee.
Bereaved are we by life--not death--

Elizabeth! Elizabeth!

James Whitcomb Riley

Elmer Brown

Awf'lest boy in this-here town
Er anywheres is Elmer Brown!
He'll mock you--yes, an' strangers, too,
An' make a face an' yell at you,--
'_Here's_ the way _you_ look!'

Yes, an' wunst in School one day,
An' Teacher's lookin' wite that way,
He helt his slate, an' hide his head,
An' maked a face at _her_, an' said,--
'_Here's_ the way _you_ look!'

An' sir! when Rosie Wheeler smile
One morning at him 'crosst the aisle,
He twist his face all up, an' black
His nose wiv ink, an' whisper back,--
'_Here's_ the way _you_ look!'

Wunst when his Aunt's all dressed to call,
An' kiss him good-bye in the hall,
An' latch the gate an' start away,
He holler out to her an' say,--
'_Here's_ the way _you_ look!'

An' when his Pa he read out loud
The speech he maked, an' feel so proud
It's in the paper--Elmer's Ma
She ketched him--wite behind his Pa,--
'_Here's_ the way _you_ look!'

Nen when his Ma she slip an' take
Him in the other room an' shake
Him good! w'y, he don't care--no-_sir_!--
He ist look up an' laugh at her,--

'_Here's_ the way _you_ look!'

James Whitcomb Riley

Even Song

Lay away the story,--
Though the theme is sweet,
There's a lack of something yet,
Leaves it incomplete:--
There's a nameless yearning--
Strangely undefined--
For a story sweeter still
Than the written kind.

Therefore read no longer--
I've no heart to hear
But just something you make up,
O my mother dear.--
With your arms around me,
Hold me, folded-eyed,--
Only let your voice go on--
I'll be satisfied.

James Whitcomb Riley

Extremes

I

A little boy once played so loud
That the Thunder, up in a thunder-cloud,
Said, 'Since I can't be heard, why, then
I'll never, never thunder again!'

II

And a little girl once kept so still
That she heard a fly on the window-sill
Whisper and say to a lady-bird,--
'She's the stilliest child I ever heard!'

James Whitcomb Riley

Fame

I

Once, in a dream, I saw a man
With haggard face and tangled hair,
And eyes that nursed as wild a care
As gaunt Starvation ever can;
And in his hand he held a wand
Whose magic touch gave life and thought
Unto a form his fancy wrought
And robed with coloring so grand,
It seemed the reflex of some child
Of Heaven, fair and undefiled--
A face of purity and love--
To woo him into worlds above:
And as I gazed with dazzled eyes,
A gleaming smile lit up his lips
As his bright soul from its eclipse
Went flashing into Paradise.
Then tardy Fame came through the door
And found a picture--nothing more.

II

And once I saw a man, alone,
In abject poverty, with hand
Uplifted o'er a block of stone
That took a shape at his command
And smiled upon him, fair and good--
A perfect work of womanhood,
Save that the eyes might never weep,
Nor weary hands be crossed in sleep,
Nor hair that fell from crown to wrist,
Be brushed away, caressed and kissed.
And as in awe I gazed on her,
I saw the sculptor's chisel fall--
I saw him sink, without a moan,
Sink lifeless at the feet of stone,
And lie there like a worshiper.
Fame crossed the threshold of the hall,

And found a statue--that was all.

III

And once I saw a man who drew
A gloom about him like a cloak,
And wandered aimlessly. The few
Who spoke of him at all, but spoke
Disparagingly of a mind
The Fates had faultily designed:
Too indolent for modern times--
Too fanciful, and full of whims--
For, talking to himself in rhymes,
And scrawling never-heard-of hymns,
The idle life to which he clung
Was worthless as the songs he sung!
I saw him, in my vision, filled
With rapture o'er a spray of bloom
The wind threw in his lonely room;
And of the sweet perfume it spilled
He drank to drunkenness, and flung
His long hair back, and laughed and sung
And clapped his hands as children do
At fairy tales they listen to,
While from his flying quill there dripped
Such music on his manuscript
That he who listens to the words
May close his eyes and dream the birds
Are twittering on every hand
A language he can understand.
He journeyed on through life, unknown,
Without one friend to call his own;
He tired. No kindly hand to press
The cooling touch of tenderness
Upon his burning brow, nor lift
To his parched lips God's freest gift--
No sympathetic sob or sigh
Of trembling lips--no sorrowing eye
Looked out through tears to see him die.
And Fame her greenest laurels brought
To crown a head that heeded not.

And this is Fame! A thing, indeed,
That only comes when least the need:
The wisest minds of every age
The book of life from page to page
Have searched in vain; each lesson conned
Will promise it the page beyond--
Until the last, when dusk of night
Falls over it, and reason's light
Is smothered by that unknown friend
Who signs his nom de plume, The End

James Whitcomb Riley

Farmer Whipple--Bachelor

It's a mystery to see me--a man o' fifty-four,
Who's lived a cross old bachelor fer thirty year' and more--
A-lookin' glad and smilin'! And they's none o' you can say
That you can guess the reason why I feel so good to-day!

I must tell you all about it! But I'll have to deviate
A little in beginnin', so's to set the matter straight
As to how it comes to happen that I never took a wife--
Kindo' 'crawfish' from the Present to the Springtime of my life!

I was brought up in the country: Of a family of five--
Three brothers and a sister--I'm the only one alive,--
Fer they all died little babies; and 'twas one o' Mother's ways,
You know, to want a daughter; so she took a girl to raise.

The sweetest little thing she was, with rosy cheeks, and fat--
We was little chunks o' shavers then about as high as that!
But someway we sort a' SUITED-like! and Mother she'd declare
She never laid her eyes on a more lovin' pair

Than WE was! So we growed up side by side fer thirteen year',
And every hour of it she growed to me more dear!--
W'y, even Father's dyin', as he did, I do believe
Warn't more affectin' to me than it was to see her grieve!

I was then a lad o' twenty; and I felt a flash o' pride
In thinkin' all depended on ME now to pervide
Fer Mother and fer Mary; and I went about the place
With sleeves rolled up--and workin', with a mighty smilin'
face.--

Fer SOMEPIN' ELSE was workin'! but not a word I said
Of a certain sort o' notion that was runnin' through my head,--
'Some day I'd maybe marry, and a BROTHER'S love was one
Thing--a LOVER'S was another!' was the way the notion run!

I remember onc't in harvest, when the 'cradle-in' ' was done,
(When the harvest of my summers mounted up to twenty-one),
I was ridin' home with Mary at the closin' o' the day--

A-chawin' straws and thinkin', in a lover's lazy way!

And Mary's cheeks was burnin' like the sunset down the lane:
I noticed she was thinkin', too, and ast her to explain.
Well--when she turned and KISSED ME, WITH HER ARMS AROUND
ME--LAW!
I'd a bigger load o' Heaven than I had a load o' straw!

I don't p'tend to learnin', but I'll tell you what's a fac',
They's a mighty truthful sayin' somers in a' almanac--
Er SOMERS--'bout 'puore happiness'--perhaps some folks'll laugh
At the idy--'only lastin' jest two seconds and a half.'--

But it's jest as true as preachin'!--fer that was a SISTER'S
kiss,
And a sister's lovin' confidence a-tellin' to me this:--
'SHE was happy, BEIN' PROMISED TO THE SON O' FARMER BROWN.'--
And my feelin's struck a pardnership with sunset and went down!

I don't know HOW I acted, and I don't know WHAT I said,--
Fer my heart seemed jest a-turnin' to an ice-cold lump o' lead;
And the hosses kind o'glimmered before me in the road,
And the lines fell from my fingers--And that was all I knowed--

Fer--well, I don't know HOW long--They's a dim rememberence
Of a sound o' snortin' horses, and a stake-and-ridered fence
A-whizzin' past, and wheat-sheaves a-dancin' in the air,
And Mary screamin' 'Murder!' and a-runnin' up to where

I was layin' by the roadside, and the wagon upside down
A-leanin' on the gate-post, with the wheels a-whirlin' roun'!
And I tried to raise and meet her, but I couldn't, with a vague
Sort o' notion comin' to me that I had a broken leg.

Well, the women nussed me through it; but many a time I'd sigh
As I'd keep a-gittin' better instid o' goin' to die,
And wonder what was left ME worth livin' fer below,
When the girl I loved was married to another, don't you know!

And my thoughts was as rebellious as the folks was good and kind
When Brown and Mary married--Railyly must 'a' been my MIND
Was kind o' out o' kilter!--fer I hated Brown, you see,

Worse'n PIZEN--and the feller whittled crutches out fer ME--

And done a thousand little ac's o' kindness and respec'--
And me a-wishin' all the time that I could break his neck!
My relief was like a mourner's when the funeral is done
When they moved to Illinois in the Fall o' Forty-one.

Then I went to work in airnest--I had nothin' much in view
But to drownd out rickollections--and it kep' me busy, too!
But I slowly thrived and prospered, tel Mother used to say
She expected yit to see me a wealthy man some day.

Then I'd think how little MONEY was, compared to happiness--
And who'd be left to use it when I died I couldn't guess!
But I've still kep' speculatin' and a-gainin' year by year,
Tel I'm payin' half the taxes in the county, mighty near!

Well!--A year ago er better, a letter comes to hand
Astin' how I'd like to dicker fer some Illinois land--
'The feller that had owned it,' it went ahead to state,
'Had jest deceased, insolvent, leavin' chance to speculate,'--

And then it closed by sayin' that I'd 'better come and see.'--
I'd never been West, anyhow--a'most too wild fer ME,
I'd allus had a notion; but a lawyer here in town
Said I'd find myself mistakend when I come to look around.

So I bids good-by to Mother, and I jumps aboard the train,
A-thinkin' what I'd bring her when I come back home again--
And ef she'd had an idy what the present was to be,
I think it's more'n likely she'd 'a' went along with me!

Cars is awful tejus ridin', fer all they go so fast!
But finally they called out my stoppin'-place at last:
And that night, at the tavern, I dreamp' I was a train
O' cars, and SKEERED at somepin', runnin' down a country lane!

Well, in the morning airly--after huntin' up the man--
The lawyer who was wantin' to swap the piece o' land--
We started fer the country; and I ast the history
Of the farm--its former owner--and so forth, etcetery!

And--well--it was interESTin'--I su'prised him, I suppose,
By the loud and frequent manner in which I blowed my nose!--
But his su'prise was greater, and it made him wonder more,
When I kissed and hugged the widdler when she met us at the
door!--

IT WAS MARY: . . . They's a feelin' a-hidin' down in here--
Of course I can't explain it, ner ever make it clear.--
It was with us in that meetin', I don't want you to fergit!
And it makes me kind o'nervous when I think about it yit!

I BOUGHT that farm, and DEEDED it, afore I left the town
With 'title clear to mansions in the skies,' to Mary Brown!
And fu'thermore, I took her and the CHILDERN--fer you see,
They'd never seed their Grandma--and I fetched 'em home with me.

So NOW you've got an idy why a man o' fifty-four,
Who's lived a cross old bachelor fer thirty year' and more
Is a-lookin' glad and smilin'!--And I've jest come into town
To git a pair o' license fer to MARRY Mary Brown.

James Whitcomb Riley

Father William

A NEW VERSION BY LEE O. HARRIS AND JAMES
WHITCOMB RILEY

'You are old, Father William, and though one would think
All the veins in your body were dry,
Yet the end of your nose is red as a pink;
I beg your indulgence, but why?'

'You see,' Father William replied, 'in my youth--
'Tis a thing I must ever regret--
It worried me so to keep up with the truth
That my nose has a flush on it yet.'

'You are old,' said the youth, 'and I grieve to detect
A feverish gleam in your eye;
Yet I'm willing to give you full time to reflect.
Now, pray, can you answer me why?'

'Alas,' said the sage, 'I was tempted to choose
Me a wife in my earlier years,
And the grief, when I think that she didn't refuse,
Has reddened my eyelids with tears.'

'You are old, Father William,' the young man said,
'And you never touch wine, you declare,
Yet you sleep with your feet at the head of the bed;
Now answer me that if you dare.'

'In my youth,' said the sage, 'I was told it was true,
That the world turned around in the night;
I cherished the lesson, my boy, and I knew
That at morning my feet would be right.'

'You are old,' said the youth, 'and it grieved me to note,
As you recently fell through the door,
That 'full as a goose' had been chalked on your coat;
Now answer me that I implore.'

'My boy,' said the sage, 'I have answered you fair,

While you stuck to the point in dispute,
But this is a personal matter, and there
Is my answer--the toe of my boot.'

James Whitcomb Riley

Find The Favorite

Our three cats is Maltese cats,
An' they's two that's white,--
An' bofe of 'em's _deef_--an' that's
'Cause their _eyes_ ain't right.--

Uncle say that _Huxley_ say
Eyes of _white_ Maltese--
When they don't match thataway--
They're deaf as you please!

Girls, they like our white cats best,
'Cause they're white as snow,
Yes, an' look the stylishest--
But they're deaf, you know!

They don't know their names, an' don't
Hear us when we call
'Come in, Nick an' Finn!--they won't
Come fer us at all!

But our _other_ cat, _he_ knows
Mister Nick an' Finn,--
Mowg's _his_ name,--an' when _he_ goes
Fer 'em, they come in!

Mowgli's _all_ his name--the same
Me an' Muvver took
Like the Wolf-Child's _other_ name,
In 'The Jungul Book.'

I bet Mowg's the smartest cat
In the world!--_He's_ not
White, but mousy-plush, with that
Smoky gloss he's got!

All's got little bells to ring,
Round their neck; but none
Only Mowg _knows_ anything--
He's the only one!

I ist 'spect sometimes he hate
White cats' stupid ways:--
He won't hardly 'sociate
With 'em, lots o' days!

Mowg wants in where _we_ air,--well,
He'll ist take his paw
An' ist ring an' ring his bell
There till me er Ma

Er _some_body lets him in
Nen an' shuts the door.--
An', when he wants out ag'in,
Nen he'll ring some more.

Ort to hear our Katy tell!
She sleeps 'way up-stairs;
An' last night she hear Mowg's bell
Ringin' round _some_wheres...

Trees grows by her winder.--So,
She lean out an' see
Mowg up there, 'way out, you know,
In the clingstone-tree;--

An'-sir! he ist _hint_ an' _ring_,--
Till she ketch an' plat
Them limbs;--nen he crawl an' spring
In where Katy's at!

James Whitcomb Riley

Floretty's Musical Contribution

All seemed delighted, though the elders more,
Of course, than were the children.--Thus, before
Much interchange of mirthful compliment,
The story-teller said _his_ stories 'went'
(Like a bad candle) _best_ when they went _out_,--
And that some sprightly music, dashed about,
Would _wholly_ quench his 'glimmer,' and inspire
Far brighter lights.

And, answering this desire,
The flutist opened, in a rapturous strain
Of rippling notes--a perfect April-rain
Of melody that drenched the senses through;--
Then--gentler--gentler--as the dusk sheds dew,
It fell, by velvety, staccatoed halts,
Swooning away in old 'Von Weber's Waltz.'
Then the young ladies sang 'Isle of the Sea'--
In ebb and flow and wave so billowy,--
Only with quavering breath and folded eyes
The listeners heard, buoyed on the fall and rise
Of its insistent and exceeding stress
Of sweetness and ecstatic tenderness ...
With lifted finger _yet_, Remembrance--List!--
'_Beautiful isle of the sea!_' wells in a mist
Of tremulous ...

... After much whispering
Among the children, Alex came to bring
Some kind of _letter_--as it seemed to be--
To Cousin Rufus. This he carelessly
Unfolded--reading to himself alone,--
But, since its contents became, later, known,
And no one '_plagued_ so _awful_ bad,' the same
May here be given--of course without full name,
Fac-simile, or written kink or curl
Or clue. It read:--

'Wild Roved an indian Girl
Brite al Floretty'

deer freind
I now take
this These means to send that _Song_ to you & make
my Promus good to you in the Regards
Of doing What i Promust afterwards,
the _notes_ & _Words_ is both here _Printed_ SOS
you *kin* can git _uncle Mart_ to read you *them* those
& cousin Rufus you can git to _Play_
the _notes_ fur you on eny Plezunt day
His Legul Work aint *Pressin* Pressing.
Ever thine
As shore as the Vine
doth the Stump intwine
thou art my Lump of Sackkerrine
Rinaldo Rinaldine
the Pirut in Captivity.

... There dropped
Another square scrap.--But the hand was stopped
That reached for it--Floretty suddenly
Had set a firm foot on her property--
Thinking it was the _letter_, not the _song_,--
But blushing to discover she was wrong,
When, with all gravity of face and air,
Her precious letter _handed_ to her there
By Cousin Rufus left her even more
In apprehension than she was before.
But, testing his unwavering, kindly eye,
She seemed to put her last suspicion by,
And, in exchange, handed the song to him.--

A page torn from a song-book: Small and dim
Both notes and words were--but as plain as day
They seemed to him, as he began to play--
And plain to _all_ the singers,--as he ran
An airy, warbling prelude, then began
Singing and swinging in so blithe a strain,
That every voice rang in the old refrain:
From the beginning of the song, clean through,
Floretty's features were a study to
The flutist who 'read _notes_' so readily,
Yet read so little of the mystery

Of that face of the girl's.--Indeed one thing
Bewildered him quite into worrying,
And that was, noticing, throughout it all,
The Hired Man shrinking closer to the wall,
She ever backing toward him through the throng
Of barricading children--till the song
Was ended, and at last he saw her near
Enough to reach and take him by the ear
And pinch it just a pang's worth of her ire
And leave it burning like a coal of fire.
He noticed, too, in subtle pantomime
She seemed to dust him off, from time to time;
And when somebody, later, asked if she
Had never heard the song before--'What! me?'
She said--then blushed again and smiled,--
'I've knowed that song sence Adam was a child!--
It's jes a joke o' this-here man's.--He's learned
To read and write a little, and its turned
His fool-head some--That's all!

And then some one
Of the loud-wrangling boys said--' Course they's none
No more, these days!--They's Fairies ust to be,
But they're all dead, a hunderd years!' said he.

'Well, there's where you're mustakened!--in reply
They heard Bud's voice, pitched sharp and thin and high.--

'An' how you goin' to prove it!

'Well, I kin!'
Said Bud, with emphasis,--'They's one lives in
Our garden--and I see 'im wunst, wiv my
Own eyes--one time I did.'

' Oh, what a lie_!'
--" Sh! "

'Well, nen,' said the skeptic--seeing there
The older folks attracted--'Tell us where
You saw him, an' all 'bout him!'

'Yes, my son.--
If you tell 'stories,' you may tell us one,'
The smiling father said, while Uncle Mart,
Behind him, winked at Bud, and pulled apart
His nose and chin with comical grimace--
Then sighed aloud, with sanctimonious face,--
"_How good and comely it is to see
Children and parents in friendship agree!_"--
You fire away, Bud, on your Fairy-tale--
Your _Uncle's_ here to back you!

Somewhat pale,
And breathless as to speech, the little man
Gathered himself. And thus his story ran.

James Whitcomb Riley

Fool-Youngens

Me an' Bert an' Minnie-Belle
Knows a joke, an' we won't tell!
No, we don't--'cause we don't know
Why we got to laughin' so;
But we got to laughin' so,
'We ist kep' a-laughin'.

Wind wuz blowin' in the tree--
An' wuz only ist us three
Playin' there; an' ever' one
Ketched each other, like we done,
Squintin' up there at the sun
Like we wuz a-laughin'.

Nothin' funny anyway;
But I laughed, an' so did they--
An' we all three laughed, an' nen
Squint' our eyes an' laugh' again:
Ner we didn't ist _p'ten'_--
We wuz _shore-'nough_ laughin'.

'We ist laugh' an' laugh', tel Bert
Say he _can't_ quit an' it hurt.
Nen I _howl_, an' Minnie-Belle
She tear up the grass a spell
An' ist stop her yeers an' _yell_
Like she'd _die_ a-laughin'.

Never sich fool-youngens yit!
Nothin' funny,--not a bit!--
But we laugh' so; tel we whoop'
Purt'-nigh like we have the croup--
All so hoarse we'd wheeze an' whoop
An' ist _choke_ a-laughin'.

James Whitcomb Riley

For You

For you, I could forget the gay
Delirium of merriment,
And let my laughter die away
In endless silence of content.
I could forget, for your dear sake,
The utter emptiness and ache
Of every loss I ever knew.--
What could I not forget for you?

I could forget the just deserts
Of mine own sins, and so erase
The tear that burns, the smile that hurts,
And all that mars or masks my face.
For your fair sake I could forget
The bonds of life that chafe and fret,
Nor care if death were false or true.--
What could I not forget for you?

What could I not forget? Ah me!
One thing, I know, would still abide
Forever in my memory,
Though all of love were lost beside--
I yet would feel how first the wine
Of your sweet lips made fools of mine
Until they sung, all drunken through--
'What could I not forget for you?'

James Whitcomb Riley

Friday Afternoon

To William Morris Pierson
[1868-1870]

Of the wealth of facts and fancies
That our memories may recall,
The old school-day romances
Are the dearest, after all!--.
When some sweet thought revises
The half-forgotten tune
That opened 'Exercises'
On 'Friday Afternoon.'

We seem to hear the clicking
Of the pencil and the pen,
And the solemn, ceaseless ticking
Of the timepiece ticking then;
And we note the watchful master,
As he waves the warning rod,
With our own heart beating faster
Than the boy's who threw the wad.

Some little hand uplifted,
And the creaking of a shoe:--
A problem left unsifted
For the teacher's hand to do:
The murmured hum of learning--
And the flutter of a book;
The smell of something burning,
And the school's inquiring look.

The bashful boy in blushes;
And the girl, with glancing eyes,
Who hides her smiles, and hushes
The laugh about to rise,--
Then, with a quick invention,
Assumes a serious face,
To meet the words, 'Attention!
Every scholar in his place!'

The opening song, page 20.--
Ah! dear old 'Golden Wreath,'
You willed your sweets in plenty;
And some who look beneath
The leaves of Time will linger,
And loving tears will start,
As Fancy trails her finger
O'er the index of the heart.

'Good News from Home'--We hear it
Welling tremulous, yet clear
And holy as the spirit
Of the song we used to hear--
'Good news for me' (A throbbing
And an aching melody)--
'Has come across the'--(sobbing,
Yea, and salty) 'dark blue sea!'

Or the paeon 'Scotland's burning!'
With its mighty surge and swell
Of chorus, still returning
To its universal yell--
Till we're almost glad to drop to
Something sad and full of pain--
And 'Skip verse three,' and stop, too,
Ere our hearts are broke again.

Then 'the big girls' compositions,
With their doubt, and hope, and glow
Of heart and face,--conditions
Of 'the big boys'--even so,--
When themes of 'Spring,' and 'Summer'
And of 'Fall,' and 'Winter-time'
Droop our heads and hold us dumber
Than the sleigh-bell's fancied chime.

Elocutionary science--
(Still in changeless infancy!--
With its 'Cataline's Defiance,'
And 'The Banner of the Free':
Or, lured from Grandma's attic,
A ramshackle 'rocker' there,

Adds a skreek of the dramatic
To the poet's 'Old Arm-Chair.'

Or the 'Speech of Logan' shifts us
From the pathos, to the fire;
And Tell (with Gessler) lifts us
Many noble notches higher.--
Till a youngster, far from sunny,
With sad eyes of watery blue,
Winds up with something 'funny,'
Like 'Cock-a-doodle-do!'

Then a dialogue--selected
For its realistic worth:--
The Cruel Boy detected
With a turtle turned to earth
Back downward; and, in pleading,
The Good Boy--strangely gay
At such a sad proceeding--
Says, 'Turn him over, pray!'

So the exercises taper
Through gradations of delight
To the reading of 'The Paper,'
Which is entertaining--quite!
For it goes ahead and mentions
'If a certain Mr. O.
Has serious intentions
That he ought to tell her so.'

It also 'Asks permission
To intimate to 'John'
The dubious condition
Of the ground he's standing on';
And, dropping the suggestion
To 'mind what he's about,'
It stuns him with the question:
'Does his mother know he's out?'

And among the contributions
To this 'Academic Press'
Are 'Versified Effusions'

By--'Our lady editress'--
Which fact is proudly stated
By the CHIEF of the concern,--
'Though the verse communicated
Bears the pen-name 'Fanny Fern.' '

.
When all has been recited,
And the teacher's bell is heard,
And visitors, invited,
Have dropped a kindly word,
A hush of holy feeling
Falls down upon us there,
As though the day were kneeling,
With the twilight for the prayer.

.
Midst the wealth of facts and fancies
That our memories may recall,
Thus the old school-day romances
Are the dearest, after all!--
When some sweet thought revises
The half-forgotten tune
That opened 'Exercises,'
On 'Friday Afternoon.'

James Whitcomb Riley

From The Headboard Of A Grave In Paraguay

A troth, and a grief, and a blessing,
Disguised them and came this way--,
And one was a promise, and one was a doubt,
And one was a rainy day.

And they met betimes with this maiden,
And the promise it spake and lied,
And the doubt it gibbered and hugged itself,
And the rainy day-- she died.

James Whitcomb Riley

George Mullen's Confession

For the sake of guilty conscience, and the heart that ticks the
time

Of the clockworks of my nature, I desire to say that I'm
A weak and sinful creature, as regards my daily walk
The last five years and better. It ain't worth while to talk--

I've been too mean to tell it! I've been so hard, you see,
And full of pride, and--onry--now there's the word for me--
Just onry--and to show you, I'll give my history
With vital points in question, and I think you'll all agree.

I was always stiff and stubborn since I could recollect,
And had an awful temper, and never would reflect;
And always into trouble--I remember once at school
The teacher tried to flog me, and I reversed that rule.

O I was bad I tell you! And it's a funny move
That a fellow wild as I was could ever fall in love;
And it's a funny notion that an animal like me,
Under a girl's weak fingers was as tame as tame could be!

But it's so, and sets me thinking of the easy way she had
Of cooling down my temper--though I'd be fighting mad.
'My Lion Queen' I called her--when a spell of mine occurred
She'd come in a den of feelings and quell them with a word.

I'll tell you how she loved me--and what her people thought:
When I asked to marry Annie they said 'they reckoned not--
That I cut too many didoes and monkey-shines to suit
Their idea of a son-in-law, and I could go, to boot!'

I tell you that thing riled me! Why, I felt my face turn white,
And my teeth shut like a steel trap, and the fingers of my right
Hand pained me with their pressure--all the rest's a mystery
Till I heard my Annie saying--'I'm going, too, you see.'

We were coming through the gateway, and she wavered for a spell
When she heard her mother crying and her raving father yell
That she wa'n't no child of his'n--like an actor in a play

We saw at Independence, coming through the other day.

Well! that's the way we started. And for days and weeks and months

And even years we journeyed on, regretting never once
Of starting out together upon the path of life--
Akind o' sort o' husband, but a mighty loving wife,--

And the cutest little baby--little Grace--I see her now
A-standin' on the pig-pen as her mother milked the cow--
And I can hear her shouting--as I stood unloading straw,--
'I'm ain't as big as papa, but I'm biggerest'n ma.'

Now folks that never married don't seem to understand
That a little baby's language is the sweetest ever planned--
Why, I tell you it's pure music, and I'll just go on to say
That I sometimes have a notion that the angels talk that way!

There's a chapter in this story I'd be happy to destroy;
I could burn it up before you with a mighty sight of joy;
But I'll go ahead and give it--not in detail, no, my friend,
For it takes five years of reading before you find the end.

My Annie's folks relented--at least, in some degree;
They sent one time for Annie, but they didn't send for me.
The old man wrote the message with a heart as hot and dry
As a furnace--'Annie Mullen, come and see your mother die.'

I saw the slur intended--why I fancied I could see
The old man shoot the insult like a poison dart at me;
And in that heat of passion I swore an inward oath
That if Annie pleased her father she could never please us both.

I watched her--dark and sullen--as she hurried on her shawl;
I watched her--calm and cruel, though I saw her tear-drops fall;
I watched her--cold and heartless, though I heard her moaning,
call
For mercy from high Heaven--and I smiled throughout it all.

Why even when she kissed me, and her tears were on my brow,
As she murmured, 'George, forgive me--I must go to mother now!'
Such hate there was within me that I answered not at all,

But calm, and cold and cruel, I smiled throughout it all.

But a shadow in the doorway caught my eye, and then the face
Full of innocence and sunshine of little baby Grace.
And I snatched her up and kissed her, and I softened through and
through
For a minute when she told me 'I must kiss her muvver too.'

I remember, at the starting, how I tried to freeze again
As I watched them slowly driving down the little crooked lane--
When Annie shouted something that ended in a cry,
And how I tried to whistle and it fizzled in a sigh.

I remember running after, with a glimmer in my sight--
Pretending I'd discovered that the traces wasn't right;
And the last that I remember, as they disappeared from view,
Was little Grace a-calling, 'I see papa! Howdy-do!'

And left alone to ponder, I again took up my hate
For the old man who would chuckle that I was desolate;
And I mouthed my wrongs in mutters till my pride called up the
pain
His last insult had given me--until I smiled again

Till the wild beast in my nature was raging in the den--
With no one now to quell it, and I wrote a letter then
Full of hissing things, and heated with so hot a heat of hate
That my pen flashed out black lightning at a most terrific rate.

I wrote that 'she had wronged me when she went away from me--
Though to see her dying mother 'twas her father's victory,
And a woman that could waver when her husband's pride was rent
Was no longer worthy of it.' And I shut the house and went.

To tell of my long exile would be of little good--
Though I couldn't half-way tell it, and I wouldn't if I could!
I could tell of California--of a wild and vicious life;
Of trackless plains, and mountains, and the Indian's
scalping-knife.

I could tell of gloomy forests howling wild with threats of
death;

I could tell of fiery deserts that have scorched me with their
breath;
I could tell of wretched outcasts by the hundreds, great and
small,
And could claim the nasty honor of the greatest of them all.

I could tell of toil and hardship; and of sickness and disease,
And hollow-eyed starvation, but I tell you, friend, that these
Are trifles in comparison with what a fellow feels
With that bloodhound, Remorsefulness, forever at his heels.

I remember--worn and weary of the long, long years of care,
When the frost of time was making early harvest of my hair--
I remember, wrecked and hopeless of a rest beneath the sky,
My resolve to quit the country, and to seek the East, and die.

I remember my long journey, like a dull, oppressive dream,
Across the empty prairies till I caught the distant gleam
Of a city in the beauty of its broad and shining stream
On whose bosom, flocked together, float the mighty swans of
steam.

I remember drifting with them till I found myself again
In the rush and roar and rattle of the engine and the train;
And when from my surroundings something spoke of child and wife,
It seemed the train was rumbling through a tunnel in my life.

Then I remember something--like a sudden burst of light--
That don't exactly tell it, but I couldn't tell it right--
A something clinging to me with its arms around my neck--
A little girl, for instance--or an angel, I expect--

For she kissed me, cried and called me 'her dear papa,' and I
felt
My heart was pure virgin gold, and just about to melt--
And so it did--it melted in a mist of gleaming rain
When she took my hand and whispered, 'My mama's on the train.'

There's some things I can dwell on, and get off pretty well,
But the balance of this story I know I couldn't tell;
So I ain't going to try it, for to tell the reason why--
I'm so chicken-hearted lately I'd be certain 'most to cry.

James Whitcomb Riley

Go Winter!

Go, Winter! Go thy ways! We want again
The twitter of the bluebird and the wren;
Leaves ever greener growing, and the shine
Of Summer's sun--not thine.--

Thy sun, which mocks our need of warmth and love
And all the heartening fervencies thereof,
It scarce hath heat enow to warm our thin
Pathetic yearnings in.

So get thee from us! We are cold, God wot,
Even as _thou_ art.--We remember not
How blithe we hailed thy coming.--That was O
Too long--too long ago!

Get from us utterly! Ho! Summer then
Shall spread her grasses where thy snows have been,
And thy last icy footprint melt and mold
In her first marigold.

James Whitcomb Riley

Grandfather Squeers

'My grandfather Squeers,' said The Raggedy Man,
As he solemnly lighted his pipe and began--

'The most indestructible man, for his years,
And the grandest on earth, was my grandfather Squeers!

'He said, when he rounded his three-score-and-ten,
'I've the hang of it now and can do it again!'

'He had frozen his heels so repeatedly, he
Could tell by them just what the weather would be;

'And would laugh and declare, 'while the Almanac would
Most falsely prognosticate, he never could!'

'Such a hale constitution had grandfather Squeers
That, 'though he'd used 'navy' for sixty odd years,

'He still chewed a dime's-worth six days of the week,
While the seventh he passed with a chew in each cheek:

'Then my grandfather Squeers had a singular knack
Of sitting around on the small of his back,

'With his legs like a letter Y stretched o'er the grate
Wherein 'twas his custom to ex-pec-tor-ate.

'He was fond of tobacco in manifold ways,
And would sit on the door-step, of sunshiny days,

'And smoke leaf-tobacco he'd raised strictly for
The pipe he'd used all through The Mexican War.'

And The Raggedy Man said, refilling the bowl
Of his own pipe and leisurely picking a coal

From the stove with his finger and thumb, 'You can see
What a tee-nacious habit he's fastened on me!

'And my grandfather Squeers took a special delight
In pruning his corns every Saturday night

'With a horn-handled razor, whose edge he excused
By saying 'twas one that his grandfather used;

'And, though deeply etched in the haft of the same
Was the ever-euphonious Wostenholm's name,

"Twas my grandfather's custom to boast of the blade
As 'A Seth Thomas razor--the best ever made!'

'No Old Settlers' Meeting, or Pioneers' Fair,
Was complete without grandfather Squeers in the chair

'To lead off the programme by telling folks how
'He used to shoot deer where the Court-House stands now'--

'How 'he felt, of a truth, to live over the past,
When the country was wild and unbroken and vast,

"That the little log cabin was just plenty fine
For himself, his companion, and fambly of nine!--

"When they didn't have even a pump, or a tin,
But drunk surface-water, year out and year in,

"From the old-fashioned gourd that was sweeter, by odds,
Than the goblets of gold at the lips of the gods!"

Then The Raggedy Man paused to plaintively say
It was clockin' along to'rds the close of the day--

And he'd ought to get back to his work on the lawn,--
Then dreamily blubbered his pipe and went on:

'His teeth were imperfect--my grandfather owned
That he couldn't eat oysters unless they were 'boned';

'And his eyes were so weak, and so feeble of sight,
He couldn't sleep with them unless, every night,

'He put on his spectacles--all he possessed,--
Three pairs--with his goggles on top of the rest.

'And my grandfather always, retiring at night,
Blew down the lamp-chimney to put out the light;

'Then he'd curl up on edge like a shaving, in bed,
And puff and smoke pipes in his sleep, it is said:

'And would snore oftentimes as the legends relate,
Till his folks were wrought up to a terrible state,--

'Then he'd snort, and rear up, and roll over; and there,
In the subsequent hush they could hear him chew air.

'And so glaringly bald was the top of his head
That many's the time he has musingly said,

'As his eyes journeyed o'er its reflex in the glass,--
'I must set out a few signs of _Keep Off the Grass!_'

'So remarkably deaf was my grandfather Squeers
That he had to wear lightning-rods over his ears

'To even hear thunder--and oftentimes then
He was forced to request it to thunder again.'

James Whitcomb Riley

Granny

1 Granny's come to our house,
2 And ho! my lawzy-daisy!
3 All the childern round the place
4 Is ist a-runnin' crazy!
5 Fetched a cake fer little Jake,
6 And fetched a pie fer Nanny,
7 And fetched a pear fer all the pack
8 That runs to kiss their Granny!

9 Lucy Ellen's in her lap,
10 And Wade and Silas Walker
11 Both's a-ridin' on her foot,
12 And 'Pollos on the rocker;
13 And Marthy's twins, from Aunt Marinn's,
14 And little Orphant Annie,
15 All's a-eatin' gingerbread
16 And giggle-un at Granny!

17 Tells us all the fairy tales
18 Ever thought er wundered --
19 And 'bundance o' other stories --
20 Bet she knows a hunderd! --
21 Bob's the one fer "Whittington,"
22 And "Golden Locks" fer Fanny!
23 Hear 'em laugh and clap their hands,
24 Listenin' at Granny!

25 "Jack the Giant-Killer" 's good;
26 And "Bean-Stalk" 's another! --
27 So's the one of "Cinderell"
28 And her old godmother; --
29 That-un's best of all the rest --
30 Bestest one of any, --
31 Where the mices scampers home
32 Like we runs to Granny!

33 Granny's come to our house,
34 Ho! my lawzy-daisy!
35 All the childern round the place

36 Is ist a-runnin' crazy!
37 Fetched a cake fer little Jake,
38 And fetched a pie fer Nanny,
39 And fetched a pear fer all the pack
40 That runs to kiss their Granny!

James Whitcomb Riley

Grant At Rest-- August 8, 1885

Sir Launcelot rode overthwart and endlong in a wide forest, and held no path but as wild adventure led him... And he returned and came again to his horse, and took off his saddle and his bridle, and let him pasture; and unlaced his helm, and ungirdled his sword, and laid him down to sleep upon his shield before the cross. --Age of Chivalry

Grant

What shall we say of the soldier. Grant,
His sword put by and his great soul free?
How shall we cheer him now or chant
His requiem befittingly?
The fields of his conquest now are seen
Ranged no more with his armed men--
But the rank and file of the gold and green
Of the waving grain is there again.

Though his valiant life is a nation's pride,
And his death heroic and half divine,
And our grief as great as the world is wide,
There breaks in speech but a single line--:
We loved him living, revere him dead--!
A silence then on our lips is laid:
We can say no thing that has not been said,
Nor pray one prayer that has not been prayed.

But a spirit within us speaks: and lo,
We lean and listen to wondrous words
That have a sound as of winds that blow,
And the voice of waters and low of herds;
And we hear, as the song flows on serene,
The neigh of horses, and then the beat
Of hooves that skurry o'er pastures green,
And the patter and pad of a boy's bare feet.

A brave lad, wearing a manly brow,
Knit as with problems of grave dispute,
And a face, like the bloom of the orchard bough,
Pink and pallid, but resolute;

And flushed it grows as the clover-bloom,
And fresh it gleams as the morning dew,
As he reins his steed where the quick quails boom
Up from the grasses he races through.

And ho! As he rides what dreams are his?
And what have the breezes to suggest--?
Do they whisper to him of shells that whiz
O'er fields made ruddy with wrongs redressed?
Does the hawk above him an Eagle float?
Does he thrill and his boyish heart beat high,
Hearing the ribbon about his throat
Flap as a Flag as the winds go by?

And does he dream of the Warrior's fame--
This Western boy in his rustic dress?
For in miniature, this is the man that came
Riding out of the Wilderness--!
The selfsame figure-- the knitted brow--
The eyes full steady-- the lips full mute--
And the face, like the bloom of the orchard bough,
Pink and pallid, but resolute.

Ay, this is the man, with features grim
And stoical as the Sphinx's own,
That heard the harsh guns calling him,
As musical as the bugle blown,
When the sweet spring heavens were clouded o'er
With a tempest, glowering and wild,
And our country's flag bowed down before
Its bursting wrath as a stricken child.

Thus, ready mounted and booted and spurred,
He loosed his bridle and dashed away--!
Like a roll of drums were his hoof-beats heard,
Like the shriek of the fife his charger's neigh!
And over his shoulder and backward blown,
We heard his voice, and we saw the sod
Reel, as our wild steeds chased his own
As though hurled on by the hand of God!

And still, in fancy, we see him ride

In the blood-red front of a hundred frays,
His face set stolid, but glorified
As a knight's of the old Arthurian days:
And victor ever as courtly too,
Gently lifting the vanquished foe,
And staying him with a hand as true
As dealt the deadly avenging blow.

So brighter than all of the cluster of stars
Of the flag enshrouding his form to-day,
His face shines forth from the grime of wars
With a glory that shall not pass away:
He rests at last: he has borne his part
Of salutes and salvos and cheers on cheers--
But O the sobs of his country's heart,
And the driving rain of a nations tears!

James Whitcomb Riley

Gratefully And Affectionately Inscribed To Joel Chandler Harris

You who to the rounded prime
Of a life of toil and stress,
Still have kept the morning-time
Of glad youth in heart and spirit,
So your laugh, as children hear it,
Seems their own, no less,--
Take this book of childish rhyme--
The Book of Joyous Children.

Their first happiness on earth
Here is echoed--their first glee:
Rich, in sooth, the volume's worth--
Not in classic lore, but rich in
The child-sagas of the kitchen;--
Therefore, take from me
To your heart of childish mirth
The Book of Joyous Children.

James Whitcomb Riley

Green Fields And Running Brooks

Ho! green fields and running brooks!
Knotted strings and fishing-hooks
Of the truant, stealing down
Weedy backways of the town.

Where the sunshine overlooks,
By green fields and running brooks,
All intruding guests of chance
With a golden tolerance,

Cooing doves, or pensive pair
Of picnickers, straying there--
By green fields and running brooks,
Sylvan shades and mossy nooks!

And--O Dreamer of the Days,
Murmurer of roundelays
All unsung of words or books,
Sing green fields and running brooks!

James Whitcomb Riley

Griggsby's Station

Pap's got his patent-right, and rich is all creation;
But where's the peace and comfort that we all had before?
Le's go a-visitin' back to Griggsby's Station--
Back where we ust to be so happy and so pore!

The likes of us a-livin' here! It's jest a mortal pity
To see us in this great big house, with cyarpets on the stairs,
And the pump right in the kitchen! And the city! City! City
And nothin' but the city all around us ever'wheres!

Climb clean above the roof and look from the steeple,
And never see a robin, nor a beech or ellow tree!
And right here in ear-shot of at least a thousan' people,
And none that neighbors with us or we want to go and see!

Le's go a-visitin' back to Griggsby's Station--
Back where the latch-strings a-hangin' from the door,
And ever' neighbor round the place is dear as a relation--
Back where we ust to be so happy and so pore!

I want to see the Wiggenses, the whole kit-and-bilin',
A-drivin' up from Shallor Ford to stay the Sunday through;
And I want to see 'em hitchin' at their son-in-law's and pilin'
Out there at 'Lizy Ellen's like they ust to do!

I want to see the piece-quilts the Jones girls is makin';
And I want to pester Laury 'bout their freckled hired hand,
And joke her 'bout the widower she come purt' nigh a-takin',
Till her Pap got his pension 'lowed in time to save his land.

Le's go a-visitin' back to Griggsby's Station--
Back where they's nothin' aggervatin' any more,
Shet away safe in the woods around the old location--
Back where we ust to be so happy and so pore!

I want to see Marindy and he'p her with her sewin',
And hear her talk so lovin' of her man that's dead and gone,
And stand up with Emanuel to show me how he's growin',
And smile as I have saw her 'fore she putt her mournin' on.

And I want to see the Samples, on the old lower eighty,
Where John, our oldest boy, he was tuk and burried-- for
His own sake and Katy's--, and I want to cry with Katy
As she reads all his letters over, writ from The War.

What's in all this grand life and high situation,
And nary pink nor hollyhawk a-bloomin' at the door--?
Le's go a-visitin' back to Griggsby's Station--
Back where we ust to be so happy and so pore!

James Whitcomb Riley

Harlie

Fold the little waxen hands
Lightly. Let your warmest tears
Speak regrets, but never fears,--
Heaven understands!
Let the sad heart, o'er the tomb,
Lift again and burst in bloom
Fragrant with a prayer as sweet
As the lily at your feet.

Bend and kiss the folded eyes--
They are only feigning sleep
While their truant glances peep
Into Paradise.
See, the face, though cold and white,
Holds a hint of some delight
E'en with Death, whose finger-tips
Rest upon the frozen lips.

When, within the years to come,
Vanished echoes live once more--
Pattering footsteps on the floor,
And the sounds of home,--
Let your arms in fancy fold
Little Harlie as of old--
As of old and as he waits
At the City's golden gates.

James Whitcomb Riley

Has She Forgotten?

I.

Has she forgotten? On this very May
We were to meet here, with the birds and bees,
As on that Sabbath, underneath the trees
We strayed among the tombs, and stripped away
The vines from these old granites, cold and gray--
And yet, indeed, not grim enough were they
To stay our kisses, smiles and ecstasies,
Or closer voice-lost vows and rhapsodies.
Has she forgotten--that the May has won
Its promise?--that the bird-songs from the tree
Are sprayed above the grasses as the sun
Might jar the dazzling dew down showeringly?
Has she forgotten life--love--everyone--
Has she forgotten me--forgotten me?

II.

Low, low down in the violets I press
My lips and whisper to her. Does she hear,
And yet hold silence, though I call her dear,
Just as of old, save for the tearfulness
Of the clenched eyes, and the soul's vast distress?
Has she forgotten thus the old caress
That made our breath a quickened atmosphere
That failed nigh unto swooning with the sheer
Delight? Mine arms clutch now this earthen heap
Sodden with tears that flow on ceaselessly
As autumn rains the long, long, long nights weep
In memory of days that used to be,--
Has she forgotten these? And, in her sleep,
Has she forgotten me--forgotten me?

III.

To-night, against my pillow, with shut eyes,
I mean to weld our faces--through the dense
Incalculable darkness make pretense

That she has risen from her reveries
To mate her dreams with mine in marriages
Of mellow palms, smooth faces, and tense ease
Of every longing nerve of indolence,--
Lift from the grave her quiet lips, and stun
My senses with her kisses--drawl the glee
Of her glad mouth, full blithe and tenderly,
Across mine own, forgetful if is done
The old love's awful dawn-time when said we,
'To-day is ours!'.... Ah, Heaven! can it be
She has forgotten me--forgotten me!

James Whitcomb Riley

He And I

Just drifting on together--
He and I--
As through the balmy weather
Of July
Drift two thistle-tufts imbedded
Each in each--by zephyrs wedded--
Touring upward, giddy-headed,
For the sky.

And, veering up and onward,
Do we seem
Forever drifting downward
In a dream,
Where we meet song-birds that know us,
And the winds their kisses blow us,
While the years flow far below us
Like a stream.

And we are happy--very--
He and I--
Aye, even glad and merry
Though on high
The heavens are sometimes shrouded
By the midnight storm, and clouded
Till the pallid moon is crowded
From the sky.

My spirit ne'er expresses
Any choice
But to clothe him with caresses
And rejoice;
And as he laughs, it is in
Such a tone the moonbeams glisten
And the stars come out to listen
To his voice.

And so, whate'er the weather,
He and I,--
With our lives linked thus together,

Float and fly
As two thistle-tufts imbedded
Each in each--by zephyrs wedded--
Touring upward, giddy-headed,
For the sky.

James Whitcomb Riley

He Called Her In

I

He called her in from me and shut the door.
And she so loved the sunshine and the sky!--
She loved them even better yet than I
That ne'er knew dearth of them--my mother dead,
Nature had nursed me in her lap instead:
And I had grown a dark and eerie child
That rarely smiled,
Save when, shut all alone in grasses high,
Looking straight up in God's great lonesome sky
And coaxing Mother to smile back on me.
'Twas lying thus, this fair girl suddenly
Came to me, nestled in the fields beside
A pleasant-seeming home, with doorway wide--
The sunshine beating in upon the floor

Like golden rain.--

O sweet, sweet face above me, turn again
And leave me! I had cried, but that an ache
Within my throat so gripped it I could make
No sound but a thick sobbing. Cowering so,
I felt her light hand laid
Upon my hair--a touch that ne'er before
Had tamed me thus, all soothed and unafraid--
It seemed the touch the children used to know
When Christ was here, so dear it was--so dear,--
At once I loved her as the leaves love dew
In midmost summer when the days are new.
Barely an hour I knew her, yet a curl
Of silken sunshine did she clip for me
Out of the bright May-morning of her hair,
And bound and gave it to me laughingly,
And caught my hands and called me '_Little girl_',
Tiptoeing, as she spoke, to kiss me there!
And I stood dazed and dumb for very stress
Of my great happiness.
She plucked me by the gown, nor saw how mean
The raiment--drew me with her everywhere:

Smothered her face in tufts of grasses green:
Put up her dainty hands and peeped between
Her fingers at the blossoms--crooned and talked
To them in strange, glad whispers, as we walked,--
Said this one was her angel mother-- this,
Her baby-sister--come back, for a kiss,
Clean from the Good-World!--smiled and kissed them, then
Closed her soft eyes and kissed them o'er again.
And so did she beguile me--so we played,--
She was the dazzling Shine--I, the dark Shade--
And we did mingle like to these, and thus,
Together, made
The perfect summer, pure and glorious.
So blent we, till a harsh voice broke upon
Our happiness.--She, startled as a fawn,
Cried, 'Oh, 'tis Father!--all the blossoms gone
From out her cheeks as those from out her grasp.--
Harsher the voice came:--She could only gasp
Affrightedly, 'Good-bye!--good-bye! good-bye!
And lo, I stood alone, with that harsh cry
Ringing a new and unknown sense of shame
Through soul and frame,
And, with wet eyes, repeating o'er and o'er,--
'He called her in from me and shut the door!'

II

He called her in from me and shut the door!
And I went wandering alone again--
So lonely--O so very lonely then,
I thought no little sallow star, alone
In all a world of twilight, e'er had known
Such utter loneliness. But that I wore
Above my heart that gleaming tress of hair
To lighten up the night of my despair,
I think I might have groped into my grave
Nor cared to wave
The ferns above it with a breath of prayer.
And how I hungered for the sweet, sweet face
That bent above me in my hiding-place
That day amid the grasses there beside

Her pleasant home!--'Her _pleasant_ home!' I sighed,
Remembering;--then shut my teeth and feigned
The harsh voice calling _me_,--then clinched my nails
So deeply in my palms, the sharp wounds pained,
And tossed my face toward heaven, as one who pales
In splendid martyrdom, with soul serene,
As near to God as high the guillotine.
And I had _envied_ her? Not that--O no!
But I had longed for some sweet haven so!--
Wherein the tempest-beaten heart might ride
Sometimes at peaceful anchor, and abide
Where those that loved me touched me with their hands,
And looked upon me with glad eyes, and slipped
Smooth fingers o'er my brow, and lulled the strands
Of my wild tresses, as they backward tipped
My yearning face and kissed it satisfied.
Then bitterly I murmured as before,--
'He called her in from me and shut the door!'

III

He called her in from me and shut the door!
After long struggling with my pride and pain--
A weary while it seemed, in which the more
I held myself from her, the greater pain
Was I to look upon her face again;--
At last--at last--half conscious where my feet
Were faring, I stood waist-deep in the sweet
Green grasses there where she
First came to me.--
The very blossoms she had plucked that day,
And, at her father's voice, had cast away,
Around me lay,
Still bright and blooming in these eyes of mine;
And as I gathered each one eagerly,
I pressed it to my lips and drank the wine
Her kisses left there for the honey-bee.
Then, after I had laid them with the tress

Of her bright hair with lingering tenderness,
I, turning, crept on to the hedge that bound

Her pleasant-seeming home--but all around
Was never sign of her!--The windows all
Were blinded; and I heard no rippling fall
Of her glad laugh, nor any harsh voice call;--
But clutching to the tangled grasses, caught
A sound as though a strong man bowed his head
And sobbed alone--unloved--uncomforted!--
And then straightway before
My tearless eyes, all vividly, was wrought
A vision that is with me evermore:--
A little girl that lies asleep, nor hears
Nor heeds not any voice nor fall of tears.--
And I sit singing o'er and o'er and o'er,--
'God called her in from him and shut the door!'

James Whitcomb Riley

Heat-Lightning

There was a curious quiet for a space
Directly following: and in the face
Of one rapt listener pulsed the flush and glow
Of the heat-lightning that pent passions throw
Long ere the crash of speech.--He broke the spell--
The host:--The Traveler's story, told so well,
He said, had wakened there within his breast
A yearning, as it were, to know _the rest_--
That all unwritten sequence that the Lord
Of Righteousness must write with flame and sword,
Some awful session of His patient thought--
Just then it was, his good old mother caught
His blazing eye--so that its fire became
But as an ember--though it burned the same.
It seemed to her, she said, that she had heard
It was the _Heavenly_ Parent never erred,
And not the _earthly_ one that had such grace:
'Therefore, my son,' she said, with lifted face
And eyes, 'let no one dare anticipate
The Lord's intent. While _He_ waits, _we_ will wait'
And with a gust of reverence genuine
Then Uncle Mart was aptly ringing in--

"_If the darkened heavens lower,
Wrap thy cloak around thy form;
Though the tempest rise in power,
God is mightier than the storm!_"

Which utterance reached the restive children all
As something humorous. And then a call
For _him_ to tell a story, or to 'say
A funny piece.' His face fell right away:
He knew no story worthy. Then he must
Declaim for them: In that, he could not trust
His memory. And then a happy thought
Struck some one, who reached in his vest and brought
Some scrappy clippings into light and said
There was a poem of Uncle Mart's he read
Last April in '_The Sentinel_.' He had

It there in print, and knew all would be glad
To hear it rendered by the author.

And,
All reasons for declining at command
Exhausted, the now helpless poet rose
And said: 'I am discovered, I suppose.
Though I have taken all precautions not
To sign my name to any verses wrought
By my transcendent genius, yet, you see,
Fame wrests my secret from me bodily;
So I must needs confess I did this deed
Of poetry red-handed, nor can plead
One whit of unintention in my crime--
My guilt of rhythm and my glut of rhyme.--

'Maenides rehearsed a tale of arms,
And Naso told of curious metat_mur_phoses;
Unnumbered pens have pictured woman's charms,
While crazy _I_'ve made poetry _on purposes!_'

In other words, I stand convicted--need
I say--by my own doing, as I read.

James Whitcomb Riley

Her Beautiful Eyes

O her beautiful eyes! they are as blue as the dew
On the violet's bloom when the morning is new,
And the light of their love is the gleam of the sun
O'er the meadows of Spring where the quick shadows run:
As the morn shirts the mists and the clouds from the skies-
So I stand in the dawn of her beautiful eyes.

And her beautiful eyes are as midday to me,
When the lily-bell bends with the weight of the bee,
And the throat of the thrush is a-pulse in the heat,
And the senses are drugged with the subtle and sweet
And delirious breaths of the air's lullabies-
So I swoon in the noon of her beautiful eyes.

O her beautiful eyes! they have smitten mine own
As a glory glanced down from the glare of The Throne;
And I reel, and I falter and fall, as afar
Fell the shepherds that looked on the mystical Star,
And yet dazed in the tidings that bade them arise-
So I grope through the night of her beautiful eyes.

James Whitcomb Riley

Her Beautiful Hands

Your hands- they are strangely fair!
O Fair- for the jewels that sparkle there,-
Fair- for the witchery of the spell
That ivory keys alone can tell;
But when their delicate touches rest
Here in my own do I love them best,
As I clasp with eager, acquisitive spans
My glorious treasure of beautiful hands!

Marvelous- wonderful- beautiful hands!
They can coax roses to bloom in the strands
Of your brown tresses; and ribbons will twine,
Under mysterious touches of thine,
Into such knots as entangle the soul
And fetter the heart under such a control
As only the strength of my love understands-
My passionate love for your beautiful hands.

As I remember the first fair touch
Of those beautiful hands that I love so much,
I seem to thrill as I then was thrilled,
Kissing the glove that I found unfilled-
When I met your gaze, and the queenly bow,
As you said to me, laughingly, 'Keep it now! '...
And dazed and alone in a dream I stand,
Kissing this ghost of your beautiful hand.

When first I loved, in the long ago,
And held your hand as I told you so-
Pressed and caressed it and gave it a kiss
And said 'I could die for a hand like this! '
Little I dreamed love's fullness yet
Had to ripen when eyes were wet
And prayers were vain in their wild demands
For one warm touch of your beautiful hands.

.....
Beautiful Hands! - O Beautiful Hands!
Could you reach out of the alien lands

Where you are lingering, and give me, to-night,
Only a touch- were it ever so light-
My heart were soothed, and my weary brain
Would lull itself into rest again;
For there is no solace the world commands
Like the caress of your beautiful hands.

James Whitcomb Riley

Her Face And Brow

Ah, help me! but her face and brow
Are lovelier than lilies are
Beneath the light of moon and star
That smile as they are smiling now-
White lilies in a pallid swoon
Of sweetest white beneath the moon-
White lilies, in a flood of bright
Pure lucidness of liquid light
Cascading down some plenilune,
When all the azure overhead
Blooms like a dazzling daisy-bed.-
So luminous her face and brow,
The luster of their glory, shed
In memory, even, blinds me now.

James Whitcomb Riley

Her Hair

The beauty of her hair bewilders me-
Pouring adown the brow, its cloven tide
Swirling about the ears on either side
And storming round the neck tumultuously:
Or like the lights of old antiquity
Through mullioned windows, in cathedrals wide
Spilled moltenly o'er figures deified
In chastest marble, nude of drapery.
And so I love it- . Either unconfined;
Or plaited in close braidings manifold;
Or smoothly drawn; or indolently twined
In careless knots whose coilings come unrolled
At any lightest kiss; or by the wind
Whipped out in flossy ravellings of gold.

James Whitcomb Riley

Her Waiting Face

In some strange place
Of long-lost lands he finds her waiting face--
Comes marveling upon it, unaware,
Set moonwise in the midnight of her hair.

James Whitcomb Riley

Herr Weiser

Herr Weiser--! Three-score-years-and-ten--,
A hale white rose of his country-men,
Transplanted here in the Hoosier loam,
And blossomy as his German home--
As blossomy and as pure and sweet
As the cool green glen of his calm retreat,
Far withdrawn from the noisy town
Where trade goes clamoring up and down,
Whose fret and fever, and stress and strife,
May not trouble his tranquil life!

Breath of rest, what a balmy gust--!
Quite of the city's heat and dust,
Jostling down by the winding road,
Through the orchard ways of his quaint abode--.
Tether the horse, as we onward fare
Under the pear-trees trailing there,
And thumping the wood bridge at night
With lumps of ripeness and lush delight,
Till the stream, as it maunders on till dawn,
Is powdered and pelted and smiled upon.

Herr Weiser, with his wholesome face,
And the gentle blue of his eyes, and grace
Of unassuming honesty,
Be there to welcome you and me!
And what though the toil of the farm be stopped
And the tireless plans of the place be dropped,
While the prayerful master's knees are set
In beds of pansy and mignonette
And lily and aster and columbine,
Offered in love, as yours and mine--?

What, but a blessing of kindly thought,
Sweet as the breath of forget-me-not--!
What, but a spirit of lustrous love
White as the aster he bends above--!
What, but an odorous memory
Of the dear old man, made known to me

In days demanding a help like his--,
As sweet as the life of the lily is--
As sweet as the soul of a babe, bloom-wise
Born of a lily in paradise.

James Whitcomb Riley

Hik-Tee-Dik!

THE WAR-CRY OF BILLY AND BUDDY

When two little boys--renowned but for noise--
Hik-tee-dik! Billy and Buddy!--
May hurt a whole school, and the head it employs,
Hik-tee-dik! Billy and Buddy!
Such loud and hilarious pupils indeed
Need learning--and yet something further they need,
Though fond hearts that love them may sorrow and bleed.
Hik-tee-dik! Billy and Buddy!

O the schoolmarm was cool, and in no wise a fool;
Hik-tee-dik! Billy and Buddy!
And in ruling her ranks it was her rule to rule;
Hik-tee-dik! Billy and Buddy!
So when these two pupils conspired, every day,
Some mad piece of mischief, with whoop and hoo-ray,
That hurt yet defied her,--how happy were they!--
Hik-tee-dik! Billy and Buddy!

At the ring of the bell they 'd rush in with a yell--
Hik-tee-dik! Billy and Buddy!
And they'd bang the school-door till the plastering fell,
Hik-tee-dik! Billy and Buddy!
They'd clinch as they came, and pretend not to see
As they knocked her desk over--then, My! and O-me!
How awfully sorry they'd both seem to be!
Hik-tee-dik! Billy and Buddy!

This trick seemed so neat and so safe a conceit,--
Hik-tee-dik! Billy and Buddy!--
They played it three times--though the third they were beat;
Hik-tee-dik! Billy and Buddy!
For the teacher, she righted her desk--raised the lid
And folded and packed away each little kid--
Closed the incident so--yes, and locked it, she did--
Hik-tee-dik! Billy and Buddy!

His Mother

DEAD! my wayward boy--_my own_--
Not _the Law's!_ but _mine_--the good
God's free gift to me alone,
Sanctified by motherhood.

'Bad,' you say: Well, who is not?
'Brutal'--'with a heart of stone'--
And 'red-handed.'--Ah! the hot
Blood upon your own!

I come not, with downward eyes,
To plead for him shamedly,--
God did not apologize
When He gave the boy to me.

Simply, I make ready now
For _His_ verdict.--_You_ prepare--
You have killed us both--and how
Will you face us There!

James Whitcomb Riley

His Mother's Way

Tomps 'ud allus haf to say
Somepin' 'bout 'his mother's way.'--
He lived hard-like--never jined
Any church of any kind.--
'It was Mother's way,' says he,
'To be good enough fer _me_
And her too,--and certinly
Lord has heerd _her_ pray!
Propped up on his dyin' bed,--
'Shore as Heaven's overhead,
I'm a-goin' there,' he said---
'It was Mother's way.'

James Whitcomb Riley

His Room

'I'm home again, my dear old Room,
I'm home again, and happy, too,
As, peering through the brightening gloom,
I find myself alone with you:
Though brief my stay, nor far away,
I missed you--missed you night and day--
As wildly yearned for you as now.--
Old Room, how are you, anyhow?

'My easy chair, with open arms,
Awaits me just within the door;
The littered carpet's woven charms
Have never seemed so bright before,--
The old rosettes and mignonettes
And ivy-leaves and violets,
Look up as pure and fresh of hue
As though baptized in morning dew.

'Old Room, to me your homely walls
Fold round me like the arms of love,
And over all my being falls
A blessing pure as from above--
Even as a nestling child caressed
And lulled upon a loving breast,
With folded eyes, too glad to weep
And yet too sad for dreams or sleep.

'You've been so kind to me, old Room--
So patient in your tender care,
My drooping heart in fullest bloom
Has blossomed for you unaware;
And who but you had cared to woo
A heart so dark, and heavy, too,
As in the past you lifted mine
From out the shadow to the shine?

'For I was but a wayward boy
When first you gladly welcomed me
And taught me work was truer joy

Than rioting incessantly:
And thus the din that stormed within
The old guitar and violin
Has fallen in a fainter tone
And sweeter, for your sake alone.

'Though in my absence I have stood
In festal halls a favored guest,
I missed, in this old quietude,
My worthy work and worthy rest--
By _this_ I know that long ago
You loved me first, and told me so
In art's mute eloquence of speech
The voice of praise may never reach.

'For lips and eyes in truth's disguise
Confuse the faces of my friends,
Till old affection's fondest ties
I find unraveling at the ends;
But as I turn to you, and learn
To meet my griefs with less concern,
Your love seems all I have to keep
Me smiling lest I needs must weep.

'Yet I am happy, and would fain
Forget the world and all its woes;
So set me to my tasks again,
Old Room, and lull me to repose:
And as we glide adown the tide
Of dreams, forever side by side,
I'll hold your hands as lovers do
Their sweethearts' and talk love to you.'

James Whitcomb Riley

His Vigil

Close the book and dim the light,
I shall read no more to-night.
No--I am not sleepy, dear--
Do not go: sit by me here
In the darkness and the deep
Silence of the watch I keep.
Something in your presence so
Soothes me--as in long ago
I first felt your hand--as now--
In the darkness touch my brow;
I've no other wish than you
Thus should fold mine eyelids to,
Saying nought of sigh or tear--
Just as God were sitting here.

James Whitcomb Riley

Home At Night

When chirping crickets fainter cry,
And pale stars blossom in the sky,
And twilight's gloom has dimmed the bloom
And blurred the butterfly:

When locust-blossoms fleck the walk,
And up the tiger-lily stalk
The glow-worm crawls and clings and falls
And glimmers down the garden-walls:

When buzzing things, with double wings
Of crisp and raspish flutterings,
Go whizzing by so very nigh
One thinks of fangs and stings:--

O then, within, is stilled the din
Of crib she rocks the baby in,
And heart and gate and latch's weight
Are lifted--and the lips of Kate.

James Whitcomb Riley

Honey Dripping From The Comb

How slight a thing may set one's fancy drifting
Upon the dead sea of the Past!--A view--
Sometimes an odor--or a rooster lifting
A far-off 'OOH! OOH-OOH!'

And suddenly we find ourselves astray
In some wood's-pasture of the Long Ago--
Or idly dream again upon a day
Of rest we used to know.

I bit an apple but a moment since--
A wilted apple that the worm had spurned,--
Yet hidden in the taste were happy hints
Of good old days returned.--

And so my heart, like some enraptured lute,
Tinkles a tune so tender and complete,
God's blessing must be resting on the fruit--
So bitter, yet so sweet!

James Whitcomb Riley

How Did You Rest, Last Night?

'How did you rest, last night?'--
I've heard my gran'pap say
Them words a thousand times--that's right--
Jes them words thataway!
As punctchul-like as morning dast
To ever heave in sight
Gran'pap 'ud allus haf to ast--
'How did you rest, last night?'

Us young-uns used to grin,
At breakfast, on the sly,
And mock the wobble of his chin
And eyebrows belt so high
And kind: _'How did you rest, last night?'_
We'd mumble and let on
Our voices trimbled, and our sight
Was dim, and hearin' gone.

* * * * *

Bad as I used to be,
All I'm a-wantin' is
As puore and ca'm a sleep fer me
And sweet a sleep as his!
And so I pray, on Jedgment Day
To wake, and with its light
See _his_ face dawn, and hear him say--
'How did you rest, last night?'

James Whitcomb Riley

How It Happened

I got to thinkin' of her--both her parents dead and gone--
And all her sisters married off, and none but her and John
A-livin' all alone there in that lonesome sort o' way,
And him a blame old bachelor, confirmder ev'ry day!
I'd knowed 'em all from childern, and their daddy from the time
He settled in the neighborhood, and had n't ary a dime
Er dollar, when he married, far to start housekeepin' on!--
So I got to thinkin' of her--both her parents dead and gone!

I got to thinkin' of her; and a-wundern what she done
That all her sisters kep' a gittin' married, one by one,
And her without no chances--and the best girl of the pack--
An old maid, with her hands, you might say, tied behind her back!
And Mother, too, afore she died, she ust to jes' take on,
When none of 'em was left, you know, but Evaline and John,
And jes' declare to goodness 'at the young men must be bline
To not see what a wife they 'd git if they got Evaline!

I got to thinkin' of her; in my great affliction she
Was sich a comfert to us, and so kind and neighborly,--
She 'd come, and leave her housework, far to be'p out little Jane,
And talk of her own mother 'at she 'd never see again--
Maybe sometimes cry together--though, far the most part she
Would have the child so riconciled and happy-like 'at we
Felt lonesomer 'n ever when she 'd put her bonnet on
And say she 'd raily haf to be a-gittin' back to John!

I got to thinkin' of her, as I say,--and more and more
I'd think of her dependence, and the burdens 'at she bore,--
Her parents both a-bein' dead, and all her sisters gone
And married off, and her a-livin' there alone with John--
You might say jes' a-toilin' and a-slavin' out her life
Far a man 'at hadn't pride enough to git hisse'f a wife--
'Less some one married Evaline, and packed her off some day!--
So I got to thinkin' of her--and it happened thataway.

James Whitcomb Riley

How John Quit The Farm

Nobody on the old farm here but Mother, me and John,
Except, of course, the extry he'p when harvest-time come on--
And then, I want to say to you, we _needed_ he'p about,
As you'd admit, ef you'd a-seen the way the crops turned out!

A better quarter-section, ner a richer soil warn't found
Than this-here old-home place o' ourn fer fifty miles around!--
The house was small--but plenty-big we found it from the day
That John--our only livin' son--packed up and went way.

You see, we tuck sich pride in John--his mother more 'n me--
That's natchurul; but _both_ of us was proud as proud could be;
Fer the boy, from a little chap, was most oncommon bright,
And seemed in work as well as play to take the same delight.

He allus went a-whistlin' round the place, as glad at heart
As robins up at five o'clock to git an airy start;
And many a time 'fore daylight Mother's waked me up to say--
'Jest listen, David!--listen!--Johnny's beat the birds to-day!'

High-sperited from boyhood, with a most inquirin' turn,--
He wanted to learn ever'thing on earth they was to learn:
He'd ast more plaguey questions in a mortal-minute here
Than his grandpap in Paradise could answer in a year!

And read! w'y, his own mother learnt him how to read and spell;
And 'The Childern of the Abbey'--w'y, he knowed that book as well
At fifteen as his parents!--and 'The Pilgrim's Progress,' too--
Jest knuckled down, the shaver did, and read 'em through and through!

At eighteen, Mother 'lowed the boy must have a better chance--
That we ort to educate him, under any circumstance;
And John he j'ined his mother, and they ding-donged and kep' on,
Tel I sent him off to school in town, half glad that he was gone.

But--I missed him--w'y of course I did!--The Fall and Winter through
I never built the kitchen-fire, er split a stick in two,
Er fed the stock, er butchered, er swung up a gambrel-pin,
But what I thought o' John, and wished that he was home agin.

He'd come, sometimes--on Sund'ys most--and stay the Sund'y out;
And on Thanksgivin'-Day he 'peared to like to be about:
But a change was workin' on him--he was stiller than before,
And did n't joke, ner laugh, ner sing and whistle any more.

And his talk was all so proper; and I noticed, with a sigh,
He was tryin' to raise side-whiskers, and had on a striped tie,
And a standin'-collar, ironed up as stiff and slick as bone;
And a breast-pin, and a watch and chain and plug-hat of his own.

But when Spring-weather opened out, and John was to come home
And he'p me through the season, I was glad to see him come;
But my happiness, that evening, with the settin' sun went down,
When he bragged of 'a position' that was offered him in town.

'But,' says I, 'you'll not accept it?' 'W'y, of course
I will,' says he.--

'This drudgin' on a farm,' he says, 'is not the life fer me;
I've set my stakes up higher,' he continued, light and gay,
'And town's the place fer me, and I'm a-goin' right away!'

And go he did!--his mother clingin' to him at the gate,
A-pleadin' and a-cryin'; but it hadn't any weight.
I was tranquiller, and told her 'twarn't no use to worry so,
And onclasped her arms from round his neck round mine--and let him go!

I felt a little bitter feelin' foolin' round about
The aidges of my conscience; but I didn't let it out;--
I simply retch out, trimbly-like, and tuck the boy's hand,
And though I did n't say a word, I knowed he'd understand.

And--well!--sence then the old home here was mighty lonesome, shore!
With me a-workin' in the field, and Mother at the door,
Her face ferever to'rds the town, and fadin' more and more---
Her only son nine miles away, a-clerkin' in a store!

The weeks and months dragged by us; and sometimes the boy would write
A letter to his mother, savin' that his work was light,
And not to feel oneasy about his health a bit--
Though his business was confinin', he was gittin' used to it.

And sometimes he would write and ast how I was gittin' on,
And ef I had to pay out much fer he'p sence he was gone;
And how the hogs was doin', and the balance of the stock,
And talk on fer a page er two jest like he used to talk.

And he wrote, along 'fore harvest, that he guessed he would git home,
Fer business would, of course be dull in town.--But didn't come:--
We got a postal later, sayin' when they had no trade
They filled the time 'invoicin' goods,' and that was why he staid.

And then he quit a-writin' altogether: Not a word--
Exceptin' what the neighbors brung who'd been to town and heard
What store John was clerkin' in, and went round to inquire
If they could buy their goods there less and sell their produce higher.

And so the Summer faded out, and Autumn wore away,
And a keener Winter never fetched around Thanksgivin'-Day!
The night before that day of thanks I'll never quite fergit,
The wind a-howlin' round the house--it makes me creepy yit!

And there set me and Mother--me a-twistin' at the prongs
Of a green scrub-ellum forestick with a vicious pair of tongs,
And Mother sayin', 'David! David!' in a' undertone,
As though she thought that I was thinkin' bad-words unbeknown.

'I've dressed the turkey, David, fer to-morrow,' Mother said,
A-tryin' to wedge some pleasant subject in my stubborn head,--
'And the mince-meat I'm a-mixin' is perfection mighty nigh;
And the pound-cake is delicious-rich--' 'Who'll eat 'em?' I-says-I.

'The cramberries is drippin'-sweet,' says Mother, runnin' on,
P'tendin' not to hear me;--'and somehow I thought of John
All the time they was a-jellin'--fer you know they allus was
His favour--he likes 'em so!' Says I, 'Well, s'pose he does?'

'Oh, nothin' much!' says Mother, with a quiet sort o' smile--
'This gentleman behind my cheer may tell you after while!
And as I turned and looked around, some one riz up and leant
And put his arms round Mother's neck, and laughed in low content.

'It's me,' he says--'your fool-boy John, come back to shake your hand;
Set down with you, and talk with you, and make you understand

How dearer yit than all the world is this old home that we
Will spend Thanksgivin' in fer life--jest Mother, you and me!

* * * * *

Nobody on the old farm here but Mother, me and John,
Except of course the extry he'p, when harvest-time comes on;
And then, I want to say to you, we need sich he'p about,
As you'd admit, ef you could see the way the crops turns out!

James Whitcomb Riley

I Smoke My Pipe

I can't extend to every friend
In need a helping hand--
No matter though I wish it so,
'Tis not as Fortune planned;
But haply may I fancy they
Are men of different stripe
Than others think who hint and wink,--
And so--I smoke my pipe!

A golden coal to crown the bowl--
My pipe and I alone,--
I sit and muse with idler views
Perchance than I should own:--
It might be worse to own the purse
Whose gluttoned bowels gripe
In little qualms of stinted alms;
And so I smoke my pipe.

And if inclined to moor my mind
And cast the anchor Hope,
A puff of breath will put to death
The morbid misanthrope
That lurks inside--as errors hide
In standing forms of type
To mar at birth some line of worth;
And so I smoke my pipe.

The subtle stings misfortune flings
Can give me little pain
When my narcotic spell has wrought
This quiet in my brain:
When I can waste the past in taste
So luscious and so ripe
That like an elf I hug myself;
And so I smoke my pipe.

And wrapped in shrouds of drifting clouds,
I watch the phantom's flight,
Till alien eyes from Paradise

Smile on me as I write:
And I forgive the wrongs that live,
As lightly as I wipe
Away the tear that rises here;
And so I smoke my pipe.

James Whitcomb Riley

If I Knew What Poets Know

If I knew what poets know,
Would I write a rhyme
Of the buds that never blow
In the summer-time?
Would I sing of golden seeds
Springing up in ironweeds?
And of rain-drops turned to snow,
If I knew what poets know?

Did I know what poets do,
Would I sing a song
Sadder than the pigeon's coo
When the days are long?
Where I found a heart in pain,
I would make it glad again;
And the false should be the true,
Did I know what poets do.

If I knew what poets know,
I would find a theme
Sweeter than the placid flow
Of the fairest dream:
I would sing of love that lives
On the errors it forgives;
And the world would better grow
If I knew what poets know.

James Whitcomb Riley

Igo And Ago

We're The Twins from Aunt Marinn's,
Igo and Ago.
When Dad comes, the show begins!--
Iram, coram, dago.

Dad he says he named us two
Igo and Ago
For a poem he always knew,
Iram, coram, dago.

Then he was a braw Scotchman--
Igo and Ago.--
Now he's Scotch-Amer-i-can.
Iram, coram, dago.

'Hey!' he cries, and pats his knee,
'Igo and Ago,
My twin bairnies, ride wi' me--
Iram, coram, dago!'

'Here,' he laughs, 'ye've each a leg,
Igo and Ago,
Gleg as Tam O'Shanter's 'Meg!'
Iram, coram, dago!'

Then we mount, with shrieks of mirth--
Igo and Ago,--
The two gladdest twins on earth!
Iram, coram, dago.

Wade and Silas-Walker cry,--
'Igo and Ago--
Annie's kissin' 'em 'good-bye!'--
Iram, coram, dago.

Aunty waves us fond farewells.--
'Igo and Ago,'
Granny pipes, 'tak care yersels!'
Iram, coram, dago.

James Whitcomb Riley

Ike Walton's Prayer

I crave, dear Lord,
No boundless hoard
Of gold and gear,
Nor jewels fine,
Nor lands, nor kine,
Nor treasure-heaps of anything.-
Let but a little hut be mine
Where at the hearthstore I may hear
The cricket sing,
And have the shine
Of one glad woman's eyes to make,
For my poor sake,
Our simple home a place divine;-
Just the wee cot-the cricket's chirr-
Love, and the smiling face of her.

I pray not for
Great riches, nor
For vast estates, and castle-halls,-
Give me to hear the bare footfalls
Of children o'er
An oaken floor,
New-risen with sunshine, or bespread
With but the tiny coverlet
And pillow for the baby's head;
And pray Thou, may
The door stand open and the day
Send ever in a gentle breeze,
With fragrance from the locust-trees,
And drowsy moan of doves, and blur
Of robin-chirps, and drove of bees,
With afterhushes of the stir
Of intermingling sounds, and then
The good-wife and the smile of her
Filling the silences again-
The cricket's call,
And the wee cot,
Dear Lord of all,
Deny me not!

I pray not that
Men tremble at
My power of place
And lordly sway, -
I only pray for simple grace
To look my neighbor in the face
Full honestly from day to day-
Yield me this horny palm to hold,
And I'll not pray
For gold;-
The tanned face, garlanded with mirth,
It hath the kingliest smile on earth-
The swart brow, diamonded with sweat,
Hath never need of coronet.
And so I reach,
Dear Lord, to Thee,
And do beseech
Thou givest me
The wee cot, and the cricket's chirr,
Love, and the glad sweet face of her.

James Whitcomb Riley

Illileo

Illileo, the moonlight seemed lost across the vales--
The stars but strewed the azure as an armor's scattered scales;
The airs of night were quiet as the breath of silken sails,
And all your words were sweeter than the notes of nightingales.

Illileo Legardi, in the garden there alone,
With your figure carved of fervor, as the Psyche carved of stone,
There came to me no murmur of the fountain's undertone
So mystically, musically mellow as your own.

You whispered low, Illileo-- so low the leaves were mute,
And the echoes faltered breathless in your voice's vain pursuit;
And there died the distant dalliance of the serenader's lute:
And I held you in my bosom as the husk may hold the fruit.

Illileo, I listened. I believed you. In my bliss,
What were all the worlds above me since I found you thus in this--?
Let them reeling reach to win me-- even Heaven I would miss,
Grasping earthward--! I would cling here, though I clung by just a kiss.

And blossoms should grow odorless-- and lilies all aghast--
And I said the stars should slacken in their paces through the vast,
Ere yet my loyalty should fail enduring to the last--.
So vowed I. It is written. It is changeless as the past.

Illileo Legardi, in the shade your palace throws
Like a cowl about the singer at your gilded porticos,
A moan goes with the music that may vex the high repose
Of a heart that fades and crumbles as the crimson of a rose.

James Whitcomb Riley

In Bohemia

Ha! My dear! I'm back again--
Vendor of Bohemia's wares!
Lordy! How it pants a man
Climbing up those awful stairs!
Well, I've made the dealer say
Your sketch might sell, anyway!
And I've made a publisher
Hear my poem, Kate, my dear.

In Bohemia, Kate, my dear--
Lodgers in a musty flat
On the top floor--living here
Neighborless, and used to that,--
Like a nest beneath the eaves,
So our little home receives
Only guests of chirping cheer--
We'll be happy, Kate, my dear!

Under your north-light there, you
At your easel, with a stain
On your nose of Prussian blue,
Paint your bits of shine and rain;
With my feet thrown up at will
O'er my littered window-sill,
I write rhymes that ring as clear
As your laughter, Kate, my dear.

Puff my pipe, and stroke my hair--
Bite my pencil-tip and gaze
At you, mutely mooning there
O'er your 'Aprils' and your 'Mays!'
Equal inspiration in
Dimples of your cheek and chin,
And the golden atmosphere
Of your paintings, Kate, my dear!

Trying! Yes, at times it is,
To clink happy rhymes, and fling
On the canvas scenes of bliss,

When we are half famishing!--
When your 'jersey' rips in spots,
And your hat's 'forget-me-nots'
Have grown tousled, old and sere--
It is trying, Kate, my dear!

But--as sure--_some_ picture sells,
And--sometimes--the poetry--
Bless us! How the parrot yells
His acclaims at you and me!
How we revel then in scenes
Of high banqueting!--sardines--
Salads--olives--and a sheer
Pint of sherry, Kate, my dear!

Even now I cross your palm,
With this great round world of gold!--
'Talking wild?' Perhaps I am--
Then, this little five-year-old!--
Call it anything you will,
So it lifts your face until
I may kiss away that tear
Ere it drowns me, Kate, my dear.

James Whitcomb Riley

In Fervent Praise Of Picnics

Picnics is fun 'at's purty hard to beat.
I purt'-nigh ruther go to them than _eat_.
I purt'-nigh ruther go to them than go
With our Char_lot_ty to the Trick-Dog Show.

James Whitcomb Riley

In The Dark

O in the depths of midnight
What fancies haunt the brain!
When even the sigh of the sleeper
Sounds like a sob of pain.

A sense of awe and of wonder
I may never well define,--
For the thoughts that come in the shadows
Never come in the shine.

The old clock down in the parlor
Like a sleepless mourner grieves,
And the seconds drip in the silence
As the rain drips from the eaves.

And I think of the hands that signal
The hours there in the gloom,
And wonder what angel watchers
Wait in the darkened room.

And I think of the smiling faces
That used to watch and wait,
Till the click of the clock was answered
By the click of the opening gate.--

They are not there now in the evening--
Morning or noon--not there;
Yet I know that they keep their vigil,
And wait for me Somewhere.

James Whitcomb Riley

In The Evening

I

In the evening of our days,
When the first far stars above
Glimmer dimmer, through the haze,
Than the dewy eyes of love,
Shall we mournfully revert
To the vanished morns and Mays
Of our youth, with hearts that hurt,--
In the evening of our days?

II

Shall the hand that holds your own
Till the twain are thrilled as now,
Be withheld, or colder grown?
Shall my kiss upon your brow
Falter from its high estate?
And, in all forgetful ways,
Shall we sit apart and wait--
In the evening of our days?

III

Nay, my wife--my life!--the gloom
Shall enfold us velvetwise,
And my smile shall be the groom
Of the gladness of your eyes:
Gently, gently as the dew
Mingles with the darkening maze,
I shall fall asleep with you--
In the evening of our days.

James Whitcomb Riley

In The South

There is a princess in the South
About whose beauty rumors hum
Like honey-bees about the mouth
Of roses dewdrops falter from;
And O her hair is like the fine
Clear amber of a jostled wine
In tropic revels; and her eyes
Are blue as rifts of Paradise.

Such beauty as may none before
Kneel daringly, to kiss the tips
Of fingers such as knights of yore
Had died to lift against their lips:
Such eyes as might the eyes of gold
Of all the stars of night behold
With glittering envy, and so glare
In dazzling splendor of despair.

So, were I but a minstrel, deft
At weaving, with the trembling strings
Of my glad harp, the warp and weft
Of rondels such as rapture sings,--
I'd loop my lyre across my breast,
Nor stay me till my knee found rest
In midnight banks of bud and flower
Beneath my lady's lattice-bower.

And there, drenched with the teary dews,
I'd woo her with such wondrous art
As well might stanch the songs that ooze
Out of the mockbird's breaking heart;
So light, so tender, and so sweet
Should be the words I would repeat,
Her casement, on my gradual sight,
Would blossom as a lily might.

James Whitcomb Riley

Indiana

Our Land-- our Home-- the common home indeed
Of soil-born children and adopted ones--
The stately daughters and the stalwart sons
Of Industry--: All greeting and godspeed!
O home to proudly live for, and if need
Be proudly die for, with the roar of guns
Blent with our latest prayer--. So died men once...
Lo Peace...! As we look on the land They freed--
Its harvests all in ocean-over flow
Poured round autumnal coasts in billowy gold--
Its corn and wine and balmed fruits and flow'rs--,
We know the exaltation that they know
Who now, steadfast inheritors, behold
The Land Elysian, marvelling 'This is ours?'

James Whitcomb Riley

Inscribed

To the Elect of Love,--or side-by-side
In raptest ecstasy, or sundered wide
By seas that bear no message to or fro
Between the loved and lost of long ago.

So were I but a minstrel, deft
At weaving, with the trembling strings
Of my glad harp, the warp and weft
Of rondels such as rapture sings,--
I'd loop my lyre across my breast,
Nor stay me till my knee found rest
In midnight banks of bud and flower
Beneath my lady's lattice-bower.

And there, drenched with the teary dews,
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So light, so tender, and so sweet
Should be the words I would repeat,
Her casement, on my gradual sight,
Would blossom as a lily might.

James Whitcomb Riley

Intellectual Limitations

Parunts knows lots more than us,
But they don't know _all_ things,--
'Cause we ketch 'em, lots o' times,
Even on little small things.

One time Winnie ask' her Ma,
At the winder, sewin',
What's the wind a-doin' when
It's a-not a-_blowin_'?

Yes, an' 'Del', that very day,
When we're nearly froze out,
He ask' Uncle _where_ it goes
When the fire goes out?

Nen _I_ run to ask my Pa,
That way, somepin' funny;
But I can't say ist but 'Say,'
When he turn to me an' say,
'Well, what is it, Honey?'

James Whitcomb Riley

Iry And Billy Jo

Iry an' Billy an' Jo!--
Iry an' Billy's _the boys_,
An' _Jo's_ their _dog_, you know,--
Their pictures took all in a row.
Bet they kin kick up a noise--
Iry and Billy, the boys,
And that-air little dog Jo!

Iry's the one 'at stands
Up there a-lookin' so mild
An' meek--with his hat in his hands,
Like such a 'bediant child--
(_Sakes-alive_!)--An' _Billy_ he sets
In the cheer an' holds onto Jo an' _sweats_
Hisse'f, a-lookin' so good! Ho-ho!
Iry an' Billy an' Jo!

Yit the way them boys, you know,
Usen to jes turn in
An' fight over that dog Jo
Wuz a burnin'-shame-an'-a-sin!--
Iry _he'd_ argy 'at, by gee-whizz!
That-air little Jo-dog wuz _his_!--
An' Billy _he'd_ claim it wuzn't so--
'Cause the dog wuz _his'n_!--An' at it they'd go,
Nip-an'-tugg, tooth-an'-toenail, you know--
Iry an' Billy an' Jo!

But their Pa--(He wuz the marshal then)
He 'tended-like 'at he _jerked 'em up_;
An' got a jury o' Brickyard men
An' helt a _trial_ about the pup:
An' _he_ says _he_ jes like to a-died
When the rest o' us town-boys _testified_--
Regardin', you know,
Iry an' Billy an' Jo.--

'Cause we all knowed, when _the Gypsies_ they
Camped down here by the crick last Fall,

They brung Jo with 'em, an' give him away
To Iry an' Billy fer nothin' at all!--
So the jury fetched in the _verdick_ so
Jo he ain't _neether_ o' theirn fer _shore_--
He's _both_ their dog, an' jes no more!
An' so
They've quit quarrelin' long ago,
Iry an' Billy an' Jo.

James Whitcomb Riley

It's_Got_To Be

'When it's _got_ to be,'--like! always say,
As I notice the years whiz past,
And know each day is a yesterday,
When we size it up, at last,--
Same as I said when my _boyhood_ went
And I knowed _we_ had to quit,--
'It's _got_ to be, and it's _goin'_ to be!'
So I said 'Good-by' to _it_.

It's _got_ to be, and it's _goin'_ to be!
So at least I always try
To kind o' say in a hearty way,--
'Well, it's _got_ to be. Good-by!'

The time jes melts like a late, last snow,--
When it's _got_ to be, it melts!
But I aim to keep a cheerful mind,
Ef I can't keep nothin' else!
I knowed, when I come to twenty-one,
That I'd soon be twenty-two,--
So I waved one hand at the soft young man,
And I said, 'Good-by to _you_!'

It's _got_ to be, and it's _goin'_ to be!
So at least I always try
To kind o' say, in a cheerful way,--
'Well, it's _got_ to be.--Good-by!'

They kep' a-goin', the years and years,
Yet still I smiled and smiled,--
For I'd said 'Good-by' to my single life,
And I now had a wife and child:
Mother and son and the father--one,--
Till, last, on her bed of pain,
She jes' smiled up, like she always done,--
And I said 'Good-by' again.

It's _got_ to be, and it's _goin'_ to be!
So at least I always try

To kind o' say, in a humble way,--
'Well, it's _got_ to be. Good-by!'

And then my boy--as he growed to be
Almost a man in size,--
Was more than a pride and joy to me,
With his mother's smilin' eyes.--
He gimme the slip, when the War broke out,
And followed me. And I
Never knowed till the first right's end ...
I found him, and then, ... 'Good-by.'

It's _got_ to be, and it's _goin'_ to be!
So at least I always try
To kind o' say, in a patient way,
'Well, it's _got_ to be. Good-by!'

I have said, 'Good-by!--Good-by!--Good-by!'
With my very best good will,
All through life from the first,--and I
Am a cheerful old man still:

But it's _got_ to end, and it's _goin'_ to end!
And this is the thing I'll do,--
With my last breath I will laugh, O Death,
And say 'Good-by' to _you_!...

It's _got_ to be! And again I say,--
When his old scythe circles high,
I'll laugh--of course, in the kindest way,--
As I say 'Good-by!--Good-by!'

James Whitcomb Riley

Jack-In-The-Box

(Grandfather, musing.)

In childish days! O memory,
You bring such curious things to me!--
Laughs to the lip--tears to the eye,
In looking on the gifts that lie
Like broken playthings scattered o'er
Imagination's nursery floor!
Did these old hands once click the key
That let 'Jack's' box-lid upward fly,
And that blear-eyed, fur-whiskered elf
Leap, as though frightened at himself,
And quiveringly lean and stare
At me, his jailer, laughing there?

A child then! Now--I only know
They call me very old; and so
They will not let me have my way,--
But uselessly I sit all day
Here by the chimney-jamb, and poke
The lazy fire, and smoke and smoke,
And watch the wreaths swoop up the flue,
And chuckle--ay, I often do--
Seeing again, all vividly,
Jack-in-the-box leap, as in glee
To see how much he looks like me!

... They talk. I can't hear what they say--
But I am glad, clean through and through
Sometimes, in fancying that they
Are saying, 'Sweet, that fancy strays
In age back to our childish days!'

James Whitcomb Riley

James Whitcomb Riley

James Whitcomb Riley

Jap Miller

Jap Miller down at Martinsville's the blamedest feller yit!
When he starts in a-talkin' other folks is apt to quit!--
'Pears like that mouth o' his'n wuz n't made fer nuthin' else
But jes' to argify 'em down and gether in their pelts:
He'll talk you down on tariff; er he'll talk you down on tax,
And prove the pore man pays 'em all--and them's about the fac's!--
Religen, law, er politics, prize-fightin', er base-ball--
Jes' tetch Jap up a little and he'll post you 'bout 'em all.

And the comicalist feller ever tilted back a cheer
And tuck a chaw tobacker kind o' like he did n't keer.--
There's where the feller's strength lays,--he's so
common-like and plain,--
They haint no dude about old Jap, you bet you--nary grain!
They 'lected him to Council and it never turned his head,
And did n't make no differunce what anybody said,--
He didn't dress no finer, ner rag out in fancy clothes;
But his voice in Council-meetin's is a turrer to his foes.

He's fer the pore man ever' time! And in the last campaign
He stumped old Morgan County, through the sunshine and the rain,
And helt the banner up'ards from a-trailin' in the dust,
And cut loose on monopolies and cuss'd and cuss'd and cuss'd!
He'd tell some funny story ever' now and then, you know,
Tel, blame it! it wuz better 'n a jack-o'-lantern show!
And I'd go furder, yit, to-day, to hear old Jap norate
Than any high-toned orator 'at ever stumped the State!

W'y, that-air blame Jap Miller, with his keen sircastic fun,
Has got more friends than ary candidate 'at ever run!
Do n't matter what his views is, when he states the same to you,
They allus coincide with your'n, the same as two and two:
You can't take issue with him--er, at least, they haint no sense
In startin' in to down him, so you better not commence.--
The best way's jes' to listen, like your humble servant does,
And jes' concede Jap Miller is the best man ever wuz!

James Whitcomb Riley

Jim

He was jes a plain ever'-day, all-round kind of a jour.,
Consumpted-Iookin'-- but la!
The jokeiest, wittiest, story-tellin', song-singin', laughin'est, jolliest
Feller you ever saw!
Worked at jes coarse work, but you kin bet he was fine enough in his talk,
And his feelin's too!
Lordy! Ef he was on'y back on his bench ag'in to-day, a- carryin' on
Like he ust to do!

Any shopmate'll tell you there never was, on top o' dirt,
A better feller'n Jim!
You want a favor, and couldn't git it anywheres else--
You could git it o' him!
Most free-heartedest man thataway in the world, I guess!
Give up ever' nickel he's worth--
And ef you'd a-wanted it, and named it to him, and it was his,
He'd a-give you the earth!

Allus a reachin' out, Jim was, and a-he'ppin' some
Pore feller onto his feet--
He'd a-never a-keered how hungry he was hisse'f,
So's the feller got somepin' to eat!
Didn't make no differ'nce at all to him how he was dressed,
He ust to say to me--,
'You togg out a tramp purty comfortable in winter-time, a huntin' a job,
And he'll git along!' says he.

Jim didn't have, ner never could git ahead, so overly much
O' this world's goods at a time--.
'Fore now I've saw him, more'n onc't, lend a dollar, and haf to, more'n
likely,
Turn round and borry a dime!
Mebby laugh and joke about it hisse'f fer awhile-- then jerk his coat,
And kindo' square his chin,
Tie on his apern, and squat hisse'f on his old shoe-bench,
And go to peggin' ag'in!

Patientest feller too, I reckon, 'at ever jes natchurly
Coughed hisse'f to death!

Long enough after his voice was lost he'd laugh in a whisper and say
He could git ever'thing but his breath--
'You fellers,' he'd sorto' twinkle his eyes and say,
'Is a-pilin' onto me
A mighty big debt fer that-air little weak-chested ghost o' mine to pack
Through all Eternity!'

Now there was a man 'at jes 'peared-like, to me,
'At or'n't a-never a-died!
'But death hain't a-showin' no favors,' the old boss said--
'On'y to Jim!' and cried:
And Wigger, who puts up the best sewed-work in the shop--
Er the whole blame neighborhood--,
He says, 'When God made Jim, I bet you He didn't do anything else that day
But jes set around and feel good!'

James Whitcomb Riley

Job Work

'Write me a rhyme of the present time'.
And the poet took his pen
And wrote such lines as the miser minds
Hide in the hearts of men.

He grew enthused, as the poets used
When their fingers kissed the strings
Of some sweet lyre, and caught the fire
True inspiration brings,

And sang the song of a nation's wrong--
Of the patriot's galling chain,
And the glad release that the angel, Peace,
Has given him again.

He sang the lay of religion's sway,
Where a hundred creeds clasp hands
And shout in glee such a symphony
That the whole world understands.

He struck the key of monopoly,
And sang of her swift decay,
And traveled the track of the railway back
With a blithesome roundelay--

Of the tranquil bliss of a true love kiss;
And painted the picture, too,
Of the wedded life, and the patient wife,
And the husband fond and true;

And sang the joy that a noble boy
Brings to a father's soul,
Who lets the wine as a mocker shine
Stagnated in the bowl.

And he stabbed his pen in the ink again,
And wrote with a writhing frown,
'This is the end.' 'And now, my friend,
You may print it--upside down!'

James Whitcomb Riley

John Alden And Percilly

We got up a Christmas-doin's
Last Christmas Eve--
Kindo' dimonstration
'At I railyly believe
Give more satisfaction--
Take it up and down--
Than ary intertainment
Ever come to town!

Railyly was a _theater_--
That's what it was,--
But, bein' in the church, you know,
We had a '_Santy Clause_'--
So 's to git the _old folks_
To patternize, you see,
And _back_ the institootion up
Kindo' _morally_.

Schoolteacher writ the thing--
(Was a friend o' mine),
Got it out o' Longfeller's
Pome 'Evangeline'--
Er some'rs--'bout the _Purituns_--.
Anyway, the part
'_John Alden_' fell to _me_--
And learnt it all by heart!

Claircy was '_Percilly_'--
(Schoolteacher 'lowed
Me and her could act them two
Best of all the crowd)--
Then--blame ef he didn't
Git her Pap, i jing!--
To take the part o' '_Santy Clause_,'
To wind up the thing.

Law! the fun o' practisun!--
Was a week er two
Me and Claircy didn't have

Nothin' else to do!--
Kep' us jes a-meetin' round,
Kindo' here and there,
Ever' night rehearsin'-like,
And gaddin' ever'where!

Game was wo'th the candle, though!--
Christmas Eve at last
Rolled around.--And 'tendance jes
Couldn't been surpassed!--
Neighbors from the country
Come from Clay and Rush--
Yes, and 'crost the county-line
Clean from Puckerbrush!

Meetin'-house jes trimbled
As 'Old Santy' went
Round amongst the childern,
With their peppermint
And sassafrac and wintergreen
Candy, and 'a ball
O' popcorn,' the preacher 'nounced,
'Free fer each and all!'

Schoolteacher suddently
Whispered in my ear,--
'Guess I got you:--_Christmas-gift_!--
Christmas is here!'
I give _him_ a gold pen,
And case to hold the thing,--
And _Claircy_ whispered '_Christmas-gift_!'
And I give her a _ring_.

'And now,' says I, 'jes watch _me_--
Christmas-gift,' says I,
'_I'm_ a-goin' to git one--
'_Santy's_' comin' by!--
Then I rech and grabbed him:
And, as you'll infer,
'Course I got the old man's,
And _he_ gimme _her_!

John Brown

Writ in between the lines of his life-deed
We trace the sacred service of a heart
Answering the Divine command, in every part
Bearing on human weal: His love did feed
The loveless; and his gentle hands did lead
The blind, and lift the weak, and balm the smart
Of other wounds than rankled at the dart
In his own breast, that gloried thus to bleed.
He served the lowliest first--nay, them alone--
The most despised that e'er wreaked vain breath
In cries of suppliance in the reign whereat
Red Guilt sate squat upon her spattered throne.--
For these doomed there it was he went to death.
God! how the merest man loves one like that!

James Whitcomb Riley

John Mckeen

John McKeen, in his rusty dress,
His loosened collar, and swarthy throat,
His face unshaven, and none the less,
His hearty laugh and his wholesomeness,
And the wealth of a workman's vote!

Bring him, O Memory, here once more,
And tilt him back in his Windsor chair
By the kitchen stove, when the day is o'er
And the light of the hearth is across the floor,
And the crickets everywhere!

And let their voices be gladly blent
With a watery jingle of pans and spoons,
And a motherly chirrup of sweet content,
And neighborly gossip and merriment,
And old-time fiddle-tunes!

Tick the clock with a wooden sound,
And fill the hearing with childish glee
Of rhyming riddle, or story found
In the Robinson Crusoe, leather-bound
Old book of the Used-to-be!

John McKeen of the Past! Ah John,
To have grown ambitious in worldly ways--!
To have rolled your shirt-sleeves down, to don
A broadcloth suit, and forgetful, gone
Out on election days!

John ah, John! Did it prove your worth
To yield you the office you still maintain--?
To fill your pockets, but leave the dearth
Of all the happier things on earth
To the hunger of heart and brain?

Under the dusk of your villa trees,
Edging the drives where your blooded span
Paw the pebbles and wait your ease--,

Where are the children about your knees,
And the mirth, and the happy man?

The blinds of your mansion are battened to;
Your faded wife is a close recluse;
And your 'finished' daughters will doubtless do
Dutifully all that is willed of you,
And marry as you shall choose--!

But O for the old-home voices, blent
With the watery jingle of pans and spoons,
And the motherly chirrup of glad content,
And neighborly gossip and merriment,
And the old-time fiddle-tunes!

James Whitcomb Riley

John Walsh

A strange life--strangely passed!
We may not read the soul
When God has folded up the scroll
In death at last.
We may not--dare not say of one
Whose task of life as well was done
As he could do it,--'This is lost,
And prayers may never pay the cost.'

Who listens to the song
That sings within the breast,
Should ever hear the good expressed
Above the wrong.
And he who leans an eager ear
To catch the discord, he will hear
The echoes of his own weak heart
Beat out the most discordant part.

Whose tender heart could build
Affection's bower above
A heart where baby nests of love
Were ever filled,--
With upward growth may reach and twine
About the children, grown divine,
That once were his a time so brief
His very joy was more than grief.

O Sorrow--'Peace, be still!'
God reads the riddle right;
And we who grope in constant night
But serve His will;
And when sometime the doubt is gone,
And darkness blossoms into dawn,--
'God keeps the good,' we then will say:
' 'Tis but the dross He throws away.'

James Whitcomb Riley

Johnson's Boy

The world is turned ag'in' me,
And people says, 'They guess
That nothin' else is in me
But pure maliciousness!
I git the blame for doin'
What other chaps destroy,
And I'm a-goin' to ruin
Because I'm 'Johnson's boy.'

THAT ain't my name--I'd ruther
They'd call me IKE or PAT--
But they've forgot the other--
And so have _I_, for that!
I reckon it's as handy,
When Nibsy breaks his toy,
Or some one steals his candy,
To say 'twas 'JOHNSON'S BOY!'

You can't git any water
At the pump, and find the spout
So durn chuck-full o' mortar
That you have to bore it out;
You tackle any scholar
In Wisdom's wise employ,
And I'll bet you half a dollar
He'll say it's 'Johnson's boy!'

Folks don't know how I suffer
In my uncomplainin' way--
They think I'm gittin' tougher
And tougher every day.
Last Sunday night, when Flinder
Was a-shoutin' out for joy,
And some one shook the winder,
He prayed for 'Johnson's boy.'

I'm tired of bein' follered
By farmers every day,
And then o' bein' collared

For coaxin' hounds away;
Hounds always plays me double--
It's a trick they all enjoy--
To git me into trouble,
Because I'm 'Johnson's boy.'

But if I git to Heaven,
I hope the Lord'll see
SOME boy has been perfect,
And lay it on to me;
I'll swell the song sonorous,
And clap my wings for joy,
And sail off on the chorus--
'Hurrah for 'Johnson's boy!'"

James Whitcomb Riley

Joney

Had a hare-lip-- Joney had:
Spiled his looks, and Joney knowed it:
Fellers tried to bore him, bad--
But ef ever he got mad,
He kep' still and never showed it.
'Druther have his mouth all pouted
And split up, and like it wuz,
Than the ones 'at laughed about it.
Purty is as purty does!

Had to listen ruther clos't
'Fore you knowed 'what he wuz givin'
You; and yet, without no boast,
Joney he wuz jest the most
Entertainin' talker livin'!
Take the Scriptur's and run through 'em,
Might say, like a' auctioneer,
And 'ud argy and review 'em
'At wuz beautiful to hear!

Hare-lip and inpediment,
Both wuz bad, and both ag'in' him--
But the old folks where he went,
'Preared like, knowin' his intent,
'Scused his mouth fer what wuz in him.
And the childern all loved Joney--
And he loved 'em back, you bet--!
Putt their arms around him-- on'y
None had ever kissed him yet!

In young company, someway,
Boys 'ud grin at one another
On the sly; and girls 'ud lay
Low, with nothin' much to say,
Er leave Joney with their mother.
Many and many a time he's fetched 'em
Candy by the paper sack,
And turned right around and ketched 'em
Makin mouths behind his back!

S'prised sometimes, the slurs he took--.
Chap said onc't his mouth looked sorter
Like a fish's mouth 'ud look
When he'd be'n jerked off the hook
And plunked back into the worter--.
Same durn feller-- it's su'prisin',
But it's facts-- 'at stood and cherred
From the bank that big babtizin'
'Pike-bridge accident occurred--!

Cherred for Joney while he give
Life to little childern drowndin'!
Which wuz fittenest to live--
Him 'at cherred, er him 'at div'
And saved thirteen lives...? They found one
Body, three days later, floated
Down the by-o, eight mile' south,
All so colored-up and bloated--
On'y knowed him by his mouth!

Had a hare-lip-- Joney had--
Folks 'at filed apast all knowed it--.
Them 'at ust to smile looked sad,
But ef he thought good er bad,
He kep' still and never showed it.
'Druther have that mouth, all pouted
And split up, and like it wuz,
Than the ones 'at laughed about it--.
Purty is as purty does!

James Whitcomb Riley

Judith

O her eyes are amber-fine--
Dark and deep as wells of wine,
While her smile is like the noon
Splendor of a day of June.
If she sorrow--lo! her face
It is like a flowery space
In bright meadows, overlaid
With light clouds and lulled with shade
If she laugh--it is the trill
Of the wayward whippoorwill
Over upland pastures, heard
Echoed by the mocking-bird
In dim thickets dense with bloom
And blurred cloyings of perfume.
If she sigh--a zephyr swells
Over odorous asphodels
And wan lilies in lush plots
Of moon-drown'd forget-me-nots.
Then, the soft touch of her hand--
Takes all breath to understand
What to liken it thereto!--
Never roseleaf rinsed with dew
Might slip soother-suave than slips
Her slow palm, the while her lips
Swoon through mine, with kiss on kiss
Sweet as heated honey is.

James Whitcomb Riley

June

Queenly month of indolent repose!
I drink thy breath in sips of rare perfume,
As in thy downy lap of clover-bloom
I nestle like a drowsy child and doze
The lazy hours away. The zephyr throws
The shifting shuttle of the Summer's loom
And weaves a damask-work of gleam and gloom
Before thy listless feet. The lily blows
A bugle-call of fragrance o'er the glade;
And, wheeling into ranks, with plume and spear,
Thy harvest-armies gather on parade;
While, faint and far away, yet pure and clear,
A voice calls out of alien lands of shade:--
All hail the Peerless Goddess of the Year!

James Whitcomb Riley

June At Woodruff

Out at Woodruff Place--afar
From the city's glare and jar,
With the leafy trees, instead
Of the awnings, overhead;
With the shadows cool and sweet,
For the fever of the street;
With the silence, like a prayer,
Breathing round us everywhere.

Gracious anchorage, at last,
From the billows of the vast
Tide of life that comes and goes,
Whence and where nobody knows--
Moving, like a skeptic's thought,
Out of nowhere into naught.
Touch and tame us with thy grace,
Placid calm of Woodruff Place!

Weave a wreath of beechen leaves
For the brow that throbs and grieves
O'er the ledger, bloody-lined,
'Neath the sun-struck window-blind!
Send the breath of woodland bloom
Through the sick man's prison room,
Till his old farm-home shall swim
Sweet in mind to hearten him!

Out at Woodruff Place the Muse
Dips her sandal in the dews,
Sacredly as night and dawn
Baptize liliated grove and lawn:
Woody path, or paven way--
She doth haunt them night and day,--
Sun or moonlight through the trees,
To her eyes, are melodies.

Swinging lanterns, twinkling clear
Through night-scenes, are songs to her--
Tinted lilt and choiring hues,

Blent with children's glad halloos;
Then belated lays that fade
Into midnight's serenade--
Vine-like words and zithern-strings
Twined through ali her slumberings.

Blessed be each hearthstone set
Neighboring the violet!
Blessed every rooftree prayed
Over by the beech's shadel
Blessed doorway, opening where
We may look on Nature--there
Hand to hand and face to face--
Storied realm, or Woodruff Place.

James Whitcomb Riley

Just To Be Good

Just to be good--
This is enough--enough!
O we who find sin's billows wild and rough,
Do we not feel how more than any gold
Would be the blameless life we led of old
While yet our lips knew but a mother's kiss?
Ah! though we miss
All else but this,
To be good is enough!

It is enough--
Enough--just to be good!
To lift our hearts where they are understood;
To let the thirst for worldly power and place
Go unappeased; to smile back in God's face
With the glad lips our mothers used to kiss.
Ah! though we miss
All else but this,
To be good is enough!

James Whitcomb Riley

Kingry's Mill

On old Brandywine-- about
Where White's Lots is now laid out,
And the old crick narries down
To the ditch that splits the town--,
Kingry's Mill stood. Hardly see
Where the old dam ust to be;
Shallor, long, dry trough o' grass
Where the old race ust to pass!

That's be'n forty years ago--
Forty years o' frost and snow--
Forty years o' shade and shine
Sence them boyhood-days o' mine--!
All the old landmarks o' town.
Changed about, er rotted down!
Where's the Tanyard? Where's the Still?
Tell me where's old Kingry's Mill?

Don't seem funder back, to me,
I'll be dogg'd! Than yisterd'y,
Since us fellers, in bare feet
And straw hats, went through the wheat,
Cuttin' 'crost the shortest shoot
Fer that-air old ellum root
Jest above the mill-dam-- where
The blame' cars now crosses there!

Through the willers down the crick
We could see the old mill stick
Its red gable up, as if
It jest knowed we'd stol'd the skiff!
See the winders in the sun
Blink like they wuz wonderun'
What the miller ort to do
With sich boys as me and you!

But old Kingry--! Who could fear
That old chap, with all his cheer--?
Leanin' at the window-sill,

Er the half-door o' the mill,
Swoppin' lies, and pokin' fun,
'N jigglin' like his hoppers done--
Laughin' grists o' gold and red
Right out o' the wagon-bed!

What did he keer where we went--?
'Jest keep out o' devilment,
And don't fool around the belts,
Bolts, ner burrs, ner nothin' else
'Bout the blame machinery,
And that's all I ast!' says-ee.
Then we'd climb the stairs, and play
In the bran-bins half the day!

Rickollect the dusty wall,
And the spider-webs, and all!
Rickollect the trimblin' spout
Where the meal come josslln' out--
Stand and comb yer fingers through
The fool-truck an hour er two--
Felt so sorto' warm-like and
Soothin' to a feller's hand!

Climb, high up above the stream,
And 'coon' out the wobbly beam
And peek down from out the lof'
Where the weather-boards was off--
Gee-mun-nee! w'y, it takes grit
Even jest to think of it--!
Lookin' 'way down there below
On the worter roarin' so!

Rickollect the flume, and wheel,
And the worter slosh and reel
And jest ravel out in froth
Flossier'n satin cloth!
Rickollect them paddles jest
Knock the bubbles galley-west,
And plunge under, and come up
Drippin' like a worter-pup!

And to see them old things gone
That I onc't was bettin' on,
In rale p'int o' fact, I feel
kindo' like that worter-wheel--,
Sorto' drippy-like and wet
Round the eyes-- but paddlin' yet,
And in mem'ry, loafin' still
Down around old Kingry's Mill!

James Whitcomb Riley

Kissing The Rod

O heart of mine, we shouldn't
Worry so!
What we've missed of calm we couldn't
Have, you know!
What we've met of stormy pain,
And of sorrow's driving rain,
We can better meet again,
If it blow!

We have erred in that dark hour
We have known,
When our tears fell with the shower,
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, forgetting 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.

James Whitcomb Riley

Knee-Deep In June

Tell you what I like the best --
'Long about knee-deep in June,
'Bout the time strawberries melts
On the vine, -- some afternoon
Like to jes' git out and rest,
And not work at nothin' else!

Orchard's where I'd ruther be --
Needn't fence it in fer me! --
Jes' the whole sky overhead,
And the whole airth underneath --
Sort o' so's a man kin breathe
Like he ort, and kind o' has
Elbow-room to keerlessly
Sprawl out len'thways on the grass
Where the shadders thick and soft
As the kivvers on the bed
Mother fixes in the loft
Allus, when they's company!

Jes' a-sort o' lazin there -
S'lazy, 'at you peek and peer
Through the wavin' leaves above,
Like a feller 'ats in love
And don't know it, ner don't keer!
Ever'thing you hear and see
Got some sort o' interest -
Maybe find a bluebird's nest
Tucked up there conveyently
Fer the boy 'at's ap' to be
Up some other apple tree!
Watch the swallers skootin' past
Bout as peert as you could ast;
Er the Bob-white raise and whiz
Where some other's whistle is.

Ketch a shadder down below,
And look up to find the crow --
Er a hawk, - away up there,

'Pearantly froze in the air! --
Hear the old hen squawk, and squat
Over ever' chick she's got,
Suddent-like! - and she knows where
That-air hawk is, well as you! --
You jes' bet yer life she do! --
Eyes a-glitterin' like glass,
Waitin' till he makes a pass!

Pee-wees wingin', to express
My opinion, 's second-class,
Yit you'll hear 'em more er less;
Sapsucks gittin' down to biz,
Weedin' out the lonesomeness;
Mr. Bluejay, full o' sass,
In them baseball clothes o' his,
Sportin' round the orchad jes'
Like he owned the premises!
Sun out in the fields kin sizz,
But flat on yer back, I guess,
In the shade's where glory is!
That's jes' what I'd like to do
Stiddy fer a year er two!

Plague! Ef they ain't somepin' in
Work 'at kind o' goes ag'in'
My convictions! - 'long about
Here in June especially! --
Under some ole apple tree,
Jes' a-restin through and through,
I could git along without
Nothin' else at all to do
Only jes' a-wishin' you
Wuz a-gittin' there like me,
And June wuz eternity!

Lay out there and try to see
Jes' how lazy you kin be! --
Tumble round and souse yer head
In the clover-bloom, er pull
Yer straw hat acrost yer eyes
And peek through it at the skies,

Thinkin' of old chums 'ats dead,
Maybe, smilin' back at you
In betwixt the beautiful
Clouds o'gold and white and blue! --
Month a man kin raily love --
June, you know, I'm talkin' of!

March ain't never nothin' new! --
April's altogether too
Brash fer me! and May -- I jes'
'Bominate its promises, --
Little hints o' sunshine and
Green around the timber-land --
A few blossoms, and a few
Chip-birds, and a sprout er two, --
Drap asleep, and it turns in
Fore daylight and snows ag'in! --
But when June comes - Clear my th'oat
With wild honey! -- Rench my hair
In the dew! And hold my coat!
Whoop out loud! And th'ow my hat! --
June wants me, and I'm to spare!
Spread them shadders anywhere,
I'll get down and waller there,
And obleeged to you at that!

James Whitcomb Riley

Kneeling With Herrick

Dear Lord, to Thee my knee is bent.--
Give me content--
Full-pleasured with what comes to me,
What e'er it be:
An humble roof--a frugal board,
And simple hoard;
The wintry fagot piled beside
The chimney wide,
While the enwreathing flames up-sprout
And twine about
The brazen dogs that guard my hearth
And household worth:
Tinge with the ember's ruddy glow
The rafters low;
And let the sparks snap with delight,
As ringers might
That mark deft measures of some tune
The children croon:
Then, with good friends, the rarest few
Thou holdest true,
Ranged round about the blaze, to share
My comfort there,--
Give me to claim the service meet
That makes each seat
A place of honor, and each guest
Loved as the rest.

James Whitcomb Riley

Last Night-- And This

Last night-- how deep the darkness was!
And well I knew its depths, because
I waded it from shore to shore,
Thinking to reach the light no more.

She would not even touch my hand---.
The winds rose and the cedars fanned
The moon out, and the stars fled back
In heaven and hid-- and all was black!

But ah! To-night a summons came,
Signed with a tear-drop for a name,
For as I wondering kissed it, lo
A line beneath it told me so.

And now-- the moon hangs over me
A disk of dazzling brilliancy,
And every star-tip stabs my sights
With splintered glitterings of light!

James Whitcomb Riley

Laughter Holding Both His Sides

Ay, thou varlet! Laugh away!
All the world's a holiday!
Laugh away, and roar and shout
Till thy hoarse tongue lolleth out!
Bloat thy cheeks, and bulge thine eyes
Unto bursting; pelt thy thighs
With thy swollen palms, and roar
As thou never hast before!
Lustier! Wilt thou! Peal on peal!
Stiflest? Squat and grind thy heel--
Wrestle with thy loins, and then
Wheeze thee whiles, and whoop again!

James Whitcomb Riley

Leedle Dutch Baby

Leedle Dutch baby haff come ter town!
Jabber und jump till der day gone down--
Jabber und splutter und split hees jaws--
Vot a Dutch baby dees Londsmon vas!
I dink dose mout' vas leedle too vide
Ober he laugh fon dot altso-side!
Haff got blenty off deemple und vrown--?
Hey! Leedle Dutchman come ter town!

Leedle Dutch baby, I dink me proud
Ober your fader can schquall dot loud
Ven he vas leedle Dutch baby like you
Und yoost don't gare, like he always do--!
Guess ven dey vean him on beer, you bet
Dot's der because dot he aind veaned yet--!
Vot you said off he dringk you down--?
Hey! Leedle Dutchman come ter town!

Leedle Dutch baby, yoost schquall away--
Schquall fon preakfast till gisterday!
Better you all time gry und shout
Dan shmile me vonce fon der coffin out!
Vot I gare off you keek my nose
Downside-up mit your heels und toes--
Downside, oder der oopside-down--?
Hey! Leedle Dutchman come ter town!

James Whitcomb Riley

Leonainie

Leonainie--Angels named her;
And they took the light
Of the laughing stars and framed her
In a smile of white;
And they made her hair of gloomy
Midnight, and her eyes of bloomy
Moonshine, and they brought her to me
In the solemn night.--

In a solemn night of summer,
When my heart of gloom
Blossomed up to greet the comer
Like a rose in bloom;
All forebodings that distressed me
I forgot as Joy caressed me--
(LYING Joy! that caught and pressed me
In the arms of doom!)

Only spake the little lisper
In the Angel-tongue;
Yet I, listening, heard her whisper,--
'Songs are only sung
Here below that they may grieve you--
Tales but told you to deceive you,--
So must Leonainie leave you
While her love is young.'

Then God smiled and it was morning.
Matchless and supreme
Heaven's glory seemed adorning
Earth with its esteem:
Every heart but mine seemed gifted
With the voice of prayer, and lifted
Where my Leonainie drifted
From me like a dream.

James Whitcomb Riley

Let Us Forget

Let us forget. What matters it that we
Once reigned o'er happy realms of long-ago,
And talked of love, and let our voices low,
And ruled for some brief sessions royally?
What if we sung, or laughed, or wept maybe?
It has availed not anything, and so
Let it go by that we may better know
How poor a thing is lost to you and me.
But yesterday I kissed your lips, and yet
Did thrill you not enough to shake the dew
From your drenched lids--and missed, with no regret,
Your kiss shot back, with sharp breaths failing you;
And so, to-day, while our worn eyes are wet
With all this waste of tears, let us forget!

James Whitcomb Riley

Liberty

New Castle, July 4, 1878

or a hundred years the pulse of time
Has throbbd for Liberty;
For a hundred years the grand old clime
Columbia has been free;
For a hundred years our country's love,
The Stars and Stripes, has waved above.

Away far out on the gulf of years--
Misty and faint and white
Through the fogs of wrong--a sail appears,
And the Mayflower heaves in sight,
And drifts again, with its little flock
Of a hundred souls, on Plymouth Rock.

Do you see them there--as long, long since--
Through the lens of History;
Do you see them there as their chieftain prints
In the snow his bended knee,
And lifts his voice through the wintry blast
In thanks for a peaceful home at last?

Though the skies are dark and the coast is bleak,
And the storm is wild and fierce,
Its frozen flake on the upturned cheek
Of the Pilgrim melts in tears,
And the dawn that springs from the darkness there
Is the morning light of an answered prayer.

The morning light of the day of Peace
That gladdens the aching eyes,
And gives to the soul that sweet release
That the present verifies,--
Nor a snow so deep, nor a wind so chill
To quench the flame of a freeman's will!

II

Days of toil when the bleeding hand
Of the pioneer grew numb,
When the untilled tracts of the barren land
Where the weary ones had come
Could offer nought from a fruitful soil
To stay the strength of the stranger's toil.

Days of pain, when the heart beat low,
And the empty hours went by
Pitiless, with the wail of woe
And the moan of Hunger's cry--
When the trembling hands upraised in prayer
Had only the strength to hold them there.

Days when the voice of hope had fled--
Days when the eyes grown weak
Were folded to, and the tears they shed
Were frost on a frozen cheek--
When the storm bent down from the skies and gave
A shroud of snow for the Pilgrim's grave.

Days at last when the smiling sun
Glanced down from a summer sky,
And a music rang where the rivers run,
And the waves went laughing by;
And the rose peeped over the mossy bank
While the wild deer stood in the stream and drank.

And the birds sang out so loud and good,
In a symphony so clear
And pure and sweet that the woodman stood
With his ax upraised to hear,
And to shape the words of the tongue unknown
Into a language all his own--

1

'Sing! every bird, to-day!
Sing for the sky so clear,
And the gracious breath of the atmosphere
Shall waft our cares away.

Sing! sing! for the sunshine free;
Sing through the land from sea to sea;
Lift each voice in the highest key
And sing for Liberty!

2

'Sing for the arms that fling
Their fetters in the dust
And lift their hands in higher trust
Unto the one Great King;
Sing for the patriot heart and hand;
Sing for the country they have planned;
Sing that the world may understand
This is Freedom's land!'

3

'Sing in the tones of prayer,
Sing till the soaring soul
Shall float above the world's control
In freedom everywhere!
Sing for the good that is to be,
Sing for the eyes that are to see
The land where man at last is free,
O sing for liberty!'

III

A holy quiet reigned, save where the hand
Of labor sent a murmur through the land,
And happy voices in a harmony
Taught every lispings breeze a melody.
A nest of cabins, where the smoke upcurled
A breathing incense to the other world.
A land of languor from the sun of noon,
That fainted slowly to the pallid moon,
Till stars, thick-scattered in the garden-land
Of Heaven by the great Jehovah's hand,
Had blossomed into light to look upon

The dusky warrior with his arrow drawn,
As skulking from the covert of the night
With serpent cunning and a fiend's delight,
With murderous spirit, and a yell of hate
The voice of Hell might tremble to translate:
When the fond mother's tender lullaby
Went quavering in shrieks all suddenly,
And baby-lips were dabbled with the stain
Of crimson at the bosom of the slain,
And peaceful homes and fortunes ruined--lost
In smoldering embers of the holocaust.
Yet on and on, through years of gloom and strife,
Our country struggled into stronger life;
Till colonies, like footprints in the sand,
Marked Freedom's pathway winding through the land--
And not the footprints to be swept away
Before the storm we hatched in Boston Bay,--
But footprints where the path of war begun
That led to Bunker Hill and Lexington,--
For he who "dared to lead where others dared
To follow" found the promise there declared
Of Liberty, in blood of Freedom's host
Baptized to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!

Oh, there were times when every patriot breast
Was riotous with sentiments expressed
In tones that swelled in volume till the sound
Of lusty war itself was well-nigh drowned.
Oh, those were times when happy eyes with tears
Brimmed o'er as all the misty doubts and fears
Were washed away, and Hope with gracious mien,
Reigned from her throne again a sovereign queen.
Until at last, upon a day like this
When flowers were blushing at the summer's kiss,
And when the sky was cloudless as the face
Of some sweet infant in its angel grace,--
There came a sound of music, thrown afloat
Upon the balmy air--a clanging note
Reiterated from the brazen throat
Of Independence Bell: A sound so sweet,
The clamoring throngs of people in the streets
Were stilled as at the solemn voice of prayer,

And heads were bowed, and lips were moving there
That made no sound--until the spell had passed,
And then, as when all sudden comes the blast
Of some tornado, came the cheer on cheer
Of every eager voice, while far and near
The echoing bells upon the atmosphere
Set glorious rumors floating, till the ear
Of every listening patriot tingled clear,
And thrilled with joy and jubilee to hear.

I

'Stir all your echoes up,
O Independence Bell,
And pour from your inverted cup
The song we love so well.

'Lift high your happy voice,
And swing your iron tongue
Till syllables of praise rejoice
That never yet were sung.

'Ring in the gleaming dawn
Of Freedom--Toll the knell
Of Tyranny, and then ring on,
O Independence Bell.--

'Ring on, and drown the moan,
Above the patriot slain,
Till sorrow's voice shall catch the tone
And join the glad refrain.

'Ring out the wounds of wrong
And rankle in the breast;
Your music like a slumber-song
Will lull revenge to rest.

'Ring out from Occident
To Orient, and peal
From continent to continent
The mighty joy you feel.

'Ring! Independence Bell!
Ring on till worlds to be
Shall listen to the tale you tell
Of love and Liberty!'

IV

O Liberty--the dearest word
A bleeding country ever heard,--
We lay our hopes upon thy shrine
And offer up our lives for thine.
You gave us many happy years
Of peace and plenty ere the tears
A mourning country wept were dried
Above the graves of those who died
Upon thy threshold. And again
When newer wars were bred, and men
Went marching in the cannon's breath
And died for thee and loved the death,
While, high above them, gleaming bright,
The dear old flag remained in sight,
And lighted up their dying eyes
With smiles that brightened paradise.
O Liberty, it is thy power
To gladden us in every hour
Of gloom, and lead us by thy hand
As little children through a land
Of bud and blossom; while the days
Are filled with sunshine, and thy praise
Is warbled in the roundelays
Of joyous birds, and in the song
Of waters, murmuring along
The paths of peace, whose flowery fringe
Has roses finding deeper tinge
Of crimson, looking on themselves
Reflected--leaning from the shelves
Of cliff and crag and mossy mound
Of emerald splendor shadow-drowned.--
We hail thy presence, as you come
With bugle blast and rolling drum,
And booming guns and shouts of glee
Commingled in a symphony

That thrills the worlds that throng to see
The glory of thy pageantry.
OAnd with thy praise, we breathe a prayer
That God who leaves you in our care
May favor us from this day on
With thy dear presence--till the dawn
Of Heaven, breaking on thy face,
Lights up thy first abiding place.

James Whitcomb Riley

Limitations Of Genius

The audience entire seemed pleased--indeed
Extremely pleased. And little Maymie, freed
From her task of instructing, ran to show
Her wondrous colored picture to and fro
Among the company.

'And how comes it,' said
Some one to Mr. Hammond, 'that, instead
Of the inventor's life you did not choose
The _artist's?_--since the world can better lose
A cutting-box or reaper than it can
A noble picture painted by a man
Endowed with gifts this drawing would suggest'--
Holding the picture up to show the rest.
'_There now!_' chimed in the wife, her pale face lit
Like winter snow with sunrise over it,--
'That's what _I'm_ always asking him.--But _he_--
Well, as he's answering _you_, he answers _me_,--
With that same silent, suffocating smile
He's wearing now!'

For quite a little while
No further speech from anyone, although
All looked at Mr. Hammond and that slow,
Immutable, mild smile of his. And then
The encouraged querist asked him yet again
Why was it, and etcetera--with all
The rest, expectant, waiting 'round the wall,--
Until the gentle Mr. Hammond said
He'd answer with a '_parable_', instead--
About 'a dreamer' that he used to know--
'An artist'--'master'--_all_--in _embryo_.

James Whitcomb Riley

Lines For An Album

I would not trace the hackneyed phrase
Of shallow words and empty praise,
And prate of 'peace' till one might think
My foolish pen was drunk with ink.
Nor will I here the wish express
Of 'lasting love and happiness,'
And 'cloudless skies'--for after all
'Into each life some rain must fall.'
--No. Keep the empty page below,
In my remembrance, white as snow--
Nor sigh to know the secret prayer
My spirit hand has written there.

James Whitcomb Riley

Little Dick And The Clock

When Dicky was sick
In the night, and the clock,
As he listened, said 'Tick-
Atty--tick-atty--tock!'
He said that it said,
Every time it said 'Tick,'
It said 'Sick,' instead,
And he heard it say 'Sick!'
And when it said 'Tick-
Atty--tick-atty--tock,'
He said it said 'Sick-
Atty--sick-atty--sock!'
And he tried to see then,
But the light was too dim,
Yet he heard it again--
And't was talking to him!

And then it said 'Sick-
Atty--sick-atty--sick
You poor little Dick-
Atty--Dick-atty--dock!
Have you got the hick-
Atties? Hi! send for Doc
To hurry up quick
Atty--quick-atty--quock,
And heat a hot brick-
Atty--brick-atty--brock,

And rikle-ty wrap it
And clickle-ty clap it
Against his cold feet-
Al-ty--weep-aty--eepaty--
There he goes, slapit-
Ty--slippaty--sleepaty!'

James Whitcomb Riley

Little Jack Janitor

And there, in that ripe Summer-night, once more
A wintry coolness through the open door
And window seemed to touch each glowing face
Refreshingly; and, for a fleeting space,
The quickened fancy, through the fragrant air,
Saw snowflakes whirling where the roseleaves were,
And sounds of veriest jingling bells again
Were heard in tinkling spoons and glasses then.

Thus Uncle Mart's old poem sounded young
And crisp and fresh and clear as when first sung,
Away back in the wakening of Spring
When his rhyme and the robin, chorusing,
Rumored, in duo-fanfare, of the soon
Invading johnny-jump-ups, with platoon
On platoon of sweet-williams, marshaled fine
To bloomed blarings of the trumpet-vine.

The poet turned to whisperingly confer
A moment with 'The Noted Traveler.'
Then left the room, tripped up the stairs, and then
An instant later reappeared again,
Bearing a little, lacquered box, or chest,
Which, as all marked with curious interest,
He gave to the old Traveler, who in
One hand upheld it, pulling back his thin
Black lustre coat-sleeves, saying he had sent
Up for his 'Magic Box,' and that he meant
To test it there--especially to show
The Children. 'It is _empty now_, you know.'--
He humped it with his knuckles, so they heard
The hollow sound--'But lest it be inferred
It is not _really_ empty, I will ask
Little Jack Janitor, whose pleasant task
It is to keep it ship-shape.'

Then he tried
And rapped the little drawer in the side,
And called out sharply 'Are you in there, Jack?'

And then a little, squeaky voice came back,--
'_Of course I'm in here--ain't you got the key
Turned on me!_'

Then the Traveler leisurely
Felt through his pockets, and at last took out
The smallest key they ever heard about!--
It, wasn't any longer than a pin:
And this at last he managed to fit in
The little keyhole, turned it, and then cried,
'Is everything swept out clean there inside?'
'_Open the drawer and see!--Don't talk to much;
Or else_', the little voice squeaked, '_talk in Dutch--
You age me, asking questions!_'

Then the man
Looked hurt, so that the little folks began
To feel so sorry for him, he put down
His face against the box and had to frown.--
'Come, sir!' he called,--'no impudence to _me!_--
You've swept out clean?'

'_Open the drawer and see!_'
And so he drew the drawer out: Nothing there,
But just the empty drawer, stark and bare.
He shoved it back again, with a sharp click.--

'_Ouch!_' yelled the little voice--'_un-snap it--quick!--
You've got my nose pinched in the crack!_'

And then
The frightened man drew out the drawer again,
The little voice exclaiming, '_Jeemi-nee!--
Say what you want, but please don't murder me!_'

'Well, then,' the man said, as he closed the drawer
With care, 'I want some cotton-batting for
My supper! Have you got it?'

And inside,
All muffled like, the little voice replied,
'_Open the drawer and see!_'

And, sure enough,
He drew it out, filled with the cotton stuff.
He then asked for a candle to be brought
And held for him: and tuft by tuft he caught
And lit the cotton, and, while blazing, took
It in his mouth and ate it, with a look
Of purest satisfaction.

'Now,' said he,
'I've eaten the drawer empty, let me see
What this is in my mouth:' And with both hands
He began drawing from his lips long strands
Of narrow silken ribbons, every hue
And tint;--and crisp they were and bright and new
As if just purchased at some Fancy-Store.
'And now, Bub, bring your cap,' he said, 'before
Something might happen!' And he stuffed the cap
Full of the ribbons. '_There_', my little chap,
Hold _tight_ to them,' he said, 'and take them to
The ladies there, for they know what to do
With all such rainbow finery!'

He smiled
Half sadly, as it seemed, to see the child
Open his cap first to his mother..... There
Was not a ribbon in it anywhere!
'_Jack Janitor!_' the man said sternly through
The Magic Box--'Jack Janitor, did _you_
Conceal those ribbons anywhere?'

'_Well, yes,_'
The little voice piped--'_but you'd never guess
The place I hid 'em if you'd guess a year!_'

'Well, won't you _tell_ me?'

'_Not until you clear
Your mean old conscience_' said the voice, '_and make
Me first do something for the Children's sake._'

'Well, then, fill up the drawer,' the Traveler said,

'With whitest white on earth and reddest red!--
Your terms accepted--Are you satisfied?'

'_Open the drawer and see!_' the voice replied.

'_Why, bless my soul!_'--the man said, as he drew
The contents of the drawer into view--
'It's level-full of _candy!_'--Pass it 'round--
Jack Janitor shan't steal _that_, I'll be bound!--
He raised and crunched a stick of it and smacked
His lips.--'Yes, that _is_ candy, for a fact!--
And it's all _yours!_'

And how the children there
Lit into it!--O never anywhere
Was such a feast of sweetness!

'And now, then,'
The man said, as the empty drawer again
Slid to its place, he bending over it,--
'Now, then, Jack Janitor, before we quit
Our entertainment for the evening, tell
Us where you hid the ribbons--can't you?'

'_Well,_'
The squeaky little voice drawled sleepily--
'_Under your old hat, maybe.--Look and see!_'

All carefully the man took off his hat:
But there was not a ribbon under that.--
He shook his heavy hair, and all in vain
The old white hat--then put it on again:
'Now, tell me, _honest_, Jack, where _did_ you hide
The ribbons?'

'_Under your hat_' the voice replied.--
'_Mind! I said 'under' and not 'in' it.--Won't
You ever take the hint on earth?--or don't
You want to show folks where the ribbons at?--
Law! but I'm sleepy!--Under--unner your hat!_'

Again the old man carefully took off

The empty hat, with an embarrassed cough,
Saying, all gravely to the children: 'You
Must promise not to _laugh_--you'll all _want_ to--
When you see where Jack Janitor has dared
To hide those ribbons--when he might have spared
My feelings.--But no matter!--Know the worst--
Here are the ribbons, as I feared at first.'--
And, quick as snap of thumb and finger, there
The old man's head had not a sign of hair,
And in his lap a wig of iron-gray
Lay, stuffed with all that glittering array
Of ribbons ... 'Take 'em to the ladies--Yes.
Good-night to everybody, and God bless
The Children.'

In a whisper no one missed
The Hired Man yawned: 'He's a vantrilloquist'

* * * * *

So gloried all the night Each trundle-bed
And pallet was enchanted--each child-head
Was packed with happy dreams. And long before
The dawn's first far-off rooster crowed, the snore
Of Uncle Mart was stilled, as round him pressed
The bare arms of the wakeful little guest
That he had carried home with him....

'I think,'
An awed voice said--'(No: I don't want a _dwink_.--
Lay still.)--I think 'The Noted Traveler' he
'S the inscrutibul-est man I ever see!'

James Whitcomb Riley

Little Orphant Annie

To all the little children: -- The happy ones; and sad ones;
The sober and the silent ones; the boisterous and glad ones;
The good ones -- Yes, the good ones, too; and all the lovely bad ones.

Little Orphant Annie's come to our house to stay,
An' wash the cups an' saucers up, an' brush the crumbs away,
An' shoo the chickens off the porch, an' dust the hearth, an' sweep,
An' make the fire, an' bake the bread, an' earn her board-an'-keep;
An' all us other childern, when the supper-things is done,
We set around the kitchen fire an' has the mostest fun
A-list'nin' to the witch-tales 'at Annie tells about,
An' the Gobble-uns 'at gits you
Ef you
Don't
Watch
Out!

Wunst they wuz a little boy wouldn't say his prayers,--
An' when he went to bed at night, away up-stairs,
His Mammy heerd him holler, an' his Daddy heerd him bawl,
An' when they turn't the kivvers down, he wuzn't there at all!
An' they seeked him in the rafter-room, an' cubby-hole, an' press,
An' seeked him up the chimbly-flue, an' ever'-wheres, I guess;
But all they ever found wuz thist his pants an' roundabout:--
An' the Gobble-uns 'll git you
Ef you
Don't
Watch
Out!

An' one time a little girl 'ud allus laugh an' grin,
An' make fun of ever' one, an' all her blood-an'-kin;
An' wunst, when they was 'company,' an' ole folks wuz there,
She mocked 'em an' shocked 'em, an' said she didn't care!
An' thist as she kicked her heels, an' turn't to run an' hide,
They wuz two great big Black Things a-standin' by her side,
An' they snatched her through the ceilin' 'fore she knowed what she's about!
An' the Gobble-uns 'll git you
Ef you

Don't
Watch
Out!

An' little Orphant Annie says, when the blaze is blue,
An' the lamp-wick sputters, an' the wind goes woo-oo!
An' you hear the crickets quit, an' the moon is gray,
An' the lightnin'-bugs in dew is all squenched away,--
You better mind yer parunts, an' yer teachurs fond an' dear,
An' churish them 'at loves you, an' dry the orphant's tear,
An' he'p the pore an' needy ones 'at clusters all about,
Er the Gobble-uns 'll git you

Ef you
Don't
Watch
Out!

James Whitcomb Riley

Little-Girl-Two-Little-Girls

I'm twins, I guess, 'cause my Ma say
I'm two little girls. An' one o' me
Is _Good_ little girl; an' th'other 'n' she
Is _Bad_ little girl as she can be!_
An' Ma say so, 'most ever' day.

An' she's the _funniest_ Ma! 'Cause when
My Doll won't mind, an' I ist cry,
W'y, nen my Ma she sob an' sigh,
An' say, 'Dear _Good_ little girl, good-bye!--
Bad little girl's comed here again!'

Last time 'at Ma act' thataway,
I cried all to myse'f awhile
Out on the steps, an' nen I smile,
An' git my Doll all fix' in style,
An' go in where Ma's at, an' say:
'Morning to you, Mommy dear!
Where's that Bad little girl wuz here?
Bad little girl's goned clean away,
An' Good little girl's comed back to stay.'

James Whitcomb Riley

Lockerbie Street

Such a dear little street it is, nestled away
From the noise of the city and heat of the day,
In cool shady coverts of whispering trees,
With their leaves lifted up to shake hands with the breeze
Which in all its wide wanderings never may meet
With a resting-place fairer than Lockerbie street!

There is such a relief, from the clangor and din
Of the heart of the town, to go loitering in
Through the dim, narrow walks, with the sheltering shade
Of the trees waving over the long promenade,
And littering lightly the ways of our feet
With the gold of the sunshine of Lockerbie street.

And the nights that come down the dark pathways of dusk,
With the stars in their tresses, and odors of musk
In their moon-woven raiments, bespangled with dews,
And looped up with lilies for lovers to use
In the songs that they sing to the tinkle and beat
Of their sweet serenadings through Lockerbie street.

O my Lockerbie street! You are fair to be seen--
Be it noon of the day, or the rare and serene
Afternoon of the night-- you are one to my heart,
And I love you above all the phrases of art,
For no language could frame and no lips could repeat
My rhyme-haunted raptures of Lockerbie street.

James Whitcomb Riley

Longfellow

The winds have talked with him confidingly;
The trees have whispered to him; and the night
Hath held him gently as a mother might,
And taught him all sad tones of melody:
The mountains have bowed to him; and the sea,
In clamorous waves, and murmurs exquisite,
Hath told him all her sorrow and delight--
Her legends fair-- her darkest mystery.
His verse blooms like a flower, night and day;
Bees cluster round his rhymes; and twitterings
Of lark and swallow, in an endless May,
Are mingling with the tender songs he sings--.
Nor shall he cease to sing-- in every lay
Of Nature's voice he sings-- and will always.

James Whitcomb Riley

Lullaby

The maple strews the embers of its leaves
O'er the laggard swallows nestled 'neath the eaves;
And the moody cricket falters in his cry--Baby-bye!--
And the lid of night is falling o'er the sky--Baby-bye!--
The lid of night is falling o'er the sky!

The rose is lying pallid, and the cup
Of the frosted calla-lily folded up;
And the breezes through the garden sob and sigh--Baby-bye!--
O'er the sleeping blooms of summer where they lie--Baby-bye!--
O'er the sleeping blooms of summer where they lie!

Yet, Baby--O my Baby, for your sake
This heart of mine is ever wide awake,
And my love may never droop a drowsy eye--Baby-bye!--
Till your own are wet above me when I die--Baby-bye!--
Till your own are wet above me when I die.

James Whitcomb Riley

Luther Benson

AFTER READING HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY

POOR victim of that vulture curse
That hovers o'er the universe,
With ready talons quick to strike
In every human heart alike,
And cruel beak to stab and tear
In virtue's vitals everywhere,--
You need no sympathy of mine
To aid you, for a strength divine
Encircles you, and lifts you clear
Above this earthly atmosphere.

And yet I can but call you poor,
As, looking through the open door
Of your sad life, I only see
A broad landscape of misery,
And catch through mists of pitying tears
The ruins of your younger years,
I see a father's shielding arm
Thrown round you in a wild alarm--
Struck down, and powerless to free
Or aid you in your agony.

I see a happy home grow dark
And desolate--the latest spark
Of hope is passing in eclipse--
The prayer upon a mother's lips
Has fallen with her latest breath
In ashes on the lips of death--
I see a penitent who reels,
And writhes, and clasps his hands, and kneels,
And moans for mercy for the sake
Of that fond heart he dared to break.

And lo! as when in Galilee
A voice above the troubled sea
Commanded 'Peace; be still!' the flood
That rolled in tempest-waves of blood

Within you, fell in calm so sweet
It ripples round the Saviour's feet;
And all your noble nature thrilled
With brightest hope and faith, and filled
Your thirsty soul with joy and peace
And praise to Him who gave release.

James Whitcomb Riley

Man's Devotion

A lover said, 'O Maiden, love me well,
For I must go away:
And should ANOTHER ever come to tell
Of love--What WILL you say?'

And she let fall a royal robe of hair
That folded on his arm
And made a golden pillow for her there;
Her face--as bright a charm

As ever setting held in kingly crown--
Made answer with a look,
And reading it, the lover bended down,
And, trusting, 'kissed the book.'

He took a fond farewell and went away.
And slow the time went by--
So weary--dreary was it, day by day
To love, and wait, and sigh.

She kissed his pictured face sometimes, and said:
'O Lips, so cold and dumb,
I would that you would tell me, if not dead,
Why, why do you not come?'

The picture, smiling, stared her in the face
Unmoved--e'en with the touch
Of tear-drops--HERS--bejeweling the case--
'Twas plain--she loved him much.

And, thus she grew to think of him as gay
And joyous all the while,
And SHE was sorrowing--'Ah, welladay!'
But pictures ALWAYS smile!

And years--dull years--in dull monotony
As ever went and came,
Still weaving changes on unceasingly,
And changing, changed her name.

Was she untrue?--She oftentimes was glad
And happy as a wife;
But ONE remembrance oftentimes made sad
Her matrimonial life.--

Though its few years were hardly noted, when
Again her path was strown
With thorns--the roses swept away again,
And she again alone!

And then--alas! ah THEN!--her lover came:
'I come to claim you now--
My Darling, for I know you are the same,
And I have kept my vow

Through these long, long, long years, and now no more
Shall we asundered be!
She staggered back and, sinking to the floor,
Cried in her agony:

'I have been false!' she moaned, 'I am not true--
I am not worthy now,
Nor ever can I be a wife to YOU--
For I have broke my vow!'

And as she kneeled there, sobbing at his feet,
He calmly spoke--no sign
Betrayed his inward agony--'I count you meet
To be a wife of mine!'

And raised her up forgiven, though untrue;
As fond he gazed on her,
She sighed,--'SO HAPPY!' And she never knew
HE was a WIDOWER.

James Whitcomb Riley

Marthy Ellen

They's nothin' in the name to strike
A feller more'n common like!
'Taint liable to git no praise
Ner nothin' like it nowadays;
An' yit that name o' her'n is jest
As purty as the purtiest--
And more 'n that, I'm here to say
I'll live a-thinkin' thataway
And die far Marthy Ellen!

It may be I was prejudust
In favor of it from the fust--
'Cause I kin ricollect jest how
We met, and hear her mother now
A-callin' of her down the road--
And, aggervatin' little toad!--
I see her now, jes' sort o' half-
Way disapp'inted, turn and laugh
And mock her--'Marthy Ellen!'

Our people never had no fuss,
And yit they never tuck to us;
We neighbered back and foreds some;
Until they see she liked to come
To our house--and me and her
Were jest together ever'whur
And all the time--and when they'd see
That I liked her and she liked me,
They'd holler 'Marthy Ellen!'

When we growed up, and they shet down
On me and her a-runnin' roun'
Together, and her father said
He'd never leave her nary red,
So he'p him, ef she married me,
And so on--and her mother she
Jest agged the gyrl, and said she 'lowed
She'd ruther see her in her shroud,
I _writ_ to Marthy Ellen--

That is, I kindo' tuck my pen
In hand, and stated whur and when
The undersigned would be that night,
With two good hosses saddled right
Far lively travelin' in case
Her folks 'ud like to jine the race.
She sent the same note back, and writ
'The rose is red!' right under it--
'Your 'n allus, Marthy Ellen.'

That's all, I reckon--Nothin' more
To tell but what you've heerd afore--
The same old story, sweeter though
Far all the trouble, don't you know.
Old-fashioned name! and yit it's jest
As purty as the purtiest;
And more 'n that, I'm here to say
I'll live a-thinking thataway,
And die far Marthy Ellen!

James Whitcomb Riley

May I Not Weep With You

Let me come in where you sit weeping—aye,
Let me, who have not any child to die,
Weep with you for the little one whose love
I have known nothing of.

The little arms that slowly, slowly loosed
Then- pressure round your neck—the hands you vided
To kiss—such arms—such hands—I never knew,
May I not weep with you?

Fain would I be of service—say something
Between the tears, that would be comforting,
But Oh! so sadder than yourself am I,
Who have not any child to die!

James Whitcomb Riley

Maymie's Story Of Red Riding Hood

W'y, one time wuz a little-weenty dirl,
An' she wuz named Red Riding Hood, 'cause her--
Her Ma she maked a little red cloak fer her
'At turnt up over her head--An' it 'uz all
Ist one piece o' red cardinal 'at 's like
The drate-long stockin's the store-keepers has.--
O! it 'uz purtiest cloak in all the world
An' all this town er anywheres they is!
An' so, one day, her Ma she put it on
Red Riding Hood, she did--one day, she did--
An' it 'uz Sund'y--'cause the little cloak
It 'uz too nice to wear ist ever day
An' all the time!--An' so her Ma, she put
It on Red Riding Hood--an' telled her not
To dit no dirt on it ner dit it mussed
Ner nothin'! An'--an'--nen her Ma she dot
Her little basket out, 'at Old Kriss bringed
Her wunst--one time, he did. And nen she fill'
It full o' whole lots an' 'bundance o' good things t' eat
(Allus my Dran'ma she says "bundance," too.)
An' so her Ma fill' little Red Riding Hood's
Nice basket all ist full o' dood things t' eat,
An' tell her take 'em to her old Dran'ma--
An' not to spill 'em, neever--'cause ef she
'Ud stump her toe an' spill 'em, her Dran'ma
She'll haf to punish her!

An' nen--An' so
Little Red Riding Hood she p'omised she
'Ud be all careful nen an' cross' her heart
'At she wont run an' spill 'em all fer six--
Five--ten--two-hundred-bushel-dollars-gold!
An' nen she kiss her Ma doo'-bye an' went
A-skippin' off--away fur off frough the
Big woods, where her Dran'ma she live at.--No!--
She didn't do a-skippin', like I said:--
She ist went walkin'--careful-like an' slow--
Ist like a little lady--walkin' 'long
As all polite an' nice--an' slow--an' straight--

An' turn her toes--ist like she's marchin' in
The Sund'y-School k-session!

An'--an'--so

She 'uz a-doin' along--an' doin' along--
On frough the drate big woods--'cause her Dran'ma
She live 'way, 'way fur off frough the big woods
From _her_ Ma's house. So when Red Riding Hood
She dit to do there, allus have most fun--
When she do frough the drate big woods, you know.--
'Cause she ain't feared a bit o' anything!
An' so she sees the little hoppty-birds
'At's in the trees, an' flyin' all around,
An' singin' dlad as ef their parunts said
They'll take 'em to the magic-lantern show!
An' she 'ud pull the purty flowers an' things
A-growin' round the stumps--An' she 'ud ketch
The purty butterflies, an' drasshoppers,
An' stick pins frough 'em--No!--I ist _said_ that!--
'Cause she's too dood an' kind an' 'bedient
To _hurt_ things thataway.--She'd _ketch_ 'em, though,
An' ist _play_ wiv 'em ist a little while,
An' nen she'd let 'em fly away, she would,
An' ist skip on adin to her Dran'ma's.

An' so, while she uz doin' 'long an' 'long,
First thing you know they 'uz a drate big old
Mean wicked Wolf jumped out 'at wanted t' eat
Her up, but _dassent_ to--'cause wite clos't there
They wuz a Man a-choppin' wood, an' you
Could _hear_ him.--So the old Wolf he 'uz _'feared_
Only to ist be _kind_ to her.--So he
Ist 'tended like he wuz dood friends to her
An' says 'Dood-morning, little Red Riding Hood!--
All ist as kind!

An' nen Riding Hood

She say 'Dood-morning,' too--all kind an' nice--
Ist like her Ma she learn'--No!--mustn't say
'Learn,' cause '_Learn_' it's unproper.--So she say
It like her _Ma_ she '_tached_' her.--An'--so she
Ist says 'Dood-morning' to the Wolf--'cause she

Don't know ut-tall 'at he's a _wicked_ Wolf
An' want to eat her up!

Nen old Wolf smile
An' say, so kind: 'Where air you doin' at?'
Nen little Red Riding Hood she says: 'I'm doin'
To my Dran'ma's, 'cause my Ma say I might.'
Nen, when she tell him that, the old Wolf he
Ist turn an' light out frough the big thick woods,
Where she can't see him any more. An so
She think he's went to _his_ house--but he haint,--
He's went to her Dran'ma's, to be there first--
An' _ketch_ her, ef she don't watch mighty sharp
What she's about!

An' nen when the old Wolf
Dit to her Dran'ma's house, he's purty smart,--
An' so he 'tend-like _he's_ Red Riding Hood,
An' knock at th' door. An' Riding Hood's Dran'ma
She's sick in bed an' can't come to the door
An' open it. So th' old Wolf knock _two_ times.
An' nen Red Riding Hood's Dran'ma she says
'Who's there?' she says. An' old Wolf 'tends-like he's
Little Red Riding Hood, you know, an' make'
His voice soun' ist like hers, an' says: 'It's me,
Dran'ma--an' I'm Red Riding Hood an' I'm
Ist come to see you.'

Nen her old Dran'ma
She think it _is_ little Red Riding Hood,
An' so she say: 'Well, come in nen an' make
You'se'f at home,' she says, 'cause I'm down sick
In bed, and got the 'ralgia, so's I can't
Dit up an' let ye in.'

An' so th' old Wolf
Ist march' in nen an' shet the door adin,
An' _drowl_, he did, an' _splunge_ up on the bed
An' et up old Miz Riding Hood 'fore she
Could put her specs on an' see who it wuz.--
An' so she never knowed _who_ et her up!

An' nen the wicked Wolf he ist put on
Her nightcap, an' all covered up in bed--
Like he wuz _her_, you know.

Nen, purty soon
Here come along little Red Riding Hood,
An' _she_ knock' at the door. An' old Wolf 'tend
Like _he's_ her Dran'ma; an' he say, 'Who's there?'
Ist like her Dran'ma say, you know. An' so
Little Red Riding Hood she say 'It's _me_,
Dran'ma--an' I'm Red Riding Hood and I'm
Ist come to _see_ you.'

An' nen old Wolf nen
He cough an' say: 'Well, come in nen an' make
You'se'f at home,' he says, 'cause I'm down sick
In bed, an' got the 'ralgia, so's I can't
Dit up an' let ye in.'

An' so she think
It's her Dran'ma a-talkin'.--So she ist
Open' the door an' come in, an' set down
Her basket, an' taked off her things, an' bringed
A chair an' clumbed up on the bed, wite by
The old big Wolf she thinks is her Dran'ma.--
Only she thinks the old Wolf's dot whole lots
More bigger ears, an' lots more whiskers, too,
Than her Dran'ma; an' so Red Riding Hood
She's kindo' skeered a little. So she says
'Oh, Dran'ma, what _big eyes_ you dot!' An' nen
The old Wolf says: 'They're ist big thataway
'Cause I'm so dlad to see you!'

Nen she says,--
'Oh, Dran'ma, what a drate big nose you dot!'
Nen th' old Wolf says: 'It's ist big thataway
Ist 'cause I smell the dood things 'at you bringed
Me in the basket!'

An' nen Riding Hood
She say 'Oh-me-oh-_my_! Dran'ma! what big
White long sharp teeth you dot!'

Nen old Wolf says:

'Yes--an' they're thataway,' he says--an' drowled--
'They're thataway,' he says, 'to _eat_ you wiv!'
An' nen he ist _jump_ at her.--

But she _scream_!--

An' _scream_', she did--So's 'at the Man
'At wuz a-choppin' wood, you know,--_he_ hear,
An' come a-runnin' in there wiv his ax;
An', 'fore the old Wolf know' what he's about,
He split his old brains out an' killed him s'quick
It make' his head swim!--An' Red Riding Hood
She wuzn't hurt at all!

An' the big Man

He tooked her all safe home, he did, an' tell
Her Ma she's all right an' ain't hurt at all
An' old Wolf's dead an' killed--an' ever'thing!--
So her Ma wuz so tickled an' so proud,
She divved _him_ all the dood things t' eat they wuz
'At's in the basket, an' she tell him 'at
She's much oblige', an' say to 'call adin.'
An' story's honest _truth_--an' all _so_, too!

James Whitcomb Riley

Moon-Drowned

'Twas the height of the fete when we quitted the riot,
And quietly stole to the terrace alone,
Where, pale as the lovers that ever swear by it,
The moon it <gazed down as a god from his throne.
We stood there enchanted.--And O the delight of
The sight of the stars and the moon and the sea,
And the infinite skies of that opulent night of
Purple and gold and ivory!

The lisp of the lip of the ripple just under--
The half-awake nightingale's dream in the yews--
Came up from the water, and down from the wonder
Of shadowy foliage, drowsed with the dews,--
Unsteady the firefly's taper--unsteady
The poise of the stars, and their light in the tide,
As it struggled and writhed in caress of the eddy,
As love in the billowy breast of a bride.

The far-away lilt of the waltz rippled to us,
And through us the exquisite thrill of the air:
Like the scent of bruised bloom was her breath, and its dew was
Not honier-sweet than her warm kisses were.
We stood there enchanted.--And O the delight of
The sight of the stars and the moon and the sea,
And the infinite skies of that opulent night of
Purple and gold and ivory!

James Whitcomb Riley

Morton

The warm pulse of the nation has grown chill;
The muffled heart of Freedom, like a knell,
Throbs solemnly for one whose earthly will
Wrought every mission well.

Whose glowing reason towered above the sea
Of dark disaster like a beacon light,
And led the Ship of State, unscathed and free,
Out of the gulfs of night.

When Treason, rabid-mouthed, and fanged with steel,
Lay growling o'er the bones of fallen braves,
And when beneath the tyrant's iron heel
Were ground the hearts of slaves,

And War, with all his train of horrors, leapt
Across the fortress-walls of Liberty
With havoc e'en the marble goddess wept
With tears of blood to see.

Throughout it all his brave and kingly mind
Kept loyal vigil o'er the patriot's vow,
And yet the flag he lifted to the wind
Is drooping o'er him now.

And Peace--all pallid from the battle-field
When first again it hovered o'er the land
And found his voice above it like a shield,
Had nestled in his hand.

.....

O throne of State and gilded Senate halls--
Though thousands throng your aisles and galleries--
How empty are ye! and what silence falls
On your hilarities!

And yet, though great the loss to us appears,
The consolation sweetens all our pain--

Though hushed the voice, through all the coming years
Its echoes will remain.

James Whitcomb Riley

Mr. Hammond's Parable--The Dreamer

I

He was a Dreamer of the Days:
Indolent as a lazy breeze
Of midsummer, in idlest ways
Lolling about in the shade of trees.
The farmer turned--as he passed him by
Under the hillside where he kneeled
Plucking a flower--with scornful eye
And rode ahead in the harvest field
Muttering--'Lawz! ef that-air shirk
Of a boy was mine fer a week er so,
He'd quit _dreamin'_ and git to work
And _airn_ his livin'--er--Well! _I_ know!
And even kindlier rumor said,
Tapping with finger a shaking head,--
'Got such a curious kind o' way--
Wouldn't surprise me much, I say!'

Lying limp, with upturned gaze
Idly dreaming away his days.
No companions? Yes, a book
Sometimes under his arm he took
To read aloud to a lonesome brook.
And school-boys, truant, once had heard
A strange voice chanting, faint and dim--
Followed the echoes, and found it him,
Perched in a tree-top like a bird,
Singing, clean from the highest limb;
And, fearful and awed, they all slipped by
To wonder in whispers if he could fly.
'Let him alone!' his father said
When the old schoolmaster came to say,
'He took no part in his books to-day--
Only the lesson the readers read.--
His mind seems sadly going astray!'
'Let him alone!' came the mournful tone,
And the father's grief in his sad eyes shone--
Hiding his face in his trembling hand,

Moaning, 'Would I could understand!
But as heaven wills it I accept
Uncomplainingly!' So he wept.

Then went 'The Dreamer' as he willed,
As uncontrolled as a light sail filled
Flutters about with an empty boat
Loosed from its moorings and afloat:
Drifted out from the busy quay
Of dull school-moorings listlessly;
Drifted off on the talking breeze,
All alone with his reveries;
Drifted on, as his fancies wrought--
Out on the mighty gulfs of thought.

II

The farmer came in the evening gray
And took the bars of the pasture down;
Called to the cows in a coaxing way,
'Bess' and 'Lady' and 'Spot' and 'Brown,'
While each gazed with a wide-eyed stare,
As though surprised at his coming there--
Till another tone, in a higher key,
Brought their obedience lothfully.

Then, as he slowly turned and swung
The topmost bar to its proper rest,
Something fluttered along and clung
An instant, shivering at his breast--
A wind-scared fragment of legal cap,
Which darted again, as he struck his hand
On his sounding chest with a sudden slap,
And hurried sailing across the land.
But as it clung he had caught the glance
Of a little penciled countenance,
And a glamour of written words; and hence,
A minute later, over the fence,
'Here and there and gone astray
Over the hills and far away,'
He chased it into a thicket of trees

And took it away from the captious breeze.

A scrap of paper with a rhyme
Scrawled upon it of summertime:
A pencil-sketch of a dairy-maid,
Under a farmhouse porch's shade,
Working merrily; and was blent
With her glad features such sweet content,
That a song she sung in the lines below
Seemed delightfully *_apropos_*:--

James Whitcomb Riley

Mr. What's-His-Name

They called him Mr. What's-his-name:
From where he was, or why he came,
Or when, or what he found to do,
Nobody in the city knew.

He lived, it seemed, shut up alone
In a low hovel of his own;
There cooked his meals and made his bed,
Careless of all his neighbors said.

His neighbors, too, said many things
Expressive of grave wonderings,
Since none of them had ever been
Within his doors, or peered therein.

In fact, grown watchful, they became
Assured that Mr. What's-his-name
Was up to something wrong--indeed,
Small doubt of it, we all agreed.

At night were heard strange noises there,
When honest people everywhere
Had long retired; and his light
Was often seen to burn all night.

He left his house but seldom--then
Would always hurry back again,
As though he feared some stranger's knock,
Finding him gone, might burst the lock.

Beside, he carried, every day,
At the one hour he went away,
A basket, with the contents hid
Beneath its woven willow lid.

And so we grew to greatly blame
This wary Mr. What's-his-name,
And look on him with such distrust
His actions seemed to sanction just.

But when he died--he died one day--
Dropped in the street while on his way
To that old wretched hut of his--
You'll think it strange--perhaps it is--

But when we lifted him, and past
The threshold of his home at last,
No man of all the crowd but stepped
With reverence,--Aye, _quailed_ and _wept_!

What was it? Just a shriek of pain
I pray to never hear again--
A withered woman, old and bowed,
That fell and crawled and cried aloud--

And kissed the dead man's matted hair--
Lifted his face and kissed him there--
Called to him, as she clutched his hand,
In words no one could understand.

Insane? Yes.--Well, we, searching, found
An unsigned letter, in a round
Free hand, within the dead man's breast:
'Look to my mother--_I'm_ at rest.

You'll find my money safely hid
Under the lining of the lid
Of my work-basket. It is hers,
And God will bless her ministers!'

And some day--though he died unknown--
If through the City by the Throne
I walk, all cleansed of earthly shame,
I'll ask for Mr. What's-his-name.

James Whitcomb Riley

My Bride That Is To Be

O soul of mine, look out and see
My bride, my bride that is to be!
Reach out with mad, impatient hands,
And draw aside futurity
As one might draw a veil aside--
And so unveil her where she stands
Madonna-like and glorified--
The queen of undiscovered lands
Of love, to where she beckons me--
My bride--my bride that is to be.

The shadow of a willow-tree
That wavers on a garden-wall
In summertime may never fall
In attitude as gracefully
As my fair bride that is to be;--
Nor ever Autumn's leaves of brown
As lightly flutter to the lawn
As fall her fairy-feet upon
The path of love she loiters down.--
O'er drops of dew she walks, and yet
Not one may stain her sandal wet--
Aye, she might dance upon the way
Nor crush a single drop to spray,
So airy-like she seems to me,--
My bride, my bride that is to be.

I know not if her eyes are light
As summer skies or dark as night,--
I only know that they are dim
With mystery: In vain I peer
To make their hidden meaning clear,
While o'er their surface, like a tear
That ripples to the silken brim,
A look of longing seems to swim
All worn and wearylike to me;
And then, as suddenly, my sight
Is blinded with a smile so bright,
Through folded lids I still may see

My bride, my bride that is to be.

Her face is like a night of June
Upon whose brow the crescent-moon
Hangs pendant in a diadem
Of stars, with envy lighting them.--
And, like a wild cascade, her hair
Floods neck and shoulder, arm and wrist,
Till only through a gleaming mist
I seem to see a siren there,
With lips of love and melody
And open arms and heaving breast
Wherein I fling myself to rest,
The while my heart cries hopelessly
For my fair bride that is to be....

Nay, foolish heart and blinded eyes!
My bride hath need of no disguise.--
But, rather, let her come to me
In such a form as bent above
My pillow when in infancy
I knew not anything but love.--
O let her come from out the lands
Of Womanhood--not fairy isles,--
And let her come with Woman's hands
And Woman's eyes of tears and smiles,--
With Woman's hopefulness and grace
Of patience lighting up her face:
And let her diadem be wrought
Of kindly deed and prayerful thought,
That ever over all distress
May beam the light of cheerfulness.--
And let her feet be brave to fare
The labyrinths of doubt and care,
That, following, my own may find
The path to Heaven God designed.--
O let her come like this to me--
My bride--my bride that is to be.

James Whitcomb Riley

My Dancin'-Days Is Over

What is it in old fiddle-chunes 'at makes me ketch my breath
And ripples up my backbone tel I'm tickled most to death?--
Kindo' like that sweet-sick feelin', in the long sweep of a swing,
The first you ever swung in, with yer first sweet-heart, i jing!--
Yer first picnic--yer first ice-cream--yer first o' _ever'thing_
'At happened 'fore yer dancin'-days wuz over!

I never understood it--and I s'pose I never can,--
But right in town here, yisterd'y, I heerd a pore blindman
A-fiddlin' old 'Gray Eagle'--_And_ -sir! I jes stopped my load
O' hay and listened at him--yes, and watched the way he 'bow'd,'--
And back I went, plum forty year', with boys and girls I knowed
And loved, long 'fore my dancin'-days wuz over!--

At high noon in yer city,--with yer blame Magnetic-Cars
A-hummin' and a-screetchin' past--and bands and G.A.R.'s
A-marchin'--and fire-ingines.--_All_ the noise, the whole street through,
Wuz lost on me!--I only heerd a whipperwill er two,
It 'peared-like, kindo' callin' 'crost the darkness and the dew,
Them nights afore my dancin'-days wuz over.

T'uz Chused'y-night at Wetherell's, er We'nsd'y-night at Strawn's,
Er Fourth-o'-July-night at uther Tomps's house er John's!--
With old Lew Church from Sugar Crick, with that old fiddle he
Had sawed clean through the Army, from Atlanty to the sea--
And yit he'd fetched, her home ag'in, so's he could play fer me
One't more afore my dancin'-days wuz over!

The woods 'at's all ben cut away wuz growin' same as then;
The youngsters all wuz boys ag'in 'at's now all oldish men;
And all the girls 'at _then_ wuz girls--I saw 'em, one and all,
As _plain_ as then--the middle-sized, the short-and-fat, and tall--
And, 'peared-like, I danced 'Tucker' fer 'em up and down the wall
Jes like afore my dancin' days wuz over!

* * * * *

Yer _po_-leece they can holler 'Say! _you_, Uncle! drive ahead!--
You can't use _all_ the right-o'-way!--fer that wuz what they said!--

But, jes the same,--in spite of all 'at you call 'interprise
And prog-gress of _you_-folks Today,' we're all of _fambly-ties_--
We're all got feelin's fittin' fer the _tears_'at's in our eyes
Er the _smiles_ afore our dancin'-days is over.

James Whitcomb Riley

My Father's Halls

My father's halls, so rich and rare,
Are desolate and bleak and bare;
My father's heart and halls are one,
Since I, their life and light, am gone.

O, valiant knight, with hand of steel
And heart of gold, hear my appeal:
Release me from the spoiler's charms,
And bear me to my father's arms.

James Whitcomb Riley

My Friend

'He is my friend,' I said,--
'Be patient!' Overhead
The skies were drear and dim;
And lo! the thought of him
Smited on my heart--and then
The sun shone out again!

'He is my friend!' The words
Brought summer and the birds;
And all my winter-time
Thawed into running rhyme
And rippled into song,
Warm, tender, brave, and strong.

And so it sings to-day.--
So may it sing alway!
Though waving grasses grow
Between, and lilies blow
Their trills of perfume clear
As laughter to the ear,
Let each mute measure end
With 'Still he is thy friend.'

James Whitcomb Riley

My Jolly Friend's Secret

Ah, friend of mine, how goes it,
Since you've taken you a mate?--
Your smile, though, plainly shows it
Is a very happy state!
Dan Cupid's necromancy!
You must sit you down and dine,
And lubricate your fancy
With a glass or two of wine.

And as you have 'deserted,'
As my other chums have done,
While I laugh alone diverted,
As you drop off one by one--
And I've remained unwedded,
Till--you see--look here--that I'm,
In a manner, 'snatched bald-headed'
By the sportive hand of Time!

I'm an 'old 'un!' yes, but wrinkles
Are not so plenty, quite,
As to cover up the twinkles
Of the BOY--ain't I right?
Yet, there are ghosts of kisses
Under this mustache of mine
My mem'ry only misses
When I drown 'em out with wine.

From acknowledgment so ample,
You would hardly take me for
What I am--a perfect sample
Of a 'jolly bachelor';
Not a bachelor has being
When he laughs at married life
But his heart and soul's agreeing
That he ought to have a wife!

Ah, ha I old chum, this claret,
Like Fatima, holds the key
Of the old Blue-Beardish garret

Of my hidden mystery!
Did you say you'd like to listen?
Ah, my boy! the 'SAD NO MORE!'
And the tear-drops that will glisten--
TURN THE CATCH UPON THE DOOR,

And sit you down beside me,
And put yourself at ease--
I'll trouble you to slide me
That wine decanter, please;
The path is kind o' mazy
Where my fancies have to go,
And my heart gets sort o' lazy
On the journey--don't you know?

Let me see--when I was twenty--
It's a lordly age, my boy,
When a fellow's money's plenty,
And the leisure to enjoy--
And a girl--with hair as golden
As--THAT; and lips--well--quite
As red as THIS I'm holdin'
Between you and the light.

And eyes and a complexion--
Ah, heavens!--le'-me-see--
Well,--just in this connection,--
DID YOU LOCK THAT DOOR FOR ME?
Did I start in recitation
My past life to recall?
Well, THAT'S an indication
I am purty tight--that's all!

James Whitcomb Riley

My Mary

My Mary, O my Mary!
The simmer-skies are blue;
The dawnin' brings the dazzle,
An' the gloamin' brings the dew,--
The mirk o' nicht the glory
O' the moon, an' kindles, too,
The stars that shift aboon the lift.--
But nae thing brings me you!

Where is it, O my Mary,
Ye are biding a' the while?
I ha' wended by your window--
I ha' waited by the stile,
An' up an' down the river
I ha' won for mony a mile,
Yet never found, adrift or drown'd,
Your lang-belated smile.

Is it forgot, my Mary,
How glad we used to be?--
The simmer-time when bonny bloomed
The auld trysting-tree,--
How there I carved the name for you,
An' you the name for me;
An' the gloamin' kenned it only
When we kissed sae tenderly.

Speek ance to me, my Mary!--
But whisper in my ear
As light as ony sleeper's breath,
An' a' my soul will hear;
My heart shall stap its beating
An' the souging atmosphere
Be hushed the while I leaning smile
An' listen to you, dear!

My Mary, O my Mary!
The blossoms bring the bees;
The sunshine brings the blossoms,

An' the leaves on a' the trees;
The simmer brings the sunshine
An' the fragrance o' the breeze,--
But O wi'out you, Mary,
I care nae thing for these!

We were sae happy, Mary!
O think how ance we said--
Wad ane o' us gae fickle,
Or ane o' us lie dead,--
To feel anither's kisses
We wad feign the auld instead,
An' ken the ither's footsteps
In the green grass owerhead.

My Mary, O my Mary!
Are ye daughter o' the air,
That ye vanish aye before me
As I follow everywhere?--
Or is it ye are only
But a mortal, wan wi' care?--
Syne I search through a' the kirkyird
An' I dinna find ye there!

James Whitcomb Riley

Mylo Jones's Wife

'Mylo Jones's wife' was all
I heerd, mighty near, last Fall--
Visitun relations down
T'other side of Morgantown!
Mylo Jones's wife she does
This and that, and 'those' and 'thus'!--
Can't 'bide babies in her sight--
Ner no childern, day and night,
Whoopin' round the premises--
NER NO NOTHIN' ELSE, I guess!

Mylo Jones's wife she 'lows
She's the boss of her own house!--
Mylo--consequences is--
Stays whare things seem SOME like HIS,--
Uses, mostly, with the stock--
Coaxin' 'Old Kate' not to balk,
Ner kick hoss-flies' branes out, ner
Act, I s'pose, so much like HER!
Yit the wimmern-folks tells you
She's PERFECTION.--Yes they do!

Mylo's wife she says she's found
Home hain't home with MEN-FOLKS round
When they's work like HERN to do-
Picklin' pears and BUTCHERN, too,
And a-rendern lard, and then
Cookin' fer a pack of men
To come trackin' up the flore
SHE'S scrubbed TEL she'll scrub no MORE!--
Yit she'd keep things clean ef they
Made her scrub tel Jedgmunt Day!

Mylo Jones's wife she sews
Carpet-rags and patches clothes
Jest year IN and OUT!--and yit
Whare's the livin' use of it?
She asts Mylo that.--And he
Gits back whare he'd ruther be,

With his team;--jest PLOWS--and don't
Never sware--like some folks won't!
Think ef HE'D CUT LOOSE, I gum!
'D he'p his heavenly chances some!

Mylo's wife don't see no use,
Ner no reason ner excuse
Fer his pore relations to
Hang round like they allus do!
Thare 'bout onc't a year--and SHE--
She jest GA'NTS 'em, folks tells me,
On spiced pears!--Pass Mylo one,
He says 'No, he don't chuse none!'
Workin'men like Mylo they
'D ort to have MEAT ev'ry day!

Dad-burn Mylo Jones's wife!
Ruther rake a blame caseknife
'Crost my wizzen than to see
Sich a womern rulin' ME!--
Ruther take and turn in and
Raise a fool mule-colt by hand'
MYLO, though--od-rot the man!--
Jest keeps ca'm--like some folks CAN--
And 'lows sich as her, I s'pose,
Is MAN'S HE'PMEET'--Mercy knows!

James Whitcomb Riley

Natural Perversities

I am not prone to moralize
In scientific doubt
On certain facts that Nature tries
To puzzle us about,--
For I am no philosopher
Of wise elucidation,
But speak of things as they occur,
From simple observation.

I notice LITTLE things--to wit:--
I never missed a train
Because I didn't RUN for it;
I never knew it rain
That my umbrella wasn't lent,--
Or, when in my possession,
The sun but wore, to all intent,
A jocular expression.

I never knew a creditor
To dun me for a debt
But I was 'cramped' or 'bu'sted'; or
I never knew one yet,
When I had plenty in my purse,
To make the least invasion,--
As I, accordingly perverse,
Have courted no occasion.

Nor do I claim to comprehend
What Nature has in view
In giving us the very friend
To trust we oughtn't to.--
But so it is: The trusty gun
Disastrously exploded
Is always sure to be the one
We didn't think was loaded.

Our moaning is another's mirth,--
And what is worse by half,
We say the funniest thing on earth

And never raise a laugh:
'Mid friends that love us over well,
And sparkling jests and liquor,
Our hearts somehow are liable
To melt in tears the quicker.

We reach the wrong when most we seek
The right; in like effect,
We stay the strong and not the weak--
Do most when we neglect.--
Neglected genius--truth be said--
As wild and quick as tinder,
The more you seek to help ahead
The more you seem to hinder.

I've known the least the greatest, too--
And, on the selfsame plan,
The biggest fool I ever knew
Was quite a little man:
We find we ought, and then we won't--
We prove a thing, then doubt it,--
Know EVERYTHING but when we don't
Know ANYTHING about it.

James Whitcomb Riley

Naughty Claude

When Little Claude was naughty wunst
At dinner-time, an' said
He won't say ' _Thank you_ ' to his Ma,
She maked him go to bed
An' stay two hours an' not git up,--
So when the clock struck Two,
Nen Claude says,--'Thank you, Mr. Clock,
I'm much obleeged to you!'

James Whitcomb Riley

Nessmuk

I hail thee, Nessmuk, for the lofty tone
Yet simple grace that marks thy poetry!
True forester thou art, and still to be,
Even in happier fields than thou hast known.
Thus, in glad visions, glimpses am I shown
Of groves delectable--'preserves' for thee--
Ranged but by friends of thine--I name thee three:--

First, Chaucer, with his bald old pate new-grown
With changeless laurel; next, in Lincoln-green,
Gold-belted, bowed and bugled, Robin Hood;
And next, Ike Walton, patient and serene:
These three, O Nessmuk, gathered hunter-wise,
Are camped on hither slopes of Paradise
To hail thee first and greet thee, as they should.

James Whitcomb Riley

No Boy Knows

There are many things that boys may know--
Why this and that are thus and so,--
Who made the world in the dark and lit
The great sun up to lighten it:
Boys know new things every day--
When they study, or when they play,--
When they idle, or sow and reap--
But no boy knows when he goes to sleep.

Boys who listen--or should, at least,--
May know that the round old earth rolls East;--
And know that the ice and the snow and the rain--
Ever repeating their parts again--
Are all just water the sunbeams first
Sip from the earth in their endless thirst,
And pour again till the low streams leap.--
But no boy knows when he goes to sleep.

A boy may know what a long glad while
It has been to him since the dawn's first smile,
When forth he fared in the realm divine
Of brook-laced woodland and spun-sunshine;--
He may know each call of his truant mates,
And the paths they went,--and the pasture-gates
Of the 'cross-lots home through the dusk so deep.--
But no boy knows when he goes to sleep.

O I have followed me, o'er and o'er,
From the flagrant drowse on the parlor-floor,
To the pleading voice of the mother when
I even doubted I heard it then--
To the sense of a kiss, and a moonlit room,
And dewy odors of locust-bloom--
A sweet white cot--and a cricket's cheep.--
But no boy knows when he goes to sleep.

James Whitcomb Riley

Noey Bixler

Another hero of those youthful years
Returns, as Noey Bixler's name appears.
And Noey--if in any special way--
Was notably good-natured.--Work or play
He entered into with selfsame delight--
A wholesome interest that made him quite
As many friends among the old as young,--
So everywhere were Noey's praises sung.

And he was awkward, fat and overgrown,
With a round full-moon face, that fairly shone
As though to meet the simile's demand.
And, cumbrous though he seemed, both eye and hand
Were dowered with the discernment and deft skill
Of the true artisan: He shaped at will,
In his old father's shop, on rainy days,
Little toy-wagons, and curved-runner sleighs;
The trimmest bows and arrows--fashioned, too.
Of 'seasoned timber,' such as Noey knew
How to select, prepare, and then complete,
And call his little friends in from the street.
'The very _best_ bow,' Noey used to say,
'Haint made o' ash ner hick'ry thataway!--
But you git _mulberry_--the _bearin_'-tree,
Now mind ye! and you fetch the piece to me,
And lem me git it _seasoned_; then, i gum!
I'll make a bow 'at you kin brag on some!
Er--ef you can't git _mulberry_,--you bring
Me a' old _locus_' hitch-post, and i jing!
I'll make a bow o' _that_'at _common_ bows
Won't dast to pick on ner turn up their nose!
And Noey knew the woods, and all the trees,
And thickets, plants and myriad mysteries
Of swamp and bottom-land. And he knew where
The ground-hog hid, and why located there.--
He knew all animals that burrowed, swam,
Or lived in tree-tops: And, by race and dam,
He knew the choicest, safest deeps wherein
Fish-traps might flourish nor provoke the sin

Of theft in some chance peeking, prying sneak,
Or town-boy, prowling up and down the creek.
All four-pawed creatures tamable--he knew
Their outer and their inner natures too;
While they, in turn, were drawn to him as by
Some subtle recognition of a tie
Of love, as true as truth from end to end,
Between themselves and this strange human friend.
The same with birds--he knew them every one,
And he could 'name them, too, without a gun.'
No wonder _Johnty_ loved him, even to
The verge of worship.--Noey led him through
The art of trapping redbirds--yes, and taught
Him how to keep them when he had them caught--
What food they needed, and just where to swing
The cage, if he expected them to _sing_.

And _Bud_ loved Noey, for the little pair
Of stilts he made him; or the stout old hair
Trunk Noey put on wheels, and laid a track
Of scantling-railroad for it in the back
Part of the barn-lot; or the cross-bow, made
Just like a gun, which deadly weapon laid
Against his shoulder as he aimed, and--'_Sping!_'
He'd hear the rusty old nail zoon and sing--
And _zip!_ your Mr. Bluejay's wing would drop
A farewell-feather from the old tree-top!
And _Maymie_ loved him, for the very small
But perfect carriage for her favorite doll--
A _lady's_ carriage--not a _baby_-cab,--
But oilcloth top, and two seats, lined with drab
And trimmed with white lace-paper from a case
Of shaving-soap his uncle bought some place
At auction once.

And _Alex_ loved him yet
The best, when Noey brought him, for a pet,
A little flying-squirrel, with great eyes--
Big as a child's: And, childlike otherwise,
It was at first a timid, tremulous, coy,
Retiring little thing that dodged the boy
And tried to keep in Noey's pocket;--till,

In time, responsive to his patient will,
It became wholly docile, and content
With its new master, as he came and went,--
The squirrel clinging flatly to his breast,
Or sometimes scampering its craziest
Around his body spirally, and then
Down to his very heels and up again.

And Little Lizzie loved him, as a bee
Loves a great ripe red apple--utterly.
For Noey's ruddy morning-face she drew
The window-blind, and tapped the window, too;
Afar she hailed his coming, as she heard
His tuneless whistling--sweet as any bird
It seemed to her, the one lame bar or so
Of old 'Wait for the Wagon'--hoarse and low
The sound was,--so that, all about the place,
Folks joked and said that Noey 'whistled bass'--
The light remark originally made
By Cousin Rufus, who knew notes, and played
The flute with nimble skill, and taste as wall,
And, critical as he was musical,
Regarded Noey's constant whistling thus
'Phenominally unmelodious.'
Likewise when Uncle Mart, who shared the love
Of jest with Cousin Rufus hand-in-glove,
Said 'Noey couldn't whistle 'Bonny Doon'
Even! and, he'd bet, couldn't carry a tune
If it had handles to it!

--But forgive
The deviations here so fugitive,
And turn again to Little Lizzie, whose
High estimate of Noey we shall choose
Above all others.--And to her he was
Particularly lovable because
He laid the woodland's harvest at her feet.--
He brought her wild strawberries, honey-sweet
And dewy-cool, in mats of greenest moss
And leaves, all woven over and across
With tender, biting 'tongue-grass,' and 'sheep-sour,'
And twin-leaved beach-mast, pranked with bud and flower

Of every gypsy-blossom of the wild,
Dark, tangled forest, dear to any child.--
All these in season. Nor could barren, drear,
White and stark-featured Winter interfere
With Noey's rare resources: Still the same
He blithely whistled through the snow and came
Beneath the window with a Fairy sled;
And Little Lizzie, bundled heels-and-head,
He took on such excursions of delight
As even 'Old Santy' with his reindeer might
Have envied her! And, later, when the snow
Was softening toward Springtime and the glow
Of steady sunshine smote upon it,--then
Came the magician Noey yet again--
While all the children were away a day
Or two at Grandma's!--and behold when they
Got home once more;--there, towering taller than
The doorway--stood a mighty, old Snow-Man!

A thing of peerless art--a masterpiece
Doubtless unmatched by even classic Greece
In heyday of Praxiteles.--Alone
It loomed in lordly grandeur all its own.
And steadfast, too, for weeks and weeks it stood,
The admiration of the neighborhood
As well as of the children Noey sought
Only to honor in the work he wrought.
The traveler paid it tribute, as he passed
Along the highway--paused and, turning, cast
A lingering, last look--as though to take
A vivid print of it, for memory's sake,
To lighten all the empty, aching miles
Beyond with brighter fancies, hopes and smiles.
The cynic put aside his biting wit
And tacitly declared in praise of it;
And even the apprentice-poet of the town
Rose to impassioned heights, and then sat down
And penned a panegyric scroll of rhyme
That made the Snow-Man famous for all time.

And though, as now, the ever warmer sun
Of summer had so melted and undone

The perishable figure that--alas!--
Not even in dwindled white against the grass--
Was left its latest and minutest ghost,
The children yet--_materially_, almost--
Beheld it--circled 'round it hand-in-hand--
(Or rather 'round the place it used to stand)--
With 'Ring-a-round-a-rosey! Bottle full
O' posey!' and, with shriek and laugh, would pull
From seeming contact with it--just as when
It was the _real-est_ of old Snow-Men.

James Whitcomb Riley

Noey's Night-Piece

'They ain't much 'tale' about it!' Noey said.--
'K'tawby grapes wuz gittin' good-n-red
I rickollect; and Tubb Kingry and me
'Ud kindo' browse round town, daytime, to see
What neighbors 'peared to have the most to spare
'At wuz git-at-able and no dog there
When we come round to git 'em, say 'bout ten
O'clock at night when mostly old folks then
Wuz snorin' at each other like they yit
Helt some old grudge 'at never slep' a bit.
Well, at the _Pars'nige_--ef ye'll call to mind,--
They's 'bout the biggest grape-arber you'll find
'Most anywheres.--And mostly there, we knowed
They wuz _k'tawbies_ thick as ever growed--
And more'n they'd _p'serve_--Besides I've heerd
Ma say k'tawby-grape-p'serves jes 'peared
A waste o' sugar, anyhow!--And so
My conscience stayed outside and lem me go
With Tubb, one night, the back-way, clean up through
That long black arber to the end next to
The house, where the k'tawbies, don't you know,
Wuz thickest. And t'uz lucky we went _slow_,--
Fer jest as we wuz cropin' tords the gray-
End, like, of the old arber--heerd Tubb say
In a skeered whisper, 'Hold up! They's some one
Jes slippin' in here!--and _looks like a gun_
He's carryin'!' I _golly!_ we both spread
Out flat against the ground!

"What's that?' Tubb said.--
And jest then--'_plink! plunk! plink!_' we heerd something
Under the back-porch-winder.--Then, i jing!
Of course we rickollected 'bout the young
School-mam 'at wuz a-boardin' there, and sung,
And played on the melodium in the choir.--
And she 'uz 'bout as purty to admire
As any girl in town!--the fac's is, she
Jest _wuz_, them times, to a dead certainty,
The belle o' this-here bailywick!--But--Well,--

I'd best git back to what I'm tryin' to tell:--
It wuz some feller come to serenade
Miss Wetherell: And there he plunked and played
His old guitar, and sung, and kep' his eye
Set on her winder, blacker'n the sky!--
And black it _stayed_.--But mayby she wuz 'way
From home, er wore out--bein' _Saturday!_

'It _seemed_ a good-'eal _longer_, but I _know_
He sung and plunked there half a' hour er so
Afore, it 'peared like, he could ever git
His own free qualified consents to quit
And go off 'bout his business. When he went
I bet you could a-bought him fer a cent!

'And now, behold ye all!--as Tubb and me
Wuz 'bout to raise up,--right in front we see
A feller slippin' out the arber, square
Smack under that-air little winder where
The _other_ feller had been standin'.--And
The thing he wuz a-carryin' in his hand
Wuzn't no _gun_ at all!--It wuz a _flute_,--
And _whoop-ee!_ how it did git up and toot
And chirp and warble, tel a mockin'-bird
'Ud dast to never let hisse'f be heerd
Ferever, after sich miracalous, high
Jim-cracks and grand skyrootics played there by
Yer Cousin Rufus!--Yes-sir; it wuz him!--
And what's more,--all a-suddent that-air dim
Dark winder o' Miss Wetherell's wuz lit
Up like a' oyshture-sign, and under it
We see him sort o' wet his lips and smile
Down 'long his row o' dancin' fingers, while
He kindo' stiffened up and kinked his breath
And everlastin'ly jest blowed the peth
Out o' that-air old one-keyed flute o' his.
And, bless their hearts, that's all the 'tale' they is!

And even as Noey closed, all radiantly
The unconscious hero of the history,
Returning, met a perfect driving storm
Of welcome--a reception strangely warm

And _unaccountable_, to _him_, although
Most _gratifying_,--and he told them so.
'I only urge,' he said, 'my right to be
Enlightened.' And a voice said: '_Certainly:_--
During your absence we agreed that you
Should tell us all a story, old or new,
Just in the immediate happy frame of mind
We knew you would return in.'

So, resigned,
The ready flutist tossed his hat aside--
Glanced at the children, smiled, and thus complied.

James Whitcomb Riley

North And South

Of the North I wove a dream,
All bespangled with the gleam
Of the glancing wings of swallows
Dipping ripples in a stream,
That, like a tide of wine,
Wound through lands of shade and shine
Where purple grapes hung bursting on the vine.

And where orchard-boughs were bent
Till their tawny fruitage blent
With the golden wake that marked the
Way the happy reapers went;
Where the dawn died into noon
As the May-mists into June,
And the dusk fell like a sweet face in a swoon.

Of the South I dreamed: And there
Came a vision clear and fair
As the marvelous enchantments
Of the mirage of the air;
And I saw the bayou-trees,
With their lavish draperies,
Hang heavy o'er the moon-washed cypress-knees.

Peering from lush fens of rice,
I beheld the Negro's eyes,
Lit with that old superstition
Death itself can not disguise;
And I saw the palm tree nod
Like an oriental god,
And the cotton froth and bubble from the pod,

And I dreamed that North and South,
With a sigh of dew and drouth,
Blew each unto the other
The salute of lip and mouth;
And I wakened, awed and thrilled--
Every doubting murmur stilled
In the silence of the dream I found fulfilled.

James Whitcomb Riley

Nothin' To Say

Nothin' to say, my daughter! Nothin' at all to say!
Gyrls that's in love, I've noticed, ginerly has their way!
Yer mother did, afore you, when her folks objected to me--
Yit here I am, and here you air; and yer mother--where is she?

You look lots like yer mother: Purty much same in size;
And about the same complected; and favor about the eyes:
Like her, too, about _livin_' here,--because _she_ couldn't stay:
It'll 'most seem like you was dead--like her!--But I hain't got nothin' to say!

She left you her little Bible--writ yer name acrost the page--
And left her ear bobs fer you, ef ever you come of age.
I've allus kep' 'em and gyuarded 'em, but ef yer goin' away--
Nothin' to say, my daughter! Nothin' at all to say!

You don't rikollect her, I reckon? No; you wasn't a year old then!
And now yer--how old _air_ you? W'y, child, not '_twenty_'! When?
And yer nex' birthday's in Aprile? and you want to git married that day?
... I wisht yer mother was livin'!--But--I hain't got nothin' to say!

Twenty year! and as good a gyrl as parent ever found!
There's a straw ketched onto yer dress there--I'll bresh it off--turn round.
(Her mother was jes' twenty when us two run away!)
Nothin' to say, my daughter! Nothin' at all to say!

James Whitcomb Riley

Old Aunt Mary's

Wasn't it pleasant, O brother mine,
In those old days of the lost sunshine
Of youth-- when the Saturday's chores were through,
And the 'Sunday's wood' in the kitchen too,
And we went visiting, 'me and you,'
Out to Old Aunt Mary's?

It all comes back so clear to-day!
Though I am as bald as you are gray--
Out by the barn-lot, and down the lane,
We patter along in the dust again,
As light as the tips of the drops of the rain,
Out to Old Aunt Mary's!

We cross the pasture, and through the wood
Where the old gray snag of the poplar stood,
Where the hammering 'red-heads' hopped awry,
And the buzzard 'raised' in the 'clearing' sky
And lolled and circled, as we went by
Out to Old Aunt Mary's.

And then in the dust of the road again;
And the teams we met, and the countrymen;
And the long highway, with sunshine spread
As thick as butter on country bread,
Our cares behind, and our hearts ahead
Out to Old Aunt Mary's.

Why, I see her now in the open door,
Where the little gourds grew up the sides and o'er
The clapboard roof--! And her face-- ah, me!
Wasn't it good for a boy to see--
And wasn't it good for a boy to be
Out to Old Aunt Mary's?

The jelly-- the Jam and the marmalade,
And the cherry and quince 'preserves' she made!
And the sweet-sour pickles of peach and pear,
With cinnamon in 'em, and all things rare--!

And the more we ate was the more to spare,
Out to Old Aunt Mary's!

And the old spring-house in the cool green gloom
Of the willow-trees--, and the cooler room
Where the swinging-shelves and the crocks were kept--
Where the cream in a golden languor slept
While the waters gurgled and laughed and wept--
Out to Old Aunt Mary's.

And O my brother, so far away,
This is to tell you she waits to-day
To welcome us--: Aunt Mary fell
Asleep this morning, whispering-- 'Tell
The boys to come!' And all is well
Out to Old Aunt Mary's.

James Whitcomb Riley

Old Fashioned Roses

They ain't no style about 'em,
And they're sorto' pale and faded,
Yit the doorway here, without 'em,
Would be lonesomer, and shaded
With a good 'eal blacker shudder
Than the morning-glories makes,
And the sunshine would look sadder
Fer their good old-fashion' sakes.

I like 'em 'cause they kindo'--
Sorto' make a feller like 'em!
And I tell you, when I find a
Bunch out whur the sun kin strike 'em,
It allus sets me thinkin'
O' the ones 'at used to grow
And peek in thro' the chinkin'
O' the cabin, don't you know!

And then I think o' mother,
And how she ust to love 'em--
When they wuzn't any other,
'Less she found 'em up above 'em!
And her eyes, afore she shut 'em,
Whispered with a smile and said
We must pick a bunch and putt 'em
In her hand when she wuz dead.

But as I wuz a-sayin',
They ain't no style about 'em
Very gaudy er displayin',
But I wouldn't be without 'em--,
'Cause I'm happier in these posies,
And the hollyhawks and sich,
Than the hummin'-bird 'at noses
In the roses of the rich.

James Whitcomb Riley

Old Man Whiskery-Whee-Kum-Wheeze

Old Man Whiskery-Whee-Kum-Wheeze
Lives 'way up in the leaves o' trees.
An' wunst I slipped up-stairs to play
In Aunty's room, while she 'uz away;
An' I clumbed up in her cushion-chair
An' ist peeked out o' the winder there;
An' there I saw--wite out in the trees--
Old Man Whiskery-Whee-Kum-Wheeze!

An' Old Man Whiskery-Whee-Kum-Wheeze
Would bow an' bow, with the leaves in the breeze,
An' waggle his whiskers an' raggledy hair,
An' bow to me in the winder there!
An' I 'd peek out, an' he'd peek in
An' waggle his whiskers an' bow ag'in,
Ist like the leaves'u'd wave in the breeze--
Old Man Whiskery-Whee-Kum-Wheeze!

An' Old Man Whiskery-Whee-Kum-Wheeze,
Seem-like, says to me: 'See my bees
A-bringin' my dinner? An' see my cup
O' locus'-blossoms they've plum' filled up?'
An' '_Um-yum, honey!_' wuz last he said,
An' waggled his whiskers an' bowed his head;
An' I yells, 'Gimme some, won't you, please,
Old Man Whiskery-Whee-Kum-Wheeze?'

James Whitcomb Riley

Old Man's Nursery Rhyme

I.

In the jolly winters
Of the long-ago,
It was not so cold as now--
O! No! No!
Then, as I remember,
Snowballs, to eat,
Were as good as apples now,
And every bit as sweet!

II.

In the jolly winters
Of the dead-and-gone,
Bub was warm as summer,
With his red mitts on,--
Just in his little waist-
And-pants all together,
Who ever heard him growl
About cold weather?

III.

In the jolly winters of the long-ago--
Was it half so cold as now?
O! No! No!
Who caught his death o' cold,
Making prints of men
Flat-backed in snow that now's
Twice as cold again?

IV.

In the jolly winters
Of the dead-and-gone,
Startin' out rabbit-hunting
Early as the dawn,--
Who ever froze his fingers,

Ears, heels, or toes,--
Or'd a cared if he had?
Nobody knows!

V.

Nights by the kitchen-stove,
Shelling white and red
Corn in the skillet, and
Sleepin' four abed!
Ah! the jolly winters
Of the long-ago!
We were not so old as now--
O! No! No!

James Whitcomb Riley

Old October

Old October's purt' nigh gone,
And the frosts is comin' on
Little heavier every day--
Like our hearts is thataway!
Leaves is changin' overhead
Back from green to gray and red,
Brown and yellor, with their stems
Loosenin' on the oaks and e'ms;
And the balance of the trees
Gittin' balder every breeze--
Like the heads we're scratchin' on!
Old October's purt' nigh gone.

I love Old October so,
I can't bear to see her go--
Seems to me like losin' some
Old-home relative er chum--
'Pears like sorto' settin' by
Some old friend 'at sigh by sigh
Was a-passin' out o' sight
Into everlastin' night!
Hickernuts a feller hears
Rattlin' down is more like tears
Drappin' on the leaves below--
I love Old October so!

Can't tell what it is about
Old October knock me out--!
I sleep well enough at night--
And the blamedest appetite
Ever mortal man possessed--,
Last thing et, it tastes the best--!
Warnuts, butternuts, pawpaws,
'Iles and limbers up my jaws
Fer raal service, sich as new
Pork, spareribs, and sausage, too--.
Yit fer all, they's somepin' 'bout
Old October knocks me out!

Old Winters On The Farm

I have jest about decided
It 'ud keep a _town-boy_ hoppin'
Fer to work all winter, choppin'
Fer a' old fire-place, like _I_ did!
Lawz! them old times wuz contrairy!--
Blame backbone o' winter, 'peared-like,
Wouldn't break!--and I wuz skeerd-like
Clean on into _Febuary_!
Nothin' ever made we madder
Than fer Pap to stomp in, layin'
On a' extra fore-stick, sayin'
'Groun'hog's out and seed his shadder!'

James Whitcomb Riley

On The Banks O' Deer Crick

On the banks o' Deer Crick! There's the place fer me!--
Worter slidin' past ye jes as clair as it kin be:--
See yer shadder in it, and the shadder o' the sky,
And the shadder o' the buzzard as he goes a-lazein' by;
Shadder o' the pizen-vines, and shadder o' the trees--
And I purt'-nigh said the shadder o' the sunshine and the breeze!
Well--I never seen the ocean ner I never seen the sea:
On the banks o' Deer Crick's grand enough fer me!

On the banks o' Deer Crick--mild er two from town--
'Long up where the mill-race comes a-loafin' down,--
Like to git up in there--'mongst the sycamores--
And watch the worter at the dam, a-frothin' as she pours:
Crawl out on some old log, with my hook and line,
Where the fish is jes so thick you kin see 'em shine
As they flicker round yer bait, _coaxin_' you to jerk,
Tel yer tired ketchin' of 'em, mighty nigh, as _work_!

On the banks o' Deer Crick!--Allus my delight
Jes to be around there--take it day er night!--
Watch the snipes and killdees foolin' half the day--
Er these-'ere little worter-bugs skootin' ever'way!--
Snakefeeders glancin' round, er dartin' out o' sight;
And dew-fall, and bullfrogs, and lightnin'-bugs at night--
Stars up through the tree-tops--er in the crick below,--
And smell o' mussrat through the dark clean from the old b'y-o!

Er take a tromp, some Sund'y, say, 'way up to 'Johnson's Hole,'
And find where he's had a fire, and hid his fishin' pole;
Have yer 'dog-leg,' with ye and yer pipe and 'cut-and-dry'--
Pocketful o' corn-bred, and slug er two o' rye,--
Soak yer hide in sunshine and waller in the shade--
Like the Good Book tells us--'where there're none to make afraid!'
Well!--I never seen the ocean ner I never seen the sea--
On the banks o' Deer Crick's grand enough fer me!

James Whitcomb Riley

On The Sunny Side

Hi and whoop-hooray, boys!
Sing a song of cheer!
Here's a holiday, boys,
Lasting half a year!
Round the world, and half is
Shadow we have tried;
Now we're where the laugh is,--
On the sunny side!

Pigeons coo and mutter,
Strutting high aloof
Where the sunbeans flutter
Through the stable roof.
Hear the chickens cheep, boys,
And the hen with pride
Clucking them to sleep, boys,
On the sunny side!

Hear the clacking guinea;
Hear the cattle moo;
Hear the horses whinny,
Looking out at you!
On the hitching-block, boys,
Grandly satisfied,
See the old peacock, boys,
On the sunny side!

Robins in the peach-tree;
Bluebirds in the pear;
Blossoms over each tree
In the orchard there!
All the world's in joy, boys,
Glad and glorified
As a romping boy, boys,
On the sunny side!

Where's a heart as mellow?
Where's a soul as free?
Where is any fellow

We would rather be?
Just ourselves or none, boys,
World around and wide,
Laughing in the sun, boys,
On the sunny side!

James Whitcomb Riley

Only A Dream

Only a dream!
Her head is bent
Over the keys of the instrument,
While her trembling fingers go astray
In the foolish tune she tries to play.
He smiles in his heart, though his deep, sad eyes
Never change to a glad surprise
As he finds the answer he seeks confessed
In glowing features, and heaving breast.

Only a dream!
Though the fete is grand,
And a hundred hearts at her command,
She takes no part, for her soul is sick
Of the Coquette's art and the Serpent's trick,--
She somehow feels she would like to fling
Her sins away as a robe, and spring
Up like a lily pure and white,
And bloom alone for HIM to-night.

Only a dream
That the fancy weaves.
The lids unfold like the rose's leaves,
And the upraised eyes are moist and mild
As the prayerful eyes of a drowsy child.
Does she remember the spell they once
Wrought in the past a few short months?
Haply not--yet her lover's eyes
Never change to the glad surprise.

Only a dream!
He winds her form
Close in the coil of his curving arm,
And whirls her away in a gust of sound
As wild and sweet as the poets found
In the paradise where the silken tent
Of the Persian blooms in the Orient,--
While ever the chords of the music seem
Whispering sadly,--'Only a dream!'

James Whitcomb Riley

Orlie Wilde

A goddess, with a siren's grace,--
A sun-haired girl on a craggy place
Above a bay where fish-boats lay
Drifting about like birds of prey.

Wrought was she of a painter's dream,--
Wise only as are artists wise,
My artist-friend, Rolf Herschelhiem,
With deep sad eyes of oversize,
And face of melancholy guise.

I pressed him that he tell to me
This masterpiece's history.
He turned--REturned--and thus beguiled
Me with the tale of Orlie Wilde:--

"We artists live ideally:
We breed our firmest facts of air;
We make our own reality--
We dream a thing and it is so.
The fairest scenes we ever see
Are mirages of memory;
The sweetest thoughts we ever know
We plagiarize from Long Ago:
And as the girl on canvas there
Is marvelously rare and fair,
'Tis only inasmuch as she
Is dumb and may not speak to me!"
He tapped me with his mahlstick--then
The picture,--and went on again:

"Orlie Wilde, the fisher's child--
I see her yet, as fair and mild
As ever nursling summer day
Dreamed on the bosom of the bay:
For I was twenty then, and went
Alone and long-haired--all content
With promises of sounding name
And fantasies of future fame,

And thoughts that now my mind discards
As editor a fledgling bard's.

"At evening once I chanced to go,
With pencil and portfolio,
Adown the street of silver sand
That winds beneath this craggy land,
To make a sketch of some old scurf
Of driftage, nosing through the surf
A splintered mast, with knarl and strand
Of rigging-rope and tattered threads
Of flag and streamer and of sail
That fluttered idly in the gale
Or whipped themselves to sadder shreds.
The while I wrought, half listlessly,
On my dismantled subject, came
A sea-bird, settling on the same
With plaintive moan, as though that he
Had lost his mate upon the sea;
And--with my melancholy trend--
It brought dim dreams half understood--
It wrought upon my morbid mood,--
I thought of my own voyagings
That had no end--that have no end.--
And, like the sea-bird, I made moan
That I was loveless and alone.
And when at last with weary wings
It went upon its wanderings,
With upturned face I watched its flight
Until this picture met my sight:
A goddess, with a siren's grace,--
A sun-haired girl on a craggy place
Above a bay where fish-boats lay
Drifting about like birds of prey.

"In airy poise she, gazing, stood
A machless form of womanhood,
That brought a thought that if for me
Such eyes had sought across the sea,
I could have swum the widest tide
That ever mariner defied,
And, at the shore, could on have gone

To that high crag she stood upon,
To there entreat and say, 'My Sweet,
Behold thy servant at thy feet.'
And to my soul I said: 'Above,
There stands the idol of thy love!'

"In this rapt, awed, ecstatic state
I gazed--till lo! I was aware
A fisherman had joined her there--
A weary man, with halting gait,
Who toiled beneath a basket's weight:
Her father, as I guessed, for she
Had run to meet him gleefully
And ta'en his burden to herself,
That perched upon her shoulder's shelf
So lightly that she, tripping, neared
A jutting crag and disappeared;
But she left the echo of a song
That thrills me yet, and will as long
As I have being! . . .

. . . "Evenings came
And went,--but each the same--the same:
She watched above, and even so
I stood there watching from below;
Till, grown so bold at last, I sung,--
(What matter now the theme thereof!)--
It brought an answer from her tongue--
Faint as the murmur of a dove,
Yet all the more the song of love. . . .

"I turned and looked upon the bay,
With palm to forehead--eyes a-blur
In the sea's smile--meant but for her!--
I saw the fish-boats far away
In misty distance, lightly drawn
In chalk-dots on the horizon--
Looked back at her, long, wistfully;--
And, pushing off an empty skiff,
I beckoned her to quit the cliff
And yield me her rare company

Upon a little pleasure-cruise.--
She stood, as loathful to refuse,
To muse for full a moment's time,--
Then answered back in pantomime
'She feared some danger from the sea
Were she discovered thus with me.'
I motioned then to ask her if
I might not join her on the cliff
And back again, with graceful wave
Of lifted arm, she answer gave
'She feared some danger from the sea.'

"Impatient, piqued, impetuous, I
Sprang in the boat, and flung 'Good-by'
From pouted mouth with angry hand,
And madly pulled away from land
With lusty stroke, despite that she
Held out her hands entreatingly:
And when far out, with covert eye
I shoreward glanced, I saw her fly
In reckless haste adown the crag,
Her hair a-flutter like a flag
Of gold that danced across the strand
In little mists of silver sand.
All curious I, pausing, tried
To fancy what it all implied,--
When suddenly I found my feet
Were wet; and, underneath the seat
On which I sat, I heard the sound
Of gurgling waters, and I found
The boat aleak alarmingly. . . .
I turned and looked upon the sea,
Whose every wave seemed mocking me;
I saw the fishers' sails once more--
In dimmer distance than before;
I saw the sea-bird wheeling by,
With foolish wish that I could fly:
I thought of firm earth, home and friends--
I thought of everything that tends
To drive a man to frenzy and
To wholly lose his own command;
I thought of all my waywardness--

Thought of a mother's deep distress;
Of youthful follies yet unpurged--
Sins, as the seas, about me surged--
Thought of the printer's ready pen
To-morrow drowning me again;--
A million things without a name--
I thought of everything but--Fame. . . .

"A memory yet is in my mind,
So keenly clear and sharp-defined,
I picture every phase and line
Of life and death, and neither mine,--
While some fair seraph, golden-haired,
Bends over me,--with white arms bared,
That strongly plait themselves about
My drowning weight and lift me out--
With joy too great for words to state
Or tongue to dare articulate!

"And this seraphic ocean-child
And heroine was Orlie Wilde:
And thus it was I came to hear
Her voice's music in my ear--
Ay, thus it was Fate paved the way
That I walk desolate to-day!" . . .

The artist paused and bowed his face
Within his palms a little space,
While reverently on his form
I bent my gaze and marked a storm
That shook his frame as wrathfully
As some typhoon of agony,
And fraught with sobs--the more profound
For that peculiar laughing sound
We hear when strong men weep. . . . I leant
With warmest sympathy--I bent
To stroke with soothing hand his brow,
He murmuring--"Tis over now!--

And shall I tie the silken thread
Of my frail romance?" "Yes," I said.--
He faintly smiled; and then, with brow

In kneading palm, as one in dread--
His tasseled cap pushed from his head
" 'Her voice's music,' I repeat,"
He said,--" 'twas sweet--O passing sweet!--
Though she herself, in uttering
Its melody, proved not the thing
Of loveliness my dreams made meet
For me--there, yearning, at her feet--
Prone at her feet--a worshiper,--
For lo! she spake a tongue," moaned he,
"Unknown to me;--unknown to me
As mine to her--as mine to her."

James Whitcomb Riley

Our Boyhood Haunts

Ho! I'm going back to where
We were youngsters.--Meet me there,
Dear old barefoot chum, and we
Will be as we used to be,--
Lawless rangers up and down
The old creek beyond the town--
Little sunburnt gods at play,
Just as in that far-away:--
Water nymphs, all unafraid,
Shall smile at us from the brink
Of the old millrace and wade
Tow'rd us as we kneeling drink
At the spring our boyhood knew,
Pure and clear as morning-dew:

And, as we are rising there,
Doubly dow'rd to hear and see,
We shall thus be made aware
Of an eerie piping, heard
High above the happy bird
In the hazel: And then we,
Just across the creek, shall see
(Hah! the goaty rascal!) Pan
Hoof it o'er the sloping green,
Mad with his own melody,
Aye, and (bless the beastly man!)
Stamping from the grassy soil
Bruised scents of fleur-de-lis,
Boneset, mint and pennyroyal.

James Whitcomb Riley

Our Hired Girl

1 Our hired girl, she's 'Lizabuth Ann;
2 An' she can cook best things to eat!
3 She ist puts dough in our pie-pan,
4 An' pours in somepin' 'at's good an' sweet;
5 An' nen she salts it all on top
6 With cinnamon; an' nen she'll stop
7 An' stoop an' slide it, ist as slow,
8 In th' old cook-stove, so's 'twon't slop
9 An' git all spilled; nen bakes it, so
10 It's custard-pie, first thing you know!
11 An' nen she'll say,
12 "Clear out o' my way!
13 They's time fer work, an' time fer play!
14 Take yer dough, an' run, child, run!
15 Er I cain't git no cookin' done!"

16 When our hired girl 'tends like she's mad,
17 An' says folks got to walk the chalk
18 When she's around, er wisht they had!
19 I play out on our porch an' talk
20 To Th' Raggedy Man 'at mows our lawn;
21 An' he says, "Whew!" an' nen leans on
22 His old crook-scythe, and blinks his eyes,
23 An' sniffs all 'round an' says, "I swawn!
24 Ef my old nose don't tell me lies,
25 It 'pears like I smell custard-pies!"
26 An' nen he'll say,
27 "Clear out o' my way!
28 They's time fer work, an' time fer play!
29 Take yer dough, an' run, child, run!
30 Er she cain't git no cookin' done!"

31 Wunst our hired girl, when she
32 Got the supper, an' we all et,
33 An' it wuz night, an' Ma an' me
34 An' Pa went wher' the "Social" met, --
35 An' nen when we come home, an' see
36 A light in the kitchen door, an' we
37 Heerd a maccordeun, Pa says, "Lan'-

38 O'-Gracious! who can her beau be?"
39 An' I marched in, an' 'Lizabuth Ann
40 Wuz parchin' corn fer The Raggedy Man!
41 Better say,
42 "Clear out o' the way!
43 They's time fer work, an' time fer play!
44 Take the hint, an' run, child, run!
45 Er we cain't git no courtin' done!"

James Whitcomb Riley

Our Kind Of A Man

1

The kind of a man for you and me!
He faces the world unflinchingly,
And smites, as long as the wrong resists,
With a knuckled faith and force like fists:
He lives the life he is preaching of,
And loves where most is the need of love;
His voice is clear to the deaf man's ears,
And his face sublime through the blind man's tears;
The light shines out where the clouds were dim,
And the widow's prayer goes up for him;
The latch is clicked at the hovel door
And the sick man sees the sun once more,
And out o'er the barren fields he sees
Springing blossoms and waving trees,
Feeling as only the dying may,
That God's own servant has come that way,
Smoothing the path as it still winds on
Through the golden gate where his loved have gone.

2

The kind of a man for me and you!
However little of worth we do
He credits full, and abides in trust
That time will teach us how more is just.
He walks abroad, and he meets all kinds
Of querulous and uneasy minds,
And sympathizing, he shares the pain
Of the doubts that rack us, heart and brain;
And knowing this, as we grasp his hand
We are surely coming to understand!
He looks on sin with pitying eyes--
E'en as the Lord, since Paradise--,
Else, should we read, Though our sins should glow
As scarlet, they shall be white as snow--?
And feeling still, with a grief half glad,
That the bad are as good as the good are bad,
He strikes straight out for the Right-- and he
Is the kind of a man for you and me!

James Whitcomb Riley

Our Little Girl

Her heart knew naught of sorrow,
Nor the vaguest taint of sin--
'Twas an ever-blooming blossom
Of the purity within:
And her hands knew only touches
Of the mother's gentle care,
And the kisses and caresses
Through the interludes of prayer.

Her baby-feet had journeyed
Such a little distance here,
They could have found no briars
In the path to interfere;
The little cross she carried
Could not weary her, we know,
For it lay as lightly on her
As a shadow on the snow.

And yet the way before us--
O how empty now and drear!--
How ev'n the dews of roses
Seem as dripping tears for her!
And the song-birds all seem crying,
As the winds cry and the rain,
All sobbingly,--'We want--we want
Our little girl again!'

James Whitcomb Riley

Our Own

They walk here with us, hand-in-hand;
We gossip, knee-by-knee;
They tell us all that they have planned--
Of all their joys to be,--
And, laughing, leave us: And, to-day,
All desolate we cry
Across wide waves of voiceless graves--
Good-by! Good-by! Good-by!

James Whitcomb Riley

Out Of Nazareth

'He shall sleep unscathed of thieves
Who loves Allah and believes.'
Thus heard one who shared the tent,
In the far-off Orient,
Of the Bedouin ben Ahrzz--
Nobler never loved the stars
Through the palm-leaves nigh the dim
Dawn his courser neighed to him!

He said: 'Let the sands be swarmed
With such thieves as I, and thou
Shalt at morning rise unharmed,
Light as eyelash to the brow
Of thy camel amber-eyed,
Ever munching either side,
Striding still, with nestled knees,
Through the midnight's oases.'

'Who can rob thee an thou hast
More than this that thou hast cast
At my feet-- this dust of gold?
Simply this and that, all told!
Hast thou not a treasure of
Such a thing as men call love?'

'Can the dusky band I lead
Rob thee of thy daily need
Of a whiter soul, or steal
What thy lordly prayers reveal?
Who could be enriched of thee
By such hoard of poverty
As thy niggard hand pretends
To dole me-- thy worst of friends?
Therefore shouldst thou pause to bless
One indeed who blesses thee:
Robbing thee, I dispossess
But myself--. Pray thou for me!'

He shall sleep unscathed of thieves

Who loves Allah and believes.

James Whitcomb Riley

Out Of The Hitherwhere

Out of the hitherwhere into the Yon--
The land that the Lord's love rests upon;
Where one may rely on the friends he meets,
And the smiles that greet him along the streets:
Where the mother that left you years ago
Will lift the hands that were folded so,
And put them about you, with all the love
And tenderness you are dreaming of.

Out of the hitherwhere into the Yon--
Where all of the friends of your youth have gone,--
Where the old schoolmate that laughed with you,
Will laugh again as he used to do,
Running to meet you, with such a face
As lights like a moon the wondrous place
Where God is living, and glad to live,
Since He is the Master and may forgive.

Out of the hitherwhere into the Yon!--
Stay the hopes we are leaning on--
You, Divine, with Your merciful eyes
Looking down from the far-away skies,--
Smile upon us, and reach and take
Our worn souls Home for the old home's sake.--
And so Amen,--for our all seems gone
Out of the hitherwhere into the Yon.

James Whitcomb Riley

Over The Eyes Of Gladness

'The voice of One hath spoken,
And the bended reed is bruised--
The golden bowl is broken,
And the silver cord is loosed.'

Over the eyes of gladness
The lids of sorrow fall,
And the light of mirth is darkened
Under the funeral pall.

The hearts that throbbed with rapture
In dreams of the future years,
Are wakened from their slumbers,
And their visions drowned in tears.

.

Two buds on the bough in the morning--
Twin buds in the smiling sun,
But the frost of death has fallen
And blighted the bloom of one.

One leaf of life still folded
Has fallen from the stem,
Leaving the symbol teaching
There still are two of them,--

For though--through Time's gradations,
The LIVING bud may burst,--
The WITHERED one is gathered,
And blooms in Heaven first.

James Whitcomb Riley

Pan

This Pan is but an idle god, I guess,
Since all the fair midsummer of my dreams
He loiters listlessly by woody streams,
Soaking the lush glooms up with laziness;
Or drowsing while the maiden-winds caress
Him prankishly, and powder him with gleams
Of sifted sunshine. And he ever seems
Drugged with a joy unutterable-- unless
His low pipes whistle hints of it far out
Across the ripples to the dragon-fly
That like a wind-born blossom blown about,
Drops quiveringly down, as though to die--
Then lifts and wavers on, as if in doubt
Whether to fan his wings or fly without.

James Whitcomb Riley

Philiper Flash

Young Philiper Flash was a promising lad,
His intentions were good--but oh, how sad
For a person to think
How the veriest pink
And bloom of perfection may turn out bad.
Old Flash himself was a moral man,
And prided himself on a moral plan,
Of a maxim as old
As the calf of gold,
Of making that boy do what he was told.

And such a good mother had Philiper Flash;
Her voice was as soft as the creamy plash
Of the milky wave
With its musical lave
That gushed through the holes of her patent churn-dash;--
And the excellent woman loved Philiper so,
She could cry sometimes when he stumped his toe,--
And she stroked his hair
With such motherly care
When the dear little angel learned to swear.

Old Flash himself would sometimes say
That his wife had 'such a ridiculous way,--
She'd, humor that child
Till he'd soon be sp'iled,
And then there'd be the devil to pay!
And the excellent wife, with a martyr's look,
Would tell old Flash himself 'he took
No notice at all
Of the bright-eyed doll
Unless when he spanked him for getting a fall!

Young Philiper Flash, as time passed by,
Grew into 'a boy with a roguish eye':
He could smoke a cigar,
And seemed by far
The most promising youth.--'He's powerful sly,
Old Flash himself once told a friend,

'Every copper he gets he's sure to spend--
And,' said he, 'don't you know
If he keeps on so
What a crop of wild oats the boy will grow!'

But his dear good mother knew Philiper's ways
So--well, she managed the money to raise;
And old Flash himself
Was 'laid on the shelf,'
(In the manner of speaking we have nowadays).
For 'gracious knows, her darling child,
If he went without money he'd soon grow wild.'
So Philiper Flash
With a regular dash
'Swung on to the reins,' and went 'slingin' the cash.'

As old Flash himself, in his office one day,
Was shaving notes in a barberous way,
At the hour of four
Death entered the door
And shaved the note on his life, they say.
And he had for his grave a magnificent tomb,
Though the venturous finger that pointed 'Gone Home,'
Looked white and cold
From being so bold,
As it feared that a popular lie was told.

Young Philiper Flash was a man of style
When he first began unpacking the pile
Of the dollars and dimes
Whose jingling chimes
Had clinked to the tune of his father's smile;
And he strewed his wealth with such lavish hand,
His rakish ways were the talk of the land,
And gossipers wise
Sat winking their eyes
(A certain foreboding of fresh surprise).

A 'fast young man' was Philiper Flash,
And wore 'loud clothes' and a weak mustache,
And 'done the Park,'
For an 'afternoon lark,'

With a very fast horse of 'remarkable dash.'
And Philiper handled a billiard-cue
About as well as the best he knew,
And used to say
'He could make it pay
By playing two or three games a day.'

And Philiper Flash was his mother's joy,
He seemed to her the magic alloy
That made her glad,
When her heart was sad,
With the thought that 'she lived for her darling boy.'
His dear good mother wasn't aware
How her darling boy relished a 'tare.'--
She said 'one night
He gave her a fright
By coming home late and ACTING tight.'

Young Philiper Flash, on a winterish day,
Was published a bankrupt, so they say--
And as far as I know
I suppose it was so,
For matters went on in a singular way;
His excellent mother, I think I was told,
Died from exposure and want and cold;
And Philiper Flash,
With a horrible slash,
Whacked his jugular open and went to smash.

James Whitcomb Riley

Pipes O' Pan At Zekesbury

The pipes of Pan! Not idler now are they
Than when their cunning fashioner first blew
The pith of music from them: Yet for you
And me their notes are blown in many a way
Lost in our murmurings for that old day
That fared so well, without us.--Waken to
The pipings here at hand:--The clear halloo
Of truant-voices, and the roundelay
The waters warble in the solitude
Of blooming thickets, where the robin's breast
Sends up such ecstasy o'er dale and dell,
Each tree top answers, till in all the wood
There lingers not one squirrel in his nest
Whetting his hunger on an empty shell.

James Whitcomb Riley

Plain Sermons

I saw a man--and envied him beside--
Because of this world's goods he had great store;
But even as I envied him, he died,
And left me envious of him no more.

I saw another man--and envied still--
Because he was content with frugal lot;
But as I envied him, the rich man's will
Bequeathed him all, and envy I forgot.

Yet still another man I saw, and he
I envied for a calm and tranquil mind
That nothing fretted in the least degree--
Until, alas! I found that he was blind.

What vanity is envy! for I find
I have been rich in dross of thought, and poor
In that I was a fool, and lastly blind
For never having seen myself before!

James Whitcomb Riley

Prior To Miss Belle's Appearance

What makes you come HERE fer, Mister,
So much to our house?--SAY?
Come to see our big sister!--
An' Charley he says 'at you kissed her
An' he ketched you, th'uther day!--
Didn' you, Charley?--But we p'omised Belle
An' crossed our heart to never to tell--
'Cause SHE gived us some o' them-er
Chawk'lut-drops 'at you bringed to her!

Charley he's my little b'uther--
An' we has a-mostest fun,
Don't we, Charley?--Our Muther,
Whenever we whips one anuther,
Tries to whip US--an' we RUN--
Don't we, Charley?--An' nen, bime-by,
Nen she gives us cake--an' pie--
Don't she, Charley?--when we come in
An' pomise never to do it ag'in!

HE'S named Charley.--I'm WILLIE--
An' I'm got the purtiest name!
But Uncle Bob HE calls me 'Billy'--
Don't he, Charley?--'N' our filly
We named 'Billy,' the same
Ist like me! An' our Ma said
'At 'Bob puts foolishnuss into our head!--
Didn' she, Charley?--An' SHE don't know
Much about BOYS!--'Cause Bob said so!

Baby's a funniest feller!
Nain't no hair on his head--
IS they, Charley?--It's meller
Wite up there! An' ef Belle er
Us ask wuz WE that way, Ma said,--
'Yes; an' yer PA'S head wuz soft as that,
An' it's that way yet!--An' Pa grabs his hat
An' says, 'Yes, childern, she's right about Pa--
'Cause that's the reason he married yer Ma!

An' our Ma says 'at 'Belle couldn'
Ketch nothin' at all but ist 'BOWS!'--
An' PA says 'at 'you're soft as puddun!'--
An' UNCLE BOB says 'you're a good-un--
'Cause he can tell by yer nose!'-
Didn' he, Charley?--An' when Belle'll play
In the poller on th' pianer, some day,
Bob makes up funny songs about you,
Till she gits mad-like he wants her to!

Our sister FANNY she's 'LEVEN
Years old! 'At's mucher 'an _I_--
Ain't it, Charley? . . . I'm seven!--
But our sister Fanny's in HEAVEN!
Nere's where you go ef you die!--
Don't you, Charley?--Nen you has WINGS--
IST LIKE FANNY!--an' PURTIEST THINGS!--
Don't you, Charley?--An' nen you can FLY--
Ist fly-an' EVER'thing! . . . I Wisht I'D die!

James Whitcomb Riley

Private Theatricals

A quite convincing axiom
Is, 'Life is like a play';
For, turning back its pages some
Few dog-eared years away,
I find where I
Committed my
Love-tale--with brackets where to sigh.

I feel an idle interest
To read again the page;
I enter, as a lover dressed,
At twenty years of age,
And play the part
With throbbing heart,
And all an actor's glowing art.

And she who plays my Lady-love
Excels!--Her loving glance
Has power her audience to move--
I am her audience.--
Her acting tact,
To tell the fact,
'Brings down the house' in every act.

And often we defy the curse
Of storms and thunder-showers,
To meet together and rehearse
This little play of ours--
I think, when she
'Makes love' to me,
She kisses very naturally!

.....

Yes; it's convincing--rather--
That 'Life is like a play':
I am playing 'Heavy Father'
In a 'Screaming Farce' to-day,
That so 'brings down

The house, ' I frown,
And fain would 'ring the curtain down.'

James Whitcomb Riley

Proem

Where are they-- the Afterwhiles--
Luring us the lengthening miles
Of our lives? Where is the dawn
With the dew across the lawn
Stroked with eager feet the far
Way the hills and valleys are?
Were the sun that smites the frown
Of the eastward-gazer down?
Where the rifted wreaths of mist
O'er us, tinged with amethyst,
Round the mountain's steep defiles?
Where are the afterwhiles?

Afterwhile-- and we will go
Thither, yon, and too and fro--
From the stifling city streets
To the country's cool retreats--
From the riot to the rest
Were hearts beat the placidest:
Afterwhile, and we will fall
Under breezy trees, and loll
In the shade, with thirsty sight
Drinking deep the blue delight
Of the skies that will beguile
Us as children-- afterwhile.

Afterwhile-- and one intends
To be gentler to his friends--,
To walk with them, in the hush
Of still evenings, o'er the plush
Of home-leading fields, and stand
Long at parting, hand in hand:
One, in time, will joy to take
New resolves for some one's sake,
And wear then the look that lies
Clear and pure in other eyes--
We will soothe and reconcile
His own conscience-- afterwhile.

Afterwhile-- we have in view
A far scene to journey to--,
Where the old home is, and where
The old mother waits us there,
Peering, as the time grows late,
Down the old path to the gate--.
How we'll click the latch that locks
In the pinks and hollyhocks,
And leap up the path once more
Where she waits us at the door--!
How we'll greet the dear old smile,
And the warm tears-- afterwhile!

Ah, the endless afterwhiles--!
Leagues on leagues, and miles on miles,
In distance far withdrawn,
Stretching on, and on, and on,
Till the fancy is footsore
And faints in the dust before
The last milestone's granite face,
Hacked with: Here Beginneth Space.
O far glimmering worlds and wings,
Mystic smiles and beckonings,
Lead us through the shadowy aisles
Out into the afterwhiles.

James Whitcomb Riley

Reach Your Hand To Me

Reach your hand to me, my friend,
With its heartiest caress--
Sometime there will come an end
To its present faithfulness--
Sometime I may ask in vain
For the touch of it again,
When between us land or sea
Holds it ever back from me.

Sometime I may need it so,
Groping somewhere in the night,
It will seem to me as though
Just a touch, however light,
Would make all the darkness day,
And along some sunny way
Lead me through an April-shower
Of my tears to this fair hour.

O the present is too sweet
To go on forever thus!
Round the corner of the street
Who can say what waits for us?--
Meeting--greeting, night and day,
Faring each the self-same way--
Still somewhere the path must end.--
Reach your hand to me, my friend!

James Whitcomb Riley

Red Riding-Hood

Sweet little myth of the nursery story--
Earliest love of mine infantile breast,
Be something tangible, bloom in thy glory
Into existence, as thou art addressed!
Hasten! appear to me, guileless and good--
Thou are so dear to me, Red Riding-Hood!

Azure-blue eyes, in a marvel of wonder,
Over the dawn of a blush breaking out;
Sensitive nose, with a little smile under
Trying to hide in a blossoming pout--
Couldn't be serious, try as you would,
Little mysterious Red Riding-Hood!

Hah! little girl, it is desolate, lonely,
Out in this gloomy old forest of Life!--
Here are not pansies and buttercups only--
Brambles and briars as keen as a knife;
And a Heart, ravenous, trails in the wood
For the meal have he must,--Red Riding-Hood!

James Whitcomb Riley

Regardin' Terry Hut

Sence I tuk holt o' Gibbses' Churn
And be'n a-handlin' the concern,
I've travelled round the grand old State
Of Indiany, lots, o' late--!
I've canvassed Crawferdsville and sweat
Around the town o' Layfayette;
I've saw a many a County-seat
I ust to think was hard to beat:
At constant dreelage and expense
I've worked Greencastle and Vincennes--
Dropped out o' Putnam into Clay,
Owen, and on down thataway
Plum into Knox, on the back-track
Fer home ag'in-- and glad I'm back--!
I've saw these towns, as I say-- but
They's none 'at beats old Terry Hut!

It's more'n likely you'll insist
I claim this 'cause I'm prejudist,
Bein' born'd here in ole Vygo
In sight o' Terry Hut--; but no,
Yer clean dead wrong--! And I maintain
They's nary drap in ary vein
O' mine but what's as free as air
To jest take issue with you there--!
'Cause, boy and man, fer forty year,
I've argied ag'inst livin' here,
And jawed around and traded lies
About our lack o' enterprise,
And tuk and turned in and agreed
All other towns was in the lead,
When-- drat my melts--! They couldn't cut
No shine a-tall with Terry Hut!

Take even, statesmanship, and wit,
And ginerel git-up-and-git,
Old Terry Hut is sound clean through--!
Turn old Dick Thompson loose, er Dan
Vorehees-- and where's they any man

Kin even hold a candle to
Their eloquence--? And where's as clean
A fi-nan-seer as Rile' McKeen--
Er puorer, in his daily walk,
In railroad er in racin' stock!
And there's 'Gene Debs-- a man 'at stands
And jest holds out in his two hands
As warm a heart as ever beat
Betwixt here and the Jedge'ment Seat--!
All these is reasons why I putt
Sich bulk o' faith in Terry Hut.

So I've come back, with eyes 'at sees
My faults, at last--, to make my peace
With this old place, and truthful' swear--
Like Giner'al Tom Nelson does--,
'They hain't no city anywhere
On God's green earth lays over us!
Our city government is grand--
'Ner is they better farmin'-land
Sun-kissed--' as Tom goes on and says--
'Er dower'd with sich advantages!
And I've come back, with welcome tread,
From journeyin's vain, as I have said,
To settle down in ca'm content,
And cuss the towns where I have went,
And brag on ourn, and boast and strut
Around the streets o' Terry Hut!

James Whitcomb Riley

Right Here At Home

Right here at home, boys, in old Hoosierdom,
Where strangers allus joke us when they come,
And brag o' _their_ old States and interprize--
Yit _settle_ here; and 'fore they realize,
They're 'hoosier' as the rest of us, and live
Right here at home, boys, with their past fergive!

Right here at home, boys, is the place, I guess,
Fer me and you and plain old happiness:
We hear the World's lots grander--likely so,--
We'll take the World's word fer it and not go.--
We know _its_ ways aint _our_ ways--so we'll stay
Right here at home, boys, where we know the way.

Right here at home, boys, where a well-to-do
Man's plenty rich enough--and knows it, too,
And's got a' extry dollar, any time,
To boost a feller up 'at _wants_ to climb
And 's got the git-up in him to go in
And _git there_, like he purt'-nigh allus kin!

Right here at home, boys, is the place fer us!--
Where folks' heart's bigger 'n their money-pu's';
And where a _common_ feller's jes as good
As any other in the neighborhood:
The World at large don't worry you and me
Right here at home, boys, where we ort to be!

Right here at home, boys--jes right where we air!--
Birds don't sing any sweeter anywhere:
Grass don't grow any greener'n she grows
Acrost the pastur' where the old path goes,--
All things in ear-shot's purty, er in sight,
Right here at home, boys, ef we _size_ 'em right.

Right here at home, boys, where the old home-place
Is sacerd to us as our mother's face,
Jes as we rickollect her, last she smiled
And kissed us--dyin' so and rickonciled,

Seein' us all at home here--none astray--
Right here at home, boys, where she sleeps to-day.

James Whitcomb Riley

Robert Burns Wilson

What intuition named thee?--Through what thrill
Of the awed soul came the command divine
Into the mother-heart, foretelling thine
Should palpitate with his whose raptures will
Sing on while daisies bloom and lavrocks trill
Their undulating ways up through the fine
Fair mists of heavenly reaches? Thy pure line
Falls as the dew of anthems, quiring still
The sweeter since the Scottish singer raised
His voice therein, and, quit of every stress
Of earthly ache and longing and despair,
Knew certainly each simple thing he praised
Was no less worthy, for its lowliness,
Than any joy of all the glory There.

James Whitcomb Riley

Romancin'

I' b'en a-kinde musin', as the feller says, and I'm
About o' the conclusion that they ain't no better time,
When you come to cipher on it, than the times we used to know
When we swore our first 'dog-gone-it' sorto solem'-like and low!

You git my idy, do you?--_Little_ tads, you understand--
Jes' a wishin' thue and thue you that you on'y was a _man_.--
Yit here I am, this minute, even forty, to a day,
And fergittin' all that's in it, wishin' jes' the other way!

I hain't no hand to lectur' on the times, er dimonstrate
Whur the trouble is, er hector and domineer with Fate,--
But when I git so flurried, and so pestered-like and blue,
And so rail owdacious worried, let me tell you what I do!--

I jes' gee-haw the hosses, and unhook the swingle-tree,
Whur the hazel-bushes tosses down their shadders over me,
And I draw my plug o' navy, and I climb the fence, and set
Jes' a-thinkin' here, 'y gravy! till my eyes is wringin'-wet!

Tho' I still kin see the trouble o' the _present_, I kin see--
Kinde like my sight was double--all the things that _used to be_;
And the flutter o' the robin, and the teeter o' the wren
Sets the willer branches bobbin 'howdy-do' thum Now to Then!

The deadnin' and the thicket's jes' a bilin' full of June,
Thum the rattle o' the cricket, to the yallar-hammer's tune;
And the catbird in the bottom, and the sap-suck on the snag,
Seems ef they cain't--od-rot'em!--jes' do nothin' else but brag!

They's music in the twitter of the bluebird and the jay,
And that sassy little critter jes' a-peckin' all the day;
They's music in the 'flicker,' and they's music in the thrush,
And they's music in the snicker o' the chipmunk in the brush!

They's music _all around_ me!--And I go back, in a dream--
Sweeter yit than ever found me fast asleep--and in the stream
That used to split the medder whur the dandylions growed,
I stand knee-deep, and redder than the sunset down the road.

Then's when I' b'en a-fishin'!--and they's other fellers, too,
With their hickry poles a-swishin' out behind 'em; and a few
Little 'shiners' on our stringers, with their tails tiptoein' bloom,
As we dance 'em in our fingers all the happy journey home.

I kin see us, true to Natur', thum the time we started out
With a biscuit and a 'tater in our little 'roundabout!'
I kin see our lines a-tanglin', and our elbows in a jam,
And our naked legs a-danglin' thum the apern of the dam.

I kin see the honeysuckle climbin' up around the mill;
And kin hear the worter chuckle, and the wheel a-growlin' still;
And thum the bank below it I kin steal the old canoe,
And jes' git in and row it like the miller used to do.

W'y, I git my fancy focussed on the past so mortal plain
I kin even smell the locus'-blossoms bloomin' in the lane;
And I hear the cow-bells clinkin' sweeter tunes 'n 'money musk'
Far the lightnin'-bugs a-blinkin'and a-dancin'in the dusk.

And so I keep on musin', as the feller says, till I'm
Firm-fixed in the conclusion that they hain't no better time,
When you come to ciper on it, than the _old_ times,--and, I swear,
I kin wake and say 'dog-gone-it!' jes' as soft as any prayer!

James Whitcomb Riley

Say Something To Me

Say something to me! I've waited so long--
Waited and wondered in vain;
Only a sentence would fall like a song
Over this listening pain--
Over a silence that glowers and frowns,--
Even my pencil to-night
Slips in the dews of my sorrow and wounds
Each tender word that I write.

Say something to me--if only to tell
Me you remember the past;
Let the sweet words, like the notes of a bell,
Ring out my vigil at last.
O it were better, far better than this
Doubt and distrust in the breast,--
For in the wine of a fanciful kiss
I could taste Heaven, and--rest.

Say something to me! I kneel and I plead,
In my wild need, for a word;
If my poor heart from this silence were freed,
I could soar up like a bird
In the glad morning, and twitter and sing,
Carol and warble and cry
Blithe as the lark as he cruises awing
Over the deeps of the sky.

James Whitcomb Riley

Scraps

There's a habit I have nurtured,
From the sentimental time
When my life was like a story,
And my heart a happy rhyme,--
Of clipping from the paper,
Or magazine, perhaps,
The idle songs of dreamers,
Which I treasure as my scraps.

They hide among my letters,
And they find a cozy nest
In the bosom of my wrapper,
And the pockets of my vest;
They clamber in my fingers
Till my dreams of wealth relapse
In fairer dreams than Fortune's
Though I find them only scraps.

Sometimes I find, in tatters
Like a beggar, form as fair
As ever gave to Heaven
The treasure of a prayer;
And words all dim and faded,
And obliterate in part,
Grow into fadeless meanings
That are printed on the heart.

Sometimes a childish jingle
Flings an echo, sweet and clear,
And thrills me as I listen
To the laughs I used to hear;
And I catch the gleam of faces,
And the glimmer of glad eyes
That peep at me expectant
O'er the walls of Paradise.

O syllables of measure!
Though you wheel yourselves in line,
And await the further order

Of this eager voice of mine;
You are powerless to follow
O'er the field my fancy maps,
So I lead you back to silence
Feeling you are only scraps.

James Whitcomb Riley

September Dark

1

The air falls chill;
The whippoorwill
Pipes lonesomely behind the Hill:
The dusk grows dense,
The silence tense;
And lo, the katydids commence.

2

Through shadowy rifts
Of woodland lifts
The low, slow moon, and upward drifts,
While left and right
The fireflies' light
Swirls eddying in the skirts of Night.

3

O Cloudland gray
And level lay
Thy mists across the face of Day!
At foot and head,
Above the dead
O Dews, weep on uncomforted!

James Whitcomb Riley

Silence

Thousands of thousands of hushed years ago,
Out on the edge of Chaos, all alone
I stood on peaks of vapor, high upthrown
Above a sea that knew nor ebb nor flow,
Nor any motion won of winds that blow,
Nor any sound of watery wail or moan,
Nor lisp of wave, nor wandering undertone
Of any tide lost in the night below.
So still it was, I mind me, as I laid
My thirsty ear against mine own faint sigh
To drink of that, I sipped it, half afraid
'Twas but the ghost of a dead voice spilled by
The one starved star that tottered through the shade
And came tiptoeing toward me down the sky.

James Whitcomb Riley

Sister Jones's Confession

I thought the deacon liked me, yit
I warn't adzackly shore of it--
Fer, mind ye, time and time agin,
When jiners 'ud be comin' in,
I'd seed him shakin' hands as free
With all the sistern as with me!
But jurin' last Revival, where
He called on _me_ to lead in prayer,
An' kneeled there with me, side by side,
A-whisper'n' 'he felt sanctified
Jes' tetchin of my gyarment's hem,'--
That settled things as fur as them-
Thare other wimmin was concerned!--
And--well!--I know I must a-turned
A dozen colors!--_Flurried_?--_la_!--
No mortal sinner never saw
A gladder widder than the one
A-kneelin' there and wonderun'
Who'd pray'--So glad, upon my word,
I raily could n't thank the Lord!

James Whitcomb Riley

Sleep

Thou drowsy god, whose blurred eyes, half awink
Muse on me--, drifting out upon thy dreams,
I lave my soul as in enchanted streams
Where revelling satyrs pipe along the brink,
And tipsy with the melody they drink,
Uplift their dangling hooves, and down the beams
Of sunshine dance like motes. Thy languor seems
An ocean-depth of love wherein I sink
Like some fond Argonaut, right willingly--,
Because of wooing eyes upturned to mine,
And siren-arms that coil their sorcery
About my neck, with kisses so divine,
The heavens reel above me, and the sea
Swallows and licks its wet lips over me.

James Whitcomb Riley

Some Scattering Remarks Of Bub's

Wunst I looked our pepper-box lid
An' cut little pie-dough biscuits, I did,
And cooked 'em on our stove one day
When our hired girl she said I may.

Honey's the goodest thing--Oo-_ooh_!
And blackberry-pies is goodest, too!
But wite hot biscuits, ist soakin'-wet
Wiv tree-mullasus, is goodest yet!

Miss Maimie she's my Ma's friend,--an'
She's purtiest girl in all the lan'!--
An' sweetest smile an' voice an' face--
An' eyes ist looks like p'serves tas'e'!

I _ruther_ go to the Circus-show;
But, 'cause my _parunts_ told me so,
I ruther go to the Sund'y School,
'Cause there I learn the goldun rule.

Say, Pa,--what _is_ the goldun rule
'At's allus at the Sund'y School?

James Whitcomb Riley

Some Songs After Master Singers

I

SONG

[W.S.]

With a hey! and a hi! and a hey-ho rhyme!

O the shepherd lad

He is ne'er so glad

As when he pipes, in the blossom-time,

So rare!

While Kate picks by, yet looks not there.

So rare! so rare!

With a hey! and a hi! and a ho!

The grasses curdle where the daisies blow!

With a hey! and a hi! and a hey-ho vow!

Then he sips her face

At the sweetest place--

And ho! how white is the hawthorn now!--

So rare!--

And the daisied world rocks round them there.

So rare! so rare!

With a hey! and a hi! and a ho!

The grasses curdle where the daisies blow!

II

TO THE CHILD JULIA

[R.H.]

Little Julia, since that we

May not as our elders be,

Let us blithely fill the days

Of our youth with pleasant plays.

First we'll up at earliest dawn,
While as yet the dew is on
The sooth'd grasses and the pied
Blossomings of morningtide;
Next, with rinsed cheeks that shine
As the enamell'd eglantine,
We will break our fast on bread
With both cream and honey spread;
Then, with many a challenge-call,
We will romp from house and hall,
Gypsying with the birds and bees
Of the green-tress'd garden trees.
In a bower of leaf and vine
Thou shalt be a lady fine
Held in duress by the great
Giant I shall personate.
Next, when many mimics more
Like to these we have played o'er,

We'll betake us home-along
Hand in hand at evensong.

III

THE DOLLY'S MOTHER

[W.W.]

A little maid, of summers four--
Did you compute her years,--
And yet how infinitely more
To me her age appears:

I mark the sweet child's serious air,
At her unplayful play,--
The tiny doll she mothers there
And lulls to sleep away,

Grows--'neath the grave similitude--
An infant real, to me,
And she a saint of motherhood

In hale maturity.

So, pausing in my lonely round,
And all unseen of her,
I stand uncovered--her profound
And abject worshipper.

IV

WIND OF THE SEA

[A.T.]

Wind of the Sea, come fill my sail--
Lend me the breath of a freshening gale
And bear my port-worn ship away!
For O the greed of the tedious town--
The shutters up and the shutters down!
Wind of the Sea, sweep over the bay
And bear me away!--away!

Whither you bear me, Wind of the Sea,
Matters never the least to me:
Give me your fogs, with the sails adrip,
Or the weltering path thro' the starless night--
On, somewhere, is a new daylight
And the cheery glint of another ship
As its colors dip and dip!

Wind of the Sea, sweep over the bay
And bear me away!--away!

V

SUBTLETY

[R.B.]

Whilst little Paul, convalescing, was staying

Close indoors, and his boisterous classmates paying

Him visits, with fresh school-notes and surprises,--
With nettling pride they sprung the word 'Athletic,'
With much advice and urgings sympathetic
Anent 'Athletic exercises.' Wise as
Lad might look, quoth Paul: 'I've pondered o'er that
'Athletic,' but I mean to take, before that,
Downstairic and outdooric exercises.'

VI

BORN TO THE PURPLE

[W.M.]

Most-like it was this kingly lad
Spake out of the pure joy he had
In his child-heart of the wee maid
Whose eerie beauty sudden laid
A spell upon him, and his words
Burst as a song of any bird's:--

A peerless Princess thou shalt be,
Through wit of love's rare sorcery:
To crown the crown of thy gold hair
Thou shalt have rubies, bleeding there
Their crimson splendor midst the marred
Pulp of great pearls, and afterward

Leaking in fainter ruddy stains
Adown thy neck-and-armlet-chains
Of turquoise, chrysoprase, and mad
Light-frenzied diamonds, dartling glad
Swift spirits of shine that interfuse
As though with lucent crystal dew
That glance and glitter like split rays
Of sunshine, born of burgeoning Mays
When the first bee tilts down the lip

Of the first blossom, and the drip
Of blended dew and honey heaves
Him blinded midst the underleaves.
For raiment, Fays shall weave for thee--
Out of the phosphor of the sea
And the frayed floss of starlight, spun
With counterwarp of the firm sun--
A vesture of such filmy sheen
As, through all ages, never queen
Therewith strove truly to make less
One fair line of her loveliness.
Thus gowned and crowned with gems and gold,
Thou shalt, through centuries untold,
Rule, ever young and ever fair,
As now thou rulest, smiling there.

James Whitcomb Riley

Song

'Why do I sing--Tra-la-la-la-la!
Glad as a King?--Tra-la-la-la-la!
Well, since you ask,--
I have such a pleasant task,
I can not help but sing!

'Why do I smile--Tra-la-la-la-la!
Working the while?--Tra-la-la-la-la!
Work like this is play,--
So I'm playing all the day--
I can not help but smile!

'So, If you please--Tra-la-la-la-la!
Live at your ease!--Tra-la-la-la-la!
You've only got to turn,
And, you see, its bound to churn--
I can not help but please!

The farmer pondered and scratched his head,
Reading over each mystic word.--
'Some o' the Dreamer's work!' he said--
'Ah, here's more--and name and date
In his hand-write!'--And the good man read,--
"Patent applied for, July third,
Eighteen hundred and forty-eight!"
The fragment fell from his nerveless grasp--
His awed lips thrilled with the joyous gasp:
'I see the p'int to the whole concern,--
He's studied out a patent churn!'

James Whitcomb Riley

Song Of Parting

Say farewell, and let me go;
Shatter every vow!
All the future can bestow
Will be welcome now!
And if this fair hand I touch
I have worshipped overmuch,
It was my mistake--and so,
Say farewell, and let me go.

Say farewell, and let me go:
Murmur no regret,
Stay your tear-drops ere they flow--
Do not waste them yet!
They might pour as pours the rain,
And not wash away the pain:
I have tried them and I know.--
Say farewell, and let me go.

Say farewell, and let me go:
Think me not untrue--
True as truth is, even so
I am true to you!
If the ghost of love may stay
Where my fond heart dies to-day,
I am with you alway--so,
Say farewell, and let me go.

James Whitcomb Riley

Song Of The New Year

I heard the bells at midnight
Ring in the dawning year;
And above the clanging chorus
Of the song, I seemed to hear
A choir of mystic voices
Flinging echoes, ringing clear,
From a band of angels winging
Through the haunted atmosphere:
'Ring out the shame and sorrow,
And the misery and sin,
That the dawning of the morrow
May in peace be ushered in.'

And I thought of all the trials
The departed years had cost,
And the blooming hopes and pleasures
That are withered now and lost;
And with joy I drank the music
Stealing o'er the feeling there
As the spirit song came pealing
On the silence everywhere:
'Ring out the shame and sorrow,
And the misery and sin,
That the dawning of the morrow
May in peace be ushered in.'

And I listened as a lover
To an utterance that flows
In syllables like dewdrops
From the red lips of a rose,
Till the anthem, fainter growing,
Climbing higher, chiming on
Up the rounds of happy rhyming,
Slowly vanished in the dawn:
'Ring out the shame and sorrow,
And the misery and sin,
That the dawning of the morrow
May in peace be ushered in.'

Then I raised my eyes to Heaven,
And with trembling lips I pled
For a blessing for the living
And a pardon for the dead;
And like a ghost of music
Slowly whispered--lowly sung--
Came the echo pure and holy
In the happy angel tongue:
'Ring out the shame and sorrow,
And the misery and sin,
And the dawn of every morrow
Will in peace be ushered in.'

James Whitcomb Riley

Squire Hawkins's Story

I hain't no hand at tellin' tales,
Er spinnin' yarns, as the sailors say;
Someway o' 'nother, language fails
To slide fer me in the oily way
That LAWYERS has; and I wisht it would,
Fer I've got somepin' that I call good;
But bein' only a country squire,
I've learned to listen and admire,
Ruther preferrin' to be addressed
Than talk myse'f--but I'll do my best:--

Old Jeff Thompson--well, I'll say,
Was the clos'test man I ever saw!--
Rich as cream, but the porest pay,
And the meanest man to work fer--La!
I've knowed that man to work one 'hand'--
Fer little er nothin', you understand--
From four o'clock in the morning light
Tel eight and nine o'clock at night,
And then find fault with his appetite!
He'd drive all over the neighborhood
To miss the place where a toll-gate stood,
And slip in town, by some old road
That no two men in the county knowed,
With a jag o' wood, and a sack o' wheat,
That wouldn't burn and you couldn't eat!
And the trades he'd make, 'll I jest de-clare,
Was enough to make a preacher swear!
And then he'd hitch, and hang about
Tel the lights in the toll-gate was blowed out,
And then the turnpike he'd turn in
And sneak his way back home ag'in!

Some folks hint, and I make no doubt,
That that's what wore his old wife out--
Toilin' away from day to day
And year to year, through heat and cold,
Uncomplainin'--the same old way
The martyrs died in the days of old;

And a-clingin', too, as the martyrs done,
To one fixed faith, and her ONLY one,--
Little Patience, the sweetest child
That ever wept unrickonciled,
Er felt the pain and the ache and sting
That only a mother's death can bring.

Patience Thompson!--I think that name
Must 'a' come from a power above,
Fer it seemed to fit her jest the same
As a GAITER would, er a fine kid glove!
And to see that girl, with all the care
Of the household on her--I de-clare
It was OUDACIOUS, the work she'd do,
And the thousand plans that she'd putt through;

And sing like a medder-lark all day long,
And drowned her cares in the joys o' song;
And LAUGH sometimes tel the farmer's 'hand,'
Away fur off in the fields, would stand
A-listenin', with the plow half drawn,
Tel the coaxin' echoes called him on;
And the furries seemed, in his dreamy eyes,
Like foot-paths a-leadin' to Paradise,
As off through the hazy atmosphere
The call fer dinner reached his ear.

Now LOVE'S as cunnin'a little thing
As a hummin'-bird upon the wing,
And as liable to poke his nose
Jest where folks would least suppose,--
And more'n likely build his nest
Right in the heart you'd leave unguessed,
And live and thrive at your expense--
At least, that's MY experience.
And old Jeff Thompson often thought,
In his se'fish way, that the quiet John
Was a stiddy chap, as a farm-hand OUGHT
To always be,--fer the airliest dawn
Found John busy--and 'EASY,' too,
Whenever his wages would fall due!--
To sum him up with a final touch,

He EAT so little and WORKED so much,
That old Jeff laughed to hisse'f and said,
'He makes ME money and airns his bread!--

But John, fer all of his quietude,
Would sometimes drap a word er so
That none but PATIENCE understood,
And none but her was MEANT to know!--
Maybe at meal-times John would say,
As the sugar-bowl come down his way,
'Thanky, no; MY coffee's sweet
Enough fer ME!' with sich conceit,
SHE'D know at once, without no doubt,
HE meant because she poured it out;
And smile and blush, and all sich stuff,
And ast ef it was 'STRONG enough?'
And git the answer, neat and trim,
'It COULDN'T be too 'strong' fer HIM!

And so things went fer 'bout a year,
Tel John, at last, found pluck to go
And pour his tale in the old man's ear--
And ef it had been HOT LEAD, I know
It couldn't 'a' raised a louder fuss,
Ner 'a' riled the old man's temper wuss!
He jest LIT in, and cussed and swore,
And lunged and rared, and ripped and tore,
And told John jest to leave his door,
And not to darken it no more!
But Patience cried, with eyes all wet,
'Remember, John, and don't ferget,
WHATEVER comes, I love you yet!'
But the old man thought, in his se'fish way,
'I'll see her married rich some day;
And THAT,' thinks he, 'is money fer ME--
And my will's LAW, as it ought to be!'

So when, in the course of a month er so,
A WIDOWER, with a farm er two,
Comes to Jeff's, w'y, the folks, you know,
Had to TALK--as the folks'll do:
It was the talk of the neighborhood--

PATIENCE and JOHN, and THEIR affairs;--
And this old chap with a few gray hairs
Had 'cut John out,' it was understood.
And some folks reckoned 'Patience, too,
Knowed what SHE was a-goin' to do--
It was LIKE her--la! indeed!--
All she loved was DOLLARS and CENTS--
Like old JEFF--and they saw no need
Fer JOHN to pine at HER negligence!

But others said, in a KINDER way,
They missed the songs she used to sing--
They missed the smiles that used to play
Over her face, and the laughin' ring
Of her glad voice--that EVERYthing
Of her OLD se'f seemed dead and gone,
And this was the ghost that they gazed on!

Tel finally it was noised about
There was a WEDDIN' soon to be
Down at Jeff's; and the 'cat was out'
Shore enough!--'LI the JEE-MUN-NEE!
It RILED me when John told me so,--
Fer I WAS A FRIEND O' JOHN'S, you know;
And his trimblin' voice jest broke in two--
As a feller's voice'll sometimes do.--
And I says, says I, 'Ef I know my biz--
And I think I know what JESTICE is,--
I've read SOME law--and I'd advise
A man like you to wipe his eyes
And square his jaws and start AGIN,
FER JESTICE IS A-GOIN' TO WIN!
And it wasn't long tel his eyes had cleared
As blue as the skies, and the sun appeared
In the shape of a good old-fashioned smile
That I hadn't seen fer a long, long while.

So we talked on fer a' hour er more,
And sunned ourselves in the open door,--
Tel a hoss-and-buggy down the road
Come a-drivin' up, that I guess John KNOWED,--
Fer he winked and says, 'I'll dessappear--

THEY'D smell a mice ef they saw ME here!'
And he thumbed his nose at the old gray mare,
And hid hisse'f in the house somewhere.

Well.--The rig drove up: and I raised my head
As old Jeff hollered to me and said
That 'him and his old friend there had come
To see ef the squire was at home.'
. . . I told 'em 'I was; and I AIMED to be
At every chance of a weddin'-fee!'
And then I laughed--and they laughed, too,--
Fer that was the object they had in view.
'Would I be on hands at eight that night?'
They ast; and 's-I, 'You're mighty right,
I'LL be on hand!' And then I BU'ST
Out a-laughin' my very wu'st,--
And so did they, as they wheeled away
And drove to'rds town in a cloud o' dust.
Then I shet the door, and me and John
Laughed and LAUGHED, and jest LAUGHED on,
Tel Mother drapped her specs, and BY
JEEWHILLIKERS! I thought she'd DIE!--
And she couldn't 'a' told, I'll bet my hat,
What on earth she was laughin' at!

But all o' the fun o' the tale hain't done!--
Fer a drizzlin' rain had jest begun,
And a-havin' 'bout four mile' to ride,
I jest concluded I'd better light
Out fer Jeff's and save my hide,--
Fer IT WAS A-GOIN' TO STORM, THAT NIGHT!
So we went down to the barn, and John
Saddled my beast, and I got on;
And he told me somepin' to not ferget,
And when I left, he was LAUGHIN' yet.

And, 'proachin' on to my journey's end,
The great big draps o' the rain come down,
And the thunder growled in a way to lend
An awful look to the lowerin' frown
The dull sky wore; and the lightnin' glanced
Tel my old mare jest MORE'N pranced,

And tossed her head, and bugged her eyes
To about four times their natchurl size,
As the big black lips of the clouds 'ud drap
Out some oath of a thunderclap,
And threaten on in an undertone
That chilled a feller clean to the bone!

But I struck shelter soon enough
To save myse'f. And the house was jammed
With the women-folks, and the weddin'stuff:--
A great, long table, fairly CRAMMED
With big pound-cakes--and chops and steaks--
And roasts and stews--and stumick-aches
Of every fashion, form, and size,
From twisters up to punkin-pies!
And candies, oranges, and figs,
And reezins,--all the 'whilligigs'
And 'jim-cracks' that the law allows
On sich occasions!--Bobs and bows
Of gigglin' girls, with corkscrew curls,
And fancy ribbons, reds and blues,
And 'beau-ketchers' and 'curliques'
To beat the world! And seven o'clock
Brought old Jeff;-and brought--THE GROOM,--
With a sideboard-collar on, and stock
That choked him so, he hadn't room
To SWALLER in, er even sneeze,
Er clear his th'oat with any case
Er comfort--and a good square cough
Would saw his Adam's apple off!

But as fer PATIENCE--MY! Oomh-OOMH!--
I never saw her look so sweet!--
Her face was cream and roses, too;
And then them eyes o' heavenly blue
Jest made an angel all complete!
And when she split 'em up in smiles
And splintered 'em around the room,
And danced acrost and met the groom,
And LAUGHED OUT LOUD--It kind o' spiles
My language when I come to that--
Fer, as she laid away his hat,

Thinks I, 'THE PAPERS HID INSIDE
OF THAT SAID HAT MUST MAKE A BRIDE
A HAPPY ONE FER ALL HER LIFE,
Er else a WRECKED AND WRETCHED WIFE!
And, someway, then, I thought of JOHN,--
Then looked towards PATIENCE. . . . She was GONE!--
The door stood open, and the rain
Was dashin' in; and sharp and plain
Above the storm we heerd a cry--
A ringin', laughin', loud 'Good-by!'
That died away, as fleet and fast
A hoss's hoofs went splashin' past!
And that was all. 'Twas done that quick! . . .
You've heerd o' fellers 'lookin' sick'?
I wisht you'd seen THE GROOM jest then--
I wisht you'd seen them two old men,
With starin' eyes that fairly GLARED
At one another, and the scared
And empty faces of the crowd,--
I wisht you could 'a' been allowed
To jest look on and see it all,--
And heerd the girls and women bawl
And wring their hands; and heerd old Jeff
A-cussin' as he swung hisse'f
Upon his hoss, who champed his bit
As though old Nick had holt of it:
And cheek by jowl the two old wrecks
Rode off as though they'd break their necks.

And as we all stood starin' out
Into the night, I felt the brush
Of some one's hand, and turned about,
And heerd a voice that whispered, 'HUSH!--
THEY'RE WAITIN' IN THE KITCHEN, AND
YOU'RE WANTED. DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?'
Well, ef my MEMORY serves me now,
I think I winked.--Well, anyhow,
I left the crowd a-gawkin' there,
And jest slipped off around to where
The back door opened, and went in,
And turned and shet the door ag'in,
And maybe LOCKED it--couldn't swear,--

A woman's arms around me makes
Me liable to make mistakes.--
I read a marriage license nex',
But as I didn't have my specs
I jest INFERRED it was all right,
And tied the knot so mortal-tight
That Patience and my old friend John
Was safe enough from that time on!

Well, now, I might go on and tell
How all the joke at last leaked out,
And how the youngsters raised the yell
And rode the happy groom about
Upon their shoulders; how the bride
Was kissed a hunderd times beside
The one I give her,--tel she cried
And laughed untel she like to died!
I might go on and tell you all
About the supper--and the BALL.--
You'd ought to see me twist my heel
Through jest one old Furginny reel
Afore you die! er tromp the strings
Of some old fiddle tel she sings
Some old cowtillion, don't you know,
That putts the devil in yer toe!

We kep' the dancin' up tel FOUR
O'clock, I reckon--maybe more.--
We hardly heerd the thunders roar,
ER THOUGHT about the STORM that blowed--
AND THEM TWO FELLERS ON THE ROAD!
Tel all at onc't we heerd the door
Bu'st open, and a voice that SWORE,--
And old Jeff Thompson tuck the floor.
He shuck hisse'f and looked around
Like some old dog about half-drowned--
HIS HAT, I reckon, WEIGHED TEN POUND
To say the least, and I'll say, SHORE,
HIS OVERCOAT WEIGHED FIFTY more--
THE WETTEST MAN YOU EVER SAW,
TO HAVE SO DRY A SON-IN-LAW!

He sized it all; and Patience laid
Her hand in John's, and looked afraid,
And waited. And a stiller set
O' folks, I KNOW, you never met
In any court room, where with dread
They wait to hear a verdick read.

The old man turned his eyes on me:
'And have you married 'em?' says he.
I nodded 'Yes.' 'Well, that'll do,'
He says, 'and now we're th'ough with YOU,--
YOU jest clear out, and I decide
And promise to be satisfied!'
He hadn't nothin' more to say.
I saw, of course, how matters lay,
And left. But as I rode away
I heerd the roosters crow fer day.

James Whitcomb Riley

Thanksgiving

Let us be thankful--not only because
Since last our universal thanks were told
We have grown greater in the world's applause,
And fortune's newer smiles surpass the old--

But thankful for all things that come as alms
From out the open hand of Providence:--
The winter clouds and storms---the summer calms--
The sleepless dread--the drowse of indolence.

Let us be thankful--thankful for the prayers
Whose gracious answers were long, long delayed,
That they might fall upon us unawares,
And bless us, as in greater need, we prayed.

Let us be thankful for the loyal hand
That love held out in welcome to our own,
When love and only love could understand
The need of touches we had never known.

Let us be thankful for the longing eyes
That gave their secret to us as they wept,
Yet in return found, with a sweet surprise,
Love's touch upon their lids, and, smiling, slept.

And let us, too, be thankful that the tears
Of sorrow have not all been drained away,
That through them still, for all the coming years,
We may look on the dead face of To-day.

James Whitcomb Riley

That Other Maud Muller

Maud Muller worked at making hay,
And cleared her forty cents a day.

Her clothes were coarse, but her health was fine,
And so she worked in the sweet sunshine

Singing as glad as a bird in May
'Barbara Allen' the livelong day.

She often glanced at the far-off town,
And wondered if eggs were up or down.

And the sweet song died of a strange disease,
Leaving a phantom taste of cheese,

And an appetite and a nameless ache
For soda-water and ginger cake.

The judge rode slowly into view--
Stopped his horse in the shade and threw

His fine-cut out, while the blushing Maud
Marveled much at the kind he 'chawed.'

'He was dry as a fish,' he said with a wink,
'And kind o' thought that a good square drink

Would brace him up.' So the cup was filled
With the crystal wine that old spring spilled;

And she gave it him with a sun-browned hand.
'Thanks,' said the judge in accents bland;

'A thousand thanks! for a sweeter draught,
From a fairer hand'--but there he laughed.

And the sweet girl stood in the sun that day,
And raked the judge instead of the hay.

The Ancient Printman

'O Printerman of sallow face,
And look of absent guile,
Is it the 'copy' on your 'case'
That causes you to smile?
Or is it some old treasure scrap
You cull from Memory's file?

'I fain would guess its mystery--
For often I can trace
A fellow dreamer's history
Whene'er it haunts the face;
Your fancy's running riot
In a retrospective race!

'Ah, Printerman, you're straying
Afar from 'stick' and type--
Your heart has 'gone a-maying,'
And you taste old kisses, ripe
Again on lips that pucker
At your old asthmatic pipe!

'You are dreaming of old pleasures
That have faded from your view;
And the music-burdened measures
Of the laughs you listen to
Are now but angel-echoes--
O, have I spoken true?'

The ancient Printer hinted
With a motion full of grace
To where the words were printed
On a card above his 'case,'--
'I am deaf and dumb!' I left him
With a smile upon his face.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Artemus Of Michigan

Grand Haven is in Michigan, and in possession, too,
Of as many rare attractions as our party ever knew:--
The fine hotel, the landlord, and the lordly bill of fare,
And the dainty-neat completeness of the pretty waiters there;
The touch on the piano in the parlor, and the trill
Of the exquisite soprano, in our fancy singing still;
Our cozy room, its comfort, and our thousand grateful tho'ts,
And at our door the gentle face

Of

H.

Y.

Potts!

His artless observations, and his drollery of style,
Bewildered with that sorrowful serenity of smile--
The eye's elusive twinkle, and the twitching of the lid,
Like he didn't go to say it and was sorry that he did.
O Artemus of Michigan! so worthy of the name,
Our manager indorses it, and Bill Nye does the same--
You tickled our affection in so many tender spots
That even Recollection laughs

At

H.

Y.

Potts!

And hark ye! O Grand Haven! count your rare attractions o'er--
The commerce of your ships at sea, and ships along the shore;
Your railroads, and your industries, and interests untold,
Your Opera House--our lecture, and the gate-receipts in gold!--
Ay, Banner Town of Michigan! count all your treasures through--
Your crowds of summer tourists, and your Sanitarium, too;
Your lake, your beach, your drives, your breezy groves
and grassy plots,

But head the list of all of these

With

H.

Y.

Potts!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Bat

I.

Thou dread, uncanny thing,
With fuzzy breast and leathern wing,
In mad, zigzagging flight,
Notching the dusk, and buffeting
The black cheeks of the night,
With grim delight!

II.

What witch's hand unhasps
Thy keen claw-cornered wings
From under the barn roof, and flings
Thee forth, with chattering gasps,
To scud the air,
And nip the lady-bug, and tear
Her children's hearts out unaware?

III.

The glow-worm's glimmer, and the bright,
Sad pulsings of the fire-fly's light,
Are banquet lights to thee.
O less than bird, and worse than beast,
Thou Devil's self, or brat, at least,
Grate not thy teeth at me!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Beautiful City

The Beautiful City! Forever
Its rapturous praises resound;
We fain would behold it-- but never
A glimpse of its dory is found:
We slacken our lips at the tender
White breasts of our mothers to hear
Of its marvellous beauty and splendor--;
We see-- but the gleam of a tear!

Yet never the story may tire us--
First graven in symbols of stone--
Rewritten on scrolls of papyrus
And parchment, and scattered and blown
By the winds of the tongues of all nations,
Like a litter of leaves wildly whirled
Down the rack of a hundred translations,
From the earliest lisp of the world.

We compass the earth and the ocean,
From the Orient's uttermost light,
To where the last ripple in motion
Lips hem of the skirt of the night--,
But the Beautiful City evades us--
No spire of it glints in the sun--
No glad-bannered battlement shades us
When all our Journey is done.

Where lies it? We question and listen;
We lean from the mountain, or mast,
And see but dull earth, or the glisten
Of seas inconceivably vast:
The dust of the one blurs our vision,
The glare of the other our brain,
Nor city nor island Elysian
In all of the land or the main!

We kneel in dim fanes where the thunders
Of organs tumultuous roll,
And the longing heart listens and wonders,

And the eyes look aloft from the soul:
But the chanson grows fainter and fainter,
Swoons wholly away and is dead;
AND our eyes only reach where the painter
Has dabbled a saint overhead.

The Beautiful City! O mortal,
Fare hopefully on in thy quest,
Pass down through the green grassy portal
That leads to the Valley of Rest;
There first passed the One who, in pity
Of all thy great yearning, awaits
To point out The Beautiful City,
And loosen the trump at the gates.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Best Is Good Enough

I quarrel not with destiny,
But make the best of everything-
The best is good enough for me.

Leave discontent alone, and she
Will shut her mouth and let you sing.
I quarrel not with destiny.

I take some things, or let 'em be-
Good gold has always got the ring;
The best is good enough for me.

Since fate insists on secrecy,
I have no arguments to bring-
I quarrel not with destiny.

The fellow that goes 'haw' for 'gee'
Will find he hasn't got full swing.
The best is good enough for me.

One only knows our needs, and he
Does all of the distributing.
I quarrel not with destiny:
The best is good enough for me.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Best Times

When Old Folks they wuz young like us
An' little as you an' me

Them wuz the best times ever wuz
Er ever goin' to be!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Blossoms On The Trees

Blossoms crimson, white, or blue,
Purple, pink, and every hue,
From sunny skies, to tintings drowned
In dusky drops of dew,
I praise you all, wherever found,
And love you through and through--;
But, Blossoms On The Trees,
With your breath upon the breeze
There's nothing all the world around
As half as sweet as you!

Could the rhymer only wring
All the sweetness to the lees
Of all the kisses clustering
In juicy Used-to-bes,
To dip his rhymes therein and sing
The blossoms on the trees--,
'O Blossoms on the Trees,'
He would twitter, trill, and coo,
'However sweet, such songs as these
Are not as sweet as you--:
For you are blooming melodies
The eyes may listen to!'

James Whitcomb Riley

The Book Of Joyous Children

Bound and bordered in leaf-green,
Edged with trellised buds and flowers
And glad Summer-gold, with clean
White and purple morning-glories
Such as suit the songs and stories
Of this book of ours,
Unrevised in text or scene,--
The Book of Joyous Children.

Wild and breathless in their glee--
Lawless rangers of all ways
Winding through lush greenery
Of Elysian vales--the viny,
Bowery groves of shady, shiny
Haunts of childish days.
Spread and read again with me
The Book of Joyous Children.

What a whir of wings, and what
Sudden drench of dews upon
The young brows, wreathed, all unsought,
With the apple-blossom garlands
Of the poets of those far lands
Whence all dreams are drawn
Set herein and soiling not
The Book of Joyous Children.

In their blithe companionship
Taste again, these pages through,
The hot honey on your lip
Of the sun-smit wild strawberry,
Or the chill tart of the cherry;
Kneel, all glowing, to
The cool spring, and with it sip
The Book of Joyous Children.

As their laughter needs no rule,
So accept their language, pray.--
Touch it not with any tool:

Surely we may understand it,--
As the heart has parsed or scanned it
Is a worthy way,
Though found not in any School
The Book of Joyous Children.

Be a truant--know no place
Of prison under heaven's rim!
Front the Father's smiling face--
Smiling, that _you_ smile the brighter
For the heavy hearts made lighter,
Since you smile with Him.
Take--and thank Him for His grace--
The Book of Joyous Children.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Boy Lives On Our Farm

The boy lives on our Farm, he's not
Afeard o' horses none!
An' he can make 'em lope, er trot,
Er rack, er pace, er run.
Sometimes he drives two horses, when
He comes to town an' brings
A wagon-full o' 'taters nen,
An' roastin'-ears an' things.

Two horses is 'a team,' he says,
An' when you drive er hitch,
The right-un's a 'near-horse,' I guess
Er 'off'--I don't know which--
The Boy lives on our Farm, he told
Me, too, 'at he can see,
By lookin' at their teeth, how old
A horse is, to a T!

I'd be the gladdest boy alive
Ef I knowed much as that,
An' could stand up like him an' drive,
An' ist push back my hat,
Like he comes skallyhootin' through
Our alley, with one arm
A-wavin' Fare-ye-well! to you--
The Boy lives on our Farm!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Boy Patriot

I want to be a Soldier!--

A Soldier!--

A Soldier!--

I want to be a Soldier, with a sabre in my hand
Or a little carbine rifle, or a musket on my shoulder,
Or just a snare-drum, snarling in the middle of the band;
I want to hear, high overhead, The Old Flag flap her wings
While all the Army, following, in chorus cheers and sings;
I want to hear the tramp and jar
Of patriots a million,
As gayly dancing off to war
As dancing a cotillion.

I want to be a Soldier!--

A Soldier!--

A Soldier!--

I want to be a Soldier, with a sabre in my hand
Or a little carbine rifle, or a musket on my shoulder,
Or just a snare-drum, snarling in the middle of the band.

I want to see the battle!--

The battle!--

The battle!--

I want to see the battle, and be in it to the end;--
I want to hear the cannon clear their throats and catch the prattle
Of all the pretty compliments the enemy can send!--
And then I know my wits will go,--and where I _should'nt_ be--
Well, there's the spot, in any fight, that you may search for me.
So, when our foes have had their fill,
Though I'm among the dying,
To see The Old Flag flying still,
I'll laugh to leave her flying!

I want to be a Soldier!--

A Soldier!--

A Soldier!--

I want to be a Soldier, with a sabre in my hand
Or a little carbine rifle, or a musket on my shoulder,
Or just a snare-drum, snarling in the middle of the band.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Boys

Where are they?--the friends of my childhood enchanted--
The clear, laughing eyes looking back in my own,
And the warm, chubby fingers my palms have so wanted,
As when we raced over
Pink pastures of clover,
And mocked the quail's whir and the bumblebee's drone?

Have the breezes of time blown their blossomy faces
Forever adrift down the years that are flown?
Am I never to see them romp back to their places,
Where over the meadow,
In sunshine and shadow,
The meadow-larks trill, and the bumblebees drone?

Where are they? Ah! dim in the dust lies the clover;
The whippoorwill's call has a sorrowful tone,
And the dove's--I have wept at it over and over;--
I want the glad luster
Of youth, and the cluster
Of faces asleep where the bumblebees drone!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Boy's Candidate

Las' time 'at Uncle Sidney come,
He bringed a watermelon home--
An' half the boys in town,
Come taggin' after him.--An' he
Says, when we et it,--_'Gracious me!
'S the boy-house fell down?'

James Whitcomb Riley

The Brook-Song

Little brook! Little brook!
You have such a happy look--
Such a very merry manner, as you swerve and
curve and crook--
And your ripples, one and one,
Reach each other's hands and run
Like laughing little children in the sun!

Little brook, sing to me:
Sing about a bumblebee
That tumbled from a lily-bell and grumbled
mumblingly,
Because he wet the film
Of his wings, and had to swim,
While the water-bugs raced round and
laughed at him!

Little brook-sing a song
Of a leaf that sailed along
Down the golden-braided centre of your current
swift and strong,
And a dragon-fly that lit
On the tilting rim of it,
And rode away and wasn't scared a bit.

And sing--how oft in glee
Came a truant boy like me,
Who loved to lean and listen to your lilting
melody,
Till the gurgle and refrain
Of your music in his brain
Wrought a happiness as keen to him
as pain.

Little brook-laugh and leap!
Do not let the dreamer weep:
Sing him all the songs of summer till he sink in
softest sleep;
And then sing soft and low

Through his dreams of long ago--
Sing back to him the rest he used to
know!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Bumblebee

1 You better not fool with a Bumblebee! --
2 Ef you don't think they can sting -- you'll see!
3 They're lazy to look at, an' kind o' go
4 Buzzin' an' bummin' aroun' so slow,
5 An' ac' so slouchy an' all fagged out,
6 Danglin' their legs as they drone about
7 The hollyhawks 'at they can't climb in
8 'Ithout ist a-tumble-un out ag'in!
9 Wunst I watched one climb clean 'way
10 In a jimson-blossom, I did, one day, --
11 An' I ist grabbed it -- an' nen let go --
12 An' "Ooh-ooh! Honey! I told ye so!"
13 Says The Raggedy Man; an' he ist run
14 An' pullt out the stinger, an' don't laugh none,
15 An' says: "They has be'n folks, I guess,
16 'At thought I wuz predjudust, more er less, --
17 Yit I still muntain 'at a Bumblebee
18 Wears out his welcome too quick fer me!"

James Whitcomb Riley

The Chant Of The Cross-Bearing Child

I bear dis cross dis many a mile.
O de cross-bearin' chile--
De cross-bearin' chile!

I bear dis cross 'long many a road
Wha' de pink ain't bloom' an' de grass done mowed.
O de cross-bearin' chile--
De cross-bearin' chile!

Hits on my conscience all dese days
Fo' ter bear de cross ut de good Lord lays
On my po' soul, an' ter lif my praise.
O de cross-bearin' chile--
De cross-bearin' chile!

I 's nigh-'bout weak ez I mos' kin be,
Yit de Marstah call an' He say,--'You 's free
Fo' ter 'cept dis cross, an' ter cringe yo' knee
To no n'er man in de worl' but me!
O de cross-bearin' chile--
De cross-bearin' chile!

Says you guess wrong, ef I let you guess--
Says you 'spec' mo', an'-a you git less:--
Says you go eas', says you go wes',
An' whense you fine de road ut you like bes'
You betteh take ch'ice er any er de res'!
O de cross-bearin' chile--
De cross-bearin' chile!

He build my feet, an' He fix de signs
Dat de shoe hit pinch an' de shoe hit bines
Ef I on'y w'ah eights an-a want'er w'ah nines;
I hone fo' de rain, an' de sun hit shines,
An' whilse I hunt de sun, hits de rain I fines.--
O-a trim my lamp, an-a gyrd my lines!
O de cross-bearin' chile--
De cross-bearin' chile!

I wade de wet, an' I walk de dry:
I done tromp long, an' I done clim high;
An' I pilgrim on ter de jasper sky,
An' I taken de resk fo' ter cas' my eye
Wha' de Gate swing wide an' de Lord draw nigh,
An' de Trump hit blow, an' I hear de cry,--
'You lay dat cross down by an' by!--
O de Cross-bearin' Chile--
Do Cross-bearin' Chile!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Child-World

A Child-World, yet a wondrous world no less,
To those who knew its boundless happiness.
A simple old frame house--eight rooms in all--
Set just one side the center of a small
But very hopeful Indiana town,--
The upper-story looking squarely down
Upon the main street, and the main highway
From East to West,--historic in its day,
Known as The National Road--old-timers, all
Who linger yet, will happily recall
It as the scheme and handiwork, as well
As property, of 'Uncle Sam,' and tell
Of its importance, 'long and long afore
Railroads wuz ever _dreamp_' of!--Furthermore,
The reminiscent first Inhabitants
Will make that old road blossom with romance
Of snowy caravans, in long parade
Of covered vehicles, of every grade
From ox-cart of most primitive design,
To Conestoga wagons, with their fine
Deep-chested six-horse teams, in heavy gear,
High names and chiming bells--to childish ear
And eye entrancing as the glittering train
Of some sun-smitten pageant of old Spain.
And, in like spirit, haply they will tell
You of the roadside forests, and the yell
Of 'wolfs' and 'painters,' in the long night-ride,
And 'screechin' catamounts' on every side.--
Of stagecoach-days, highwaymen, and strange crimes,
And yet unriddled mysteries of the times
Called 'Good Old.' 'And why 'Good Old?'' once a rare
Old chronicler was asked, who brushed the hair
Out of his twinkling eyes and said,--'Well John,
They're 'good old times' because they're dead and gone!'

The old home site was portioned into three
Distinctive lots. The front one--natively
Facing to southward, broad and gaudy-fine
With lilac, dahlia, rose, and flowering vine--

The dwelling stood in; and behind that, and
Upon the alley north and south, left hand,
The old wood-house,--half, trimly stacked with wood,
And half, a work-shop, where a workbench stood
Steadfastly through all seasons.--Over it,
Along the wall, hung compass, brace-and-bit,
And square, and drawing-knife, and smoothing-plane--
And little jack-plane, too--the children's vain
Possession by pretense--in fancy they
Manipulating it in endless play,
Turning out countless curls and loops of bright,
Fine satin shavings--Rapture infinite!
Shelved quilting-frames; the toolchest; the old box
Of refuse nails and screws; a rough gun-stock's
Outline in 'curly maple'; and a pair
Of clamps and old krout-cutter hanging there.
Some 'patterns,' in thin wood, of shield and scroll,
Hung higher, with a neat 'cane-fishing-pole'
And careful tackle--all securely out
Of reach of children, rummaging about.

Beside the wood-house, with broad branches free
Yet close above the roof, an apple-tree
Known as 'The Prince's Harvest'--Magic phrase!
That was _a boy's own tree_, in many ways!--
Its girth and height meet both for the caress
Of his bare legs and his ambitiousness:
And then its apples, humoring his whim,
Seemed just to fairly _hurry_ ripe for him--
Even in June, impetuous as he,
They dropped to meet him, halfway up the tree.
And O their bruised sweet faces where they fell!--
And ho! the lips that feigned to 'kiss them _well_ '!

'The Old Sweet-Apple-Tree,' a stalwart, stood
In fairly sympathetic neighborhood
Of this wild princeling with his early gold
To toss about so lavishly nor hold
In bounteous hoard to overbrim at once
All Nature's lap when came the Autumn months.
Under the spacious shade of this the eyes
Of swinging children saw swift-changing skies

Of blue and green, with sunshine shot between,
And 'when the old cat died' they saw but green.
And, then, there was a cherry-tree.--We all
And severally will yet recall
From our lost youth, in gentlest memory,
The blessed fact--There was a cherry-tree.

There was a cherry-tree. Its bloomy snows
Cool even now the fevered sight that knows
No more its airy visions of pure joy--
As when you were a boy.

There was a cherry-tree. The Bluejay set
His blue against its white--O blue as jet
He seemed there then!--But now--Whoever knew
He was so pale a blue!

There was a cherry-tree--Our child-eyes saw
The miracle:--Its pure white snows did thaw
Into a crimson fruitage, far too sweet
But for a boy to eat.

There was a cherry-tree, give thanks and joy!--
There was a bloom of snow--There was a boy--
There was a Bluejay of the realest blue--
And fruit for both of you.

Then the old garden, with the apple-trees
Grouped 'round the margin, and 'a stand of bees'
By the 'white-winter-pearmain'; and a row
Of currant-bushes; and a quince or so.
The old grape-arbor in the center, by
The pathway to the stable, with the sty
Behind it, and upon it, cootering flocks
Of pigeons, and the cutest 'martin-box'!--
Made like a sure-enough house--with roof, and doors
And windows in it, and veranda-floors
And balusters all 'round it--yes, and at
Each end a chimney--painted red at that
And penciled white, to look like little bricks;
And, to cap all the builder's cunning tricks,
Two tiny little lightning-rods were run

Straight up their sides, and twinkled in the sun.
Who built it? Nay, no answer but a smile.--
It _may_ be you can guess who, afterwhile.
Home in his stall, 'Old Sorrel' munched his hay
And oats and corn, and switched the flies away,
In a repose of patience good to see,
And earnest of the gentlest pedigree.
With half pathetic eye sometimes he gazed
Upon the gambols of a colt that grazed
Around the edges of the lot outside,
And kicked at nothing suddenly, and tried
To act grown-up and graceful and high-bred,
But dropped, _k'whop!_ and scraped the buggy-shed,
Leaving a tuft of woolly, foxy hair
Under the sharp-end of a gate-hinge there.
Then, all ignobly scrambling to his feet
And whinneying a whinney like a bleat,
He would pursue himself around the lot
And--do the whole thing over, like as not!...
Ah! what a life of constant fear and dread
And flop and squawk and flight the chickens led!
Above the fences, either side, were seen
The neighbor-houses, set in plots of green
Dooryards and greener gardens, tree and wall
Alike whitewashed, and order in it all:
The scythe hooked in the tree-fork; and the spade
And hoe and rake and shovel all, when laid
Aside, were in their places, ready for
The hand of either the possessor or
Of any neighbor, welcome to the loan
Of any tool he might not chance to own.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Circus-Day Parade

Oh, the Circus-Day parade! How the bugles played and played!
And how the glossy horses tossed their flossy manes, and neighed,
As the rattle and the rhyme of the tenor-drummer's time
Filled all the hungry hearts of us with melody sublime!

How the grand band-wagon shone with a splendor all its own,
And glittered with a glory that our dreams had never known!
And how the boys behind, high and low of every kind,
Marched in unconscious capture, with a rapture undefined!

How the horsemen, two and two, with their plumes of white and blue,
And crimson, gold and purple, nodding by at me and you.
Waved the banners that they bore, as the Knights in days of yore,
Till our glad eyes gleamed and glistened like the spangles that they wore!

How the graceless-graceful stride of the elephant was eyed,
And the capers of the little horse that cantered at his side!
How the shambling camels, tame to the plaudits of their fame,
With listless eyes came silent, masticating as they came.

How the cages jolted past, with each wagon battened fast,
And the mystery within it only hinted of at last
From the little grated square in the rear, and nosing there
The snout of some strange animal that sniffed the outer air!

And, last of all, The Clown, making mirth for all the town,
With his lips curved ever upward and his eyebrows ever down,
And his chief attention paid to the little mule that played
A tattoo on the dashboard with his heels, in the parade.

Oh! the Circus-Day parade! How the bugles played and played!
And how the glossy horses tossed their flossy manes and neighed.
As the rattle and the rhyme of the tenor-drummer's time
Filled all the hungry hearts of us with melody sublime!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Clover

Some sings of the lily, and daisy, and rose,
And the pansies and pinks that the Summertime
throws
In the green grassy lap of the medder that lays
Blinkin' up at the skyes through the sunshiney days;
But what is the lily and all of the rest
Of the flowers, to a man with a hart in his brest
That was dipped brimmin' full of the honey and dew
Of the sweet clover-blossoms his babyhood knew?
I never set eyes on a clover-field now,
Er fool round a stable, er climb in the mow,
But my childhood comes back jest as clear and as plane
As the smell of the clover I'm sniffin' again;
And I wunder away in a bare-footed dream,
Whare I tangle my toes in the blossoms that gleam
With the dew of the dawn of the morning of love
Ere it wept ore the graves that I'm weepin' above.

And so I love clover--it seems like a part
Of the sacerdest sorrows and joys of my hart;
And wharever it blossoms, oh, thare let me bow
And thank the good God as I'm thankin' Him now;
And I pray to Him still fer the stren'th when I die,
To go out in the clover and tell it good-bye,
And lovin'ly nestle my face in its bloom
While my soul slips away on a breth of perfume

James Whitcomb Riley

The Curse Of The Wandering Foot

All hope of rest withdrawn me?--
What dread command hath put
This awful curse upon me--
The curse of the wandering foot!
Forward and backward and thither,
And hither and yon again--
Wandering ever! And whither?
Answer them, God! Amen.

The blue skies are far o'er me---
The bleak fields near below:
Where the mother that bore me?--
Where her grave in the snow?--
Glad in her trough of a coffin--
The sad eyes frozen shut
That wept so often, often,
The curse of the wandering foot!

Here in your marts I care not
Whatsoever ye think.
Good folk many who dare not
Give me to eat and drink:
Give me to sup of your pity--
Feast me on prayers!--O ye,
Met I your Christ in the city
He would fare forth with me--

Forward and onward and thither,
And hither again and yon,
With milk for our drink together
And honey to feed upon--
Nor hope of rest withdrawn us,
Since the one Father put
The blessed curse upon us--
The curse of the wandering foot.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Cyclone

So lone I stood, the very trees seemed drawn
In conference with themselves.--Intense--intense
Seemed everything;--the summer splendor on
The sight,--magnificence!

A babe's life might not lighter fail and die
Than failed the sunlight--Though the hour was noon,
The palm of midnight might not lighter lie
Upon the brow of June.

With eyes upraised, I saw the underwings
Of swallows--gone the instant afterward--
While from the elms there came strange twitterings,
Stilled scarce ere they were heard.

The river seemed to shiver; and, far down
Its darkened length, I saw the sycamores
Lean inward closer, under the vast frown
That weighed above the shores.

Then was a roar, born of some awful burst!--
And one lay, shrieking, chattering, in my path--
Flung--he or I--out of some space accurst
As of Jehovah's wrath:

Nor barely had he wreaked his latest prayer,
Ere back the noon flashed o'er the ruin done,
And, o'er uprooted forests touseled there,
The birds sang in the sun.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Days Gone By

O the days gone by! O the days gone by!
The apples in the orchard, and the pathway through the rye;
The chirrup of the robin, and the whistle of the quail
As he piped across the meadows sweet as any nightingale;
When the bloom was on the clover, and the blue was in the sky,
And my happy heart brimmed over in the days gone by.

In the days gone by, when my naked feet were tripped
By the honey-suckle's tangles where the water-lilies dipped,
And the ripples of the river lipped the moss along the brink
Where the placid-eyed and lazy-footed cattle came to drink,
And the tilting snipe stood fearless of the truant's wayward cry
And the splashing of the swimmer, in the days gone by.

O the days gone by! O the days gone by!
The music of the laughing lip, the luster of the eye;
The childish faith in fairies, and Aladdin's magic ring--
The simple, soul-reposing, glad belief in everything,--
When life was like a story, holding neither sob nor sigh,
In the golden olden glory of the days gone by.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Dead Lover

Time is so long when a man is dead!
Some one sews; and the room is made
Very clean; and the light is shed
Soft through the window-shade.

Yesterday I thought: 'I know
Just how the bells will sound, and how
The friends will talk, and the sermon go,
And the hearse-horse bow and bow!'

This is to-day; and I have no thing
To think of-- nothing whatever to do
But to hear the throb of the pulse of a wing
That wants to fly back to you.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Drum

O the drum!
There is some
Intonation in thy grum
Monotony of utterance that strikes the spirit dumb,
As we hear
Through the clear
And unclouded atmosphere,
Thy palpitating syllables roll in upon the ear!

There's a part
Of the art
Of thy music-throbbing heart
That thrills a something in us that awakens with a start,
And in rhyme
With the chime
And exactitude of time,
Goes marching on to glory to thy melody sublime.

And the guest
Of the breast
That thy rolling robs of rest
Is a patriotic spirit as a Continental dressed;
And he looms
From the glooms
Of a century of tombs,
And the blood he spilled at Lexington in living beauty blooms.

And his eyes
Wear the guise
Of a purpose pure and wise,
As the love of them is lifted to a something in the skies
That is bright
Red and white,
With a blur of starry light,
As it laughs in silken ripples to the breezes day and night.

There are deep
Hushes creep
O'er the pulses as they leap,

As thy tumult, fainter growing, on the silence falls asleep,
While the prayer
Rising there
Wills the sea and earth and air
As a heritage to Freedom's sons and daughters everywhere.

Then, with sound
As profound
As the thunderings resound,
Come thy wild reverberations in a throe that shakes the ground,
And a cry
Flung on high,
Like the flag it flutters by,
Wings rapturously upward till it nestles in the sky.

O the drum!
There is some
Intonation in thy grum
Monotony of utterance that strikes the spirit dumb,
As we hear
Through the clear
And unclouded atmosphere,
Thy palpitating syllables roll in upon the ear!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Evening Company

Within the sitting-room, the company
Had been increased in number. Two or three
Young couples had been added: Emma King,
Ella and Mary Mathers--all could sing
Like veritable angels--Lydia Martin, too,
And Nelly Millikan.--What songs they knew!--

_"Ever of Thee--wherever I may be,
Fondly I'm drea-m-ing ever of thee!_"

And with their gracious voices blend the grace
Of Warsaw Barnett's tenor; and the bass
Unfathomed of Wick Chapman--Fancy still
Can feel, as well as hear it, thrill on thrill,
Vibrating plainly down the backs of chairs
And through the wall and up the old hall-stairs.--
Indeed young Chapman's voice especially
Attracted Mr. Hammond--For, said he,
Waiving the most Elysian sweetness of
The ladies' voices--altitudes above
The man's for sweetness;--but--as contrast, would
Not Mr. Chapman be so very good
As, just now, to oblige all with--in fact,
Some sort of jolly song,--to counteract
In part, at least, the sad, pathetic trend
Of music generally. Which wish our friend
'The Noted Traveler' made second to
With heartiness--and so each, in review,
Joined in--until the radiant basso cleared
His wholly unobstructed throat and peered
Intently at the ceiling--voice and eye
As opposite indeed as earth and sky.--
Thus he uplifted his vast bass and let
It roam at large the memories booming yet:

"Old Simon the Cellarer keeps a rare store
Of Malmsey and Malvoi-sie,
Of Cyprus, and who can say how many more?--
But a chary old so-u-l is he-e-ee--

A chary old so-u-l is he!
Of hock and Canary he never doth fail;
And all the year 'round, there is brewing of ale;--
Yet he never aileth, he quaintly doth say,
While he keeps to his sober six flagons a day."

... And then the chorus--the men's voices all
Warred in it--like a German Carnival.--
Even _Mrs_ . Hammond smiled, as in her youth,
Hearing her husband--And in veriest truth
'The Noted Traveler's' ever-present hat
Seemed just relaxed a little, after that,
As at conclusion of the Bacchic song
He stirred his 'float' vehemently and long.

Then Cousin Rufus with his flute, and art
Blown blithely through it from both soul and heart--
Inspired to heights of mastery by the glad,
Enthusiastic audience he had
In the young ladies of a town that knew
No other flutist,--nay, nor _wanted_ to,
Since they had heard _his_ 'Polly Hopkin's Waltz,'
Or 'Rickett's Hornpipe,' with its faultless faults,
As rendered solely, he explained, 'by ear,'
Having but heard it once, Commencement Year,
At 'Old Ann Arbor.'

Little Maymie now
Seemed 'friends' with _Mr. Hammond_--anyhow,
Was lifted to his lap--where settled, she--
Enthroned thus, in her dainty majesty,
Gained _universal_ audience--although
Addressing him alone:--'I'm come to show
You my new Red-blue pencil; and _she_ says'--
(Pointing to _Mrs_ . Hammond)--'that she guess'
You'll make a _picture_ fer me.'

'And what _kind_
Of picture?' Mr. Hammond asked, inclined
To serve the child as bidden, folding square
The piece of paper she had brought him there.--
'I don't know,' Maymie said--'only ist make

A _little dirl_, like me!

He paused to take

A sharp view of the child, and then he drew--

Awhile with red, and then awhile with blue--

The outline of a little girl that stood

In converse with a wolf in a great wood;

And she had on a hood and cloak of red--

As Maymie watched--'_Red Riding Hood!_' she said.

'And who's '_Red Riding Hood'?_'

'W'y, don't _you_ know?'

Asked little Maymie--

But the man looked so

All uninformed, that little Maymie could

But tell him _all about_ Red Riding Hood.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Frog

Who am I but the Frog--the Frog!
My realm is the dark bayou,
And my throne is the muddy and moss-grown log
That the poison-vine clings to--
And the blacksnakes slide in the slimy tide
Where the ghost of the moon looks blue.

What am I but a King--a King!--
For the royal robes I wear--
A scepter, too, and a signet-ring,
As vassals and serfs declare:
And a voice, god wot, that is equaled not
In the wide world anywhere!

I can talk to the Night--the Night!--
Under her big black wing
She tells me the tale of the world outright,
And the secret of everything;
For she knows you all, from the time you crawl,
To the doom that death will bring.

The Storm swoops down, and he blows--and blows,--
While I drum on his swollen cheek,
And croak in his angered eye that glows
With the lurid lightning's streak;
While the rushes drown in the watery frown
That his bursting passions leak.

And I can see through the sky--the sky--
As clear as a piece of glass;
And I can tell you the how and why
Of the things that come to pass--
And whether the dead are there instead,
Or under the graveyard grass.

To your Sovereign lord all hail--all hail!--
To your Prince on his throne so grim!
Let the moon swing low, and the high stars trail
Their heads in the dust to him;

And the wide world sing: Long live the King,
And grace to his royal whim!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Funny Little Fellow

'Twas a Funny Little Fellow
Of the very purest type,
For he had a heart as mellow
As an apple over ripe;
And the brightest little twinkle
When a funny thing occurred,
And the lightest little tinkle
Of a laugh you ever heard!

His smile was like the glitter
Of the sun in tropic lands,
And his talk a sweeter twitter
Than the swallow understands;
Hear him sing--and tell a story--
Snap a joke--ignite a pun,--
'Twas a capture--rapture--glory,
An explosion--all in one!

Though he hadn't any money--
That condiment which tends
To make a fellow 'honey'
For the palate of his friends;--
Sweet simples he compounded--
Sovereign antidotes for sin
Or taint,--a faith unbounded
That his friends were genuine.

He wasn't honored, maybe--
For his songs of praise were slim,--
Yet I never knew a baby
That wouldn't crow for him;
I never knew a mother
But urged a kindly claim
Upon him as a brother,
At the mention of his name.

The sick have ceased their sighing,
And have even found the grace
Of a smile when they were dying

As they looked upon his face;
And I've seen his eyes of laughter
Melt in tears that only ran
As though, swift-dancing after,
Came the Funny Little Man.

He laughed away the sorrow
And he laughed away the gloom
We are all so prone to borrow
From the darkness of the tomb;
And he laughed across the ocean
Of a happy life, and passed,
With a laugh of glad emotion,
Into Paradise at last.

And I think the Angels knew him,
And had gathered to await
His coming, and run to him
Through the widely opened Gate,
With their faces gleaming sunny
For his laughter-loving sake,
And thinking, 'What a funny
Little Angel he will make!'

James Whitcomb Riley

The Good, Old-Fashioned People

When we hear Uncle Sidney tell
About the long-ago
An' old, old friends he loved so well
When _he_ was young--My-oh!--
Us childern all wish _we'd 'a'_ bin
A-livin' then with Uncle,--so
We could a-kindo' happened in
On them old friends he used to know!--
The good, old-fashioned people--
The hale, hard-working people--
The kindly country people
'At Uncle used to know!

They was God's people, Uncle says,
An' gloried in His name,
An' worked, without no selfishness,
An' loved their neighbors same
As they was kin: An' when they biled
Their tree-molasses, in the Spring,
Er butchered in the Fall, they smiled
An' sheered with all jist ever'thing!--

The good, old-fashioned people--
The hale, hard-working people--
The kindly country people
'At Uncle used to know!

He tells about 'em, lots o' times,
Till we'd all ruther hear
About 'em than the Nurs'ry Rhymes
Er Fairies--mighty near!--
Only sometimes he stops so long
An' then talks on so low an' slow,
It's purt'-nigh sad as any song
To listen to him talkin' so
Of the good, old-fashioned people--
The hale, hard-working people--
The kindly country people
'At Uncle used to know!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Happy Little Cripple

I'm thist a little cripple boy, an' never goin' to grow
An' get a great big man at all!--'cause Aunty told me so.
When I was thist a baby onc't, I falled out of the bed
An' got 'The Curv'ture of the Spine'--'at's what the Doctor said.
I never had no Mother nen--fer my Pa runned away
An' dassn't come back here no more--'cause he was drunk one day
An' stobbed a man in thish-ere town, an' couldn't pay his fine!
An' nen my Ma she died--an' I got 'Curv'ture of the Spine!'

I'm nine years old! An' you can't guess how much I weigh, I bet!--
Last birthday I weighed thirty-three!--An' I weigh thirty yet!
I'm awful little fer my size--I'm purt' nigh littler 'nan
Some babies is!--an' neighbors all calls me 'The Little Man!'
An' Doc one time he laughed an' said: 'I 'spect, first thing you know,
You'll have a little spike-tail coat an' travel with a show!'
An' nen I laughed--till I looked round an' Aunty was a-cryin'--
Sometimes she acts like that, 'cause I got 'Curv'ture of the Spine.'

I set--while Aunty's washin'--on my little long-leg stool,
An' watch the little boys an' girls a-skipin' by to school;
An' I peck on the winder, an' holler out an' say:
'Who wants to fight The Little Man 'at dares you all today?'
An', nen the boys climbs on the fence, an' little girls peeks through,
An' they all says: 'Cause you're so big, you think we're 'feared o' you!'
An' nen they yell, an' shake their fist at me, like I shake mine--
They're thist in fun, you know, 'cause I got 'Curv'ture of the Spine!'

At evening, when the ironin's done, an' Aunty's fixed the fire,
An' filled an' lit the lamp, an' trimmed the wick an' turned it higher,
An' fetched the wood all in fer night, an' locked the kitchen door,
An' stuffed the ole crack where the wind blows in up through the floor--
She sets the kittle on the coals, an' biles an' makes the tea,
An' fries the liver an' the mush, an' cooks a egg fer me;
An' sometimes--when I cough so hard--her elderberry wine
Don't go so bad fer little boys with 'Curv'ture of the Spine!'

But Aunty's all so childish-like on my account, you see,
I'm 'most afeard she'll be took down--an' 'at's what bothers me!--
'Cause ef my good old Aunty ever would git sick an' die,

I don't know what she'd do in heaven--till I come, by an' by:--
Fer she's so ust to all my ways, an' ever'thing, you know,
An' no one there like me, to nuss an' worry over so!--
'Cause all the little childerns there's so straight an' strong an' fine,
They's nary angel 'bout the place with 'Curv'ture of the Spine!'

James Whitcomb Riley

The Harp Of The Minstrel

The harp of the minstrel has never a tone
As sad as the song in his bosom to-night,
For the magical touch of his fingers alone
Can not waken the echoes that breathe it aright;
But oh! as the smile of the moon may impart
A sorrow to one in an alien clime,
Let the light of the melody fall on the heart,
And cadence his grief into musical rhyme.

The faces have faded, the eyes have grown dim
That once were his passionate love and his pride;
And alas! all the smiles that once blossomed for him
Have fallen away as the flowers have died.
The hands that entwined him the laureate's wreath
And crowned him with fame in the long, long ago,
Like the laurels are withered and folded beneath
The grass and the stubble--the frost and the snow.

Then sigh, if thou wilt, as the whispering strings
Strive ever in vain for the utterance clear,
And think of the sorrowful spirit that sings,
And jewel the song with the gem of a tear.
For the harp of the minstrel has never a tone
As sad as the song in his bosom tonight,
And the magical touch of his fingers alone
Can not waken the echoes that breathe it aright.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Harper

Like a drift of faded blossoms
Caught in a slanting rain,
His fingers glimpsed down the strings of his harp
In a tremulous refrain:

Patter and tinkle, and drip and drip!
Ah! but the chords were rainy sweet!
And I closed my eyes and I bit my lip,
As he played there in the street.

Patter, and drip, and tinkle!
And there was the little bed
In the corner of the garret,
And the rafters overhead!

And there was the little window --
Tinkle, and drip, and drip!--
The rain above, and a mother's love,
And God's companionship!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Hereafter

Hereafter! O we need not waste
Our smiles or tears, whatever befall:
No happiness but holds a taste
Of something sweeter, after all;--
No depth of agony but feels
Some fragment of abiding trust,--
Whatever death unlocks or seals,
The mute beyond is just.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Hired Man And Floretty

The Hired Man's supper, which he sat before,
In near reach of the wood-box, the stove-door
And one leaf of the kitchen-table, was
Somewhat belated, and in lifted pause
His dextrous knife was balancing a bit
Of fried mush near the port awaiting it.

At the glad children's advent--gladder still
To find him there--'Jest tickled fit to kill
To see ye all!' he said, with unctious cheer.--
'I'm tryin'-like to he'p Floretty here
To git things cleared away and give ye room
Accordin' to yer stren'th. But I p'sume
It's a pore boarder, as the poet says,
That quarrels with his victuals, so I guess
I'll take another wedge o' that-air cake,
Florett', that you're a-learnin' how to bake.'
He winked and feigned to swallow painfully.--

'Jest 'fore ye all come in, Floretty she
Was boastin' 'bout her biscuits--and they air
As good--sometimes--as you'll find anywhere.--
But, women gits to braggin' on their bread,
I'm s'picious 'bout their pie--as Danty said.'
This raillery Floretty strangely seemed
To take as compliment, and fairly beamed
With pleasure at it all.

--'Speakin' o' bread--
When she come here to live,' The Hired Man said,--
'Never ben out o' Freeport 'fore she come
Up here,--of course she needed 'sperience some.--
So, one day, when yer Ma was goin' to set
The risin' fer some bread, she sent Florett
To borry leaven, 'crost at Ryans'--So,
She went and asked fer twelve.--She didn't know,
But thought, whatever 'twuz, that she could keep
One fer herse'f, she said. O she wuz deep!'

Some little evidence of favor hailed
The Hired Man's humor; but it wholly failed
To touch the serious Susan Loehr, whose air
And thought rebuked them all to listening there
To her brief history of the _city_-man
And his pale wife--'A sweeter woman than
She ever saw!'--So Susan testified,--
And so attested all the Loehrs beside.--
So entertaining was the history, that
The Hired Man, in the corner where he sat
In quiet sequestration, shelling corn,
Ceased wholly, listening, with a face forlorn
As Sorrow's own, while Susan, John and Jake
Told of these strangers who had come to make
Some weeks' stay in the town, in hopes to gain
Once more the health the wife had sought in vain:
Their doctor, in the city, used to know
The Loehrs--Dan and Rachel--years ago,--
And so had sent a letter and request
For them to take a kindly interest
In favoring the couple all they could--
To find some home-place for them, if they would,
Among their friends in town. He ended by
A dozen further lines, explaining why
His patient must have change of scene and air--
New faces, and the simple friendships there
With _them_, which might, in time, make her forget
A grief that kept her ever brooding yet
And wholly melancholy and depressed,--
Nor yet could she find sleep by night nor rest
By day, for thinking--thinking--thinking still Upon a grief beyond the doctor's
skill,--
The death of her one little girl.

'Pore thing!'

Floretty sighed, and with the turkey-wing
Brushed off the stove-hearth softly, and peered in
The kettle of molasses, with her thin
Voice wandering into song unconsciously--
In purest, if most witless, sympathy.--

"Then sleep no more:

Around thy heart
Some ten-der dream may i-dlee play.
But mid-night song,
With mad-jick art,
Will chase that dree muh-way!"

'That-air besetment of Floretty's,' said
The Hired Man,--' _singin_--she _inhairited_,--
Her _father_ wuz addicted--same as her--
To singin'--yes, and played the dulcimer!
But--gittin' back,--I s'pose yer talkin' 'bout
Them _Hammondses_. Well, Hammond he gits out
Pattents on things--inventions-like, I'm told--
And's got more money'n a house could hold!
And yit he can't git up no pattent-right
To do away with _dyin'_.--And he might
Be worth a _million_, but he couldn't find
Nobody sellin' _health_ of any kind!...
But they's no thing onhandier fer _me_
To use than other people's misery.--
Floretty, hand me that-air skillet there
And lem me git 'er het up, so's them-air
Childern kin have their popcorn.'

It was good
To hear him now, and so the children stood
Closer about him, waiting.

'Things to _eat_,'
The Hired Man went on, "'s mighty hard to beat!
Now, when _I_ wuz a boy, we was so pore,
My parunts couldn't 'ford popcorn no more
To pamper _me_ with;--so, I hat to go
Without popcorn--sometimes a _year_ er so!--
And _suffer'n' saints!_ how hungry I would git
Fer jest one other chance--like this--at it!
Many and many a time I've _dreamp_', at night,
About popcorn,--all busted open white,
And hot, you know--and jest enough o' salt
And butter on it fer to find no fault--
Oomh!--Well! as I was goin' on to say,--
After a-_dreamin_' of it thataway,

Then havin' to wake up and find it's all
A _dream_, and hain't got no popcorn at-tall,
Ner haint _had_ none--I'd think, ' _Well, where's the use!_ '
And jest lay back and sob the plaster'n' loose!
And I have _prayed_, what_ever_ happened, it
'Ud eether be popcorn er death!.... And yit
I've noticed--more'n likely so have you--
That things don't happen when you _want_ 'em to.'

And thus he ran on artlessly, with speech
And work in equal exercise, till each
Tureen and bowl brimmed white. And then he greased
The saucers ready for the wax, and seized
The fragrant-steaming kettle, at a sign
Made by Floretty; and, each child in line,
He led out to the pump--where, in the dim
New coolness of the night, quite near to him
He felt Floretty's presence, fresh and sweet
As ... dewy night-air after kitchen-heat.

There, still, with loud delight of laugh and jest,
They plied their subtle alchemy with zest--
Till, sudden, high above their tumult, welled
Out of the sitting-room a song which held
Them stilled in some strange rapture, listening
To the sweet blur of voices chorusing:--

"When twilight approaches the season
That ever is sacred to song,
Does some one repeat my name over,
And sigh that I tarry so long?
And is there a chord in the music
That's missed when my voice is away?--
And a chord in each heart that awakens
Regret at my wearisome stay-ay--
Regret at my wearisome stay."

All to himself, The Hired Man thought--'Of course
They'll sing _Floretty_ homesick!'

... O strange source
Of ecstasy! O mystery of Song!--

To hear the dear old utterance flow along:--

"Do they set me a chair near the table
When evening's home-pleasures are nigh?--
When the candles are lit in the parlor.
And the stars in the calm azure sky."...

Just then the moonlight sliced the porch slantwise,
And flashed in misty spangles in the eyes
Floretty clenched--while through the dark--'I jing!'
A voice asked, 'Where's that song '_you'd_ learn to sing
Ef I sent you the _ballat_?'--which I done
Last I was home at Freeport.--S'pose you run
And git it--and we'll all go in to where
They'll know the notes and sing it fer ye there.'
And up the darkness of the old stairway
Floretty fled, without a word to say--
Save to herself some whisper muffled by
Her apron, as she wiped her lashes dry.

Returning, with a letter, which she laid
Upon the kitchen-table while she made
A hasty crock of 'float,'--poured thence into
A deep glass dish of iridescent hue
And glint and sparkle, with an overflow
Of froth to crown it, foaming white as snow.--
And then--poundcake, and jelly-cake as rare,
For its delicious complement,--with air
Of Hebe mortalized, she led her van
Of votaries, rounded by The Hired Man.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Home-Going

We must get home--for we have been away
So long it seems forever and a day!
And O so very homesick we have grown,
The laughter of the world is like a moan
In our tired hearing, and its songs as vain,--
We must get home--we must get home again!

We must get home: It hurts so, staying here,
Where fond hearts must be wept out tear by tear,
And where to wear wet lashes means, at best,
When most our lack, the least our hope of rest
When most our need of joy, the more our pain--
We must get home--we must get home again!

We must get home: All is so quiet there:
The touch of loving hands on brow and hair--
Dim rooms, wherein the sunshine is made mild---
The lost love of the mother and the child
Restored in restful lullabies of rain.--
We must get home--we must get home again!

We must get home, where, as we nod and drowse,
Time humors us and tiptoes through the house,
And loves us best when sleeping baby-wise,
With dreams--not tear-drops--brimming our clenched eyes,--
Pure dreams that know nor taint nor earthly stain--
We must get home--we must get home again!

We must get home; and, unremembering there
All gain of all ambitions elsewhere,
Rest--from the feverish victory, and the crown
Of conquest whose waste glory weighs us down.--
Fame's fairest gifts we toss back with disdain--
We must get home--we must get home again!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Hoodoo

Owned a pair o' skates onc't.--Traded
Fer 'em,--stropped 'em on and waded
Up and down the crick, a-waitin'
Tel she'd freeze up fit fer skatin'.
Mildest winter I remember--
More like Spring- than Winter-weather!--
Did n't _frost_ tel bout December-
Git up airly ketch a' feather
Of it, mayby, 'crost the winder--
Sunshine swinge it like a cinder!

Well--I _waited_ --and _kep_' waitin'!
Couldn't see my money's w'oth in
Them-air skates and was no skatin',
Ner no hint o' ice ner nothin'!
So, one day--along in airly
Spring--I swopped 'em off--and barely
Closed the dicker, 'fore the weather
Natchurly jes slipped the ratchet,
And crick--tail-race--all together,
Froze so tight cat couldn't scratch it!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Hoosier Folk-Child

The Hoosier Folk-Child--all unsung--
Unlettered all of mind and tongue;
Unmastered, unmolested--made
Most wholly frank and unafraid:
Untaught of any school--unvexed
Of law or creed--all unperplexed--
Unsermoned, aye, and undefiled,
An all imperfect-perfect child--
A type which (Heaven forgive us!) you
And I do tardy honor to,
And so, profane the sanctities
Of our most sacred memories.
Who, growing thus from boy to man,
That dares not be American?
Go, Pride, with prudent underbuzz--
Go _whistle_! as the Folk-Child does.

The Hoosier Folk-Child's world is not
Much wider than the stable-lot
Between the house and highway fence
That bounds the home his father rents.
His playmates mostly are the ducks
And chickens, and the boy that 'shucks
Corn by the shock,' and talks of town,
And whether eggs are 'up' or 'down,'
And prophecies in boastful tone
Of 'owning horses of his own,'
And 'being his own man,' and 'when
He gets to be, what he'll do then.'--
Takes out his jack-knife dreamily
And makes the Folk-Child two or three
Crude corn-stalk figures,--a wee span
Of horses and a little man.

The Hoosier Folk-Child's eyes are wise
And wide and round as Brownies' eyes:
The smile they wear is ever blent
With all-expectant wonderment,--
On homeliest things they bend a look

As rapt as o'er a picture-book,
And seem to ask, whate'er befall,
The happy reason of it all:--
Why grass is all so glad a green,
And leaves--and what their lispings mean;--
Why buds grow on the boughs, and why
They burst in blossom by and by--
As though the orchard in the breeze
Had shook and popped its _popcorn-trees_,
To lure and whet, as well they might,
Some seven-league giant's appetite!

The Hoosier Folk-Child's chubby face
Has scant refinement, caste or grace,--
From crown to chin, and cheek to cheek,
It bears the grimy water-streak
Of rinsings such as some long rain
Might drool across the window-pane
Wherethrough he peers, with troubled frown,
As some lorn team drives by for town.
His brow is elfed with wispish hair,
With tangles in it here and there,
As though the warlocks snarled it so
At midmirk when the moon sagged low,
And boughs did toss and skreek and shake,
And children moaned themselves awake,
With fingers clutched, and starting sight
Blind as the blackness of the night!

The Hoosier Folk-Child!--Rich is he
In all the wealth of poverty!
He owns nor title nor estate,
Nor speech but half articulate,--
He owns nor princely robe nor crown;--
Yet, draped in patched and faded brown,
He owns the bird-songs of the hills--
The laughter of the April rills;
And his are all the diamonds set.
In Morning's dewy coronet,--
And his the Dusk's first minted stars
That twinkle through the pasture-bars,
And litter all the skies at night

With glittering scraps of silver light;--
The rainbow's bar, from rim to rim,
In beaten gold, belongs to him.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Iron Horse

No song is mine of Arab steed--
My courser is of nobler blood,
And cleaner limb and fleeter speed,
And greater strength and hardihood
Than ever cantered wild and free
Across the plains of Araby.

Go search the level desert land
From Sana on to Samarcand--
Wherever Persian prince has been,
Or Dervish, Sheik, or Bedouin,
And I defy you there to point
Me out a steed the half so fine--
From tip of ear to pastern-joint--
As this old iron horse of mine.

You do not know what beauty is--
You do not know what gentleness
His answer is to my caress!--
Why, look upon this gait of his,--
A touch upon his iron rein--
He moves with such a stately grace
The sunlight on his burnished mane
Is barely shaken in its place;
And at a touch he changes pace,
And, gliding backward, stops again.

And talk of mettle--Ah! my friend,
Such passion smolders in his breast
That when awakened it will send
A thrill of rapture wilder than
E'er palpitated heart of man
When flaming at its mightiest.
And there's a fierceness in his ire--
A maddened majesty that leaps
Along his veins in blood of fire,
Until the path his vision sweeps
Spins out behind him like a thread
Unraveled from the reel of time,

As, wheeling on his course sublime,
The earth revolves beneath his tread.

Then stretch away, my gallant steed!
Thy mission is a noble one:
Thou bear'st the father to the son,
And sweet relief to bitter need;
Thou bear'st the stranger to his friends;
Thou bear'st the pilgrim to the shrine,
And back again the prayer he sends
That God will prosper me and mine,--
The star that on thy forehead gleams
Has blossomed in our brightest dreams.

Then speed thee on thy glorious race!
The mother waits thy ringing pace;
The father leans an anxious ear
The thunder of thy hooves to hear;
The lover listens, far away,
To catch thy keen exultant neigh;
And, where thy breathings roll and rise,
The husband strains his eager eyes,
And laugh of wife and baby-glee
Ring out to greet and welcome thee.
Then stretch away! and when at last
The master's hand shall gently check
Thy mighty speed, and hold thee fast,
The world will pat thee on the neck.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Jaybird

The Jaybird he's my _favorite_
Of all the birds they is!
I think he's quite a stylish sight
In that blue suit of his:
An' when he' lights an' shuts his wings,
His coat's a 'cutaway'--
I guess it's only when he sings
You'd know he wuz a jay.

I like to watch him when he's lit
In top of any tree,
'Cause all birds git wite out of it
When _he_ 'lights, an' they see
How proud he act', an' swell an' spread
His chest out more an' more,
An' raise the feathers on his head
Like it's cut pompadore!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Jolly Miller

It was a Jolly Miller lived on the River Dee;
He looked upon his piller, and there he found a flea:
'O Mr. Flea! you have bit' me,
And you shall shorely die!
So he scrunched his bones against the stones--
And there he let him lie!

Twas then the Jolly Miller he laughed and told his wife,
And she laughed fit to kill her, and dropped her carvin'-knife!--
'O Mr. Flea!' 'Ho-ho!' 'Tee-hee!'
They both laughed fit to kill,
Until the sound did almost drownd
The rumble of the mill!

'Laugh on, my Jolly Miller! and Missus Miller, too!--
But there's a weeping-willer will soon wave over you! '
The voice was all so awful small--
So very small and slim!--
He durst' infer that it was her,
Ner her infer 'twas him!

That night the Jolly Miller, says he, 'It's Wifey dear,
That cat o' yourn, I'd kill her!--her actions is so queer,--
She rubbin' 'ginst the grindstone-legs,
And yowlin' at the sky--
And I 'low the moon haint greener
Than the yaller of her eye!'

And as the Jolly Miller went chuckle-un to bed,
Was Somepin jerked his piller from underneath his head!
'O Wife,' says he, on-easi-lee,
'Fetch here that lantern there!'
But Somepin moans in thunder tones,
'You tetch it ef you dare!'

'Twas then the Jolly Miller he trimbled and he quailed--
And his wife choked until her breath come back, 'n' she wailed!
And 'O!' cried she, 'it is the Flea,
All white and pale and wann--

He's got you in his clutches, and
He's bigger than a man!'

'_Ho! ho! my Jolly Miller,' (fer 'twas the Flea, fer shore!)
'I reckon you'll not rack my bones ner scrunch 'em any more!_'
And then _the Ghost_ he grabbed him clos't,
With many a ghastly smile,
And from the doorstep stooped and hopped
About four hundred mile!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Katydids

Sometimes I keep
From going to sleep,
To hear the katydids 'cheep-cheep!'
And think they say
Their prayers that way;
But _katydids_ don't have to _pray_!

I listen when
They cheep again
And so, I think, they're _singing_ then!
But, no; I'm wrong,--
The sound's too long
And all-alike to be a song!

I think, 'Well, there!
I do declare,
If it is neither song nor prayer,
It's _talk_--and quite
Too vain and light
For me to listen to all night!'

And so, I smile,
And think,--'Now I'll
Not listen for a little while!'
Then, sweet and clear,
Next '_cheep_' I hear
'S a _kiss_.... Good morning, Mommy dear!

James Whitcomb Riley

The King

They rode right out of the morning sun--
A glimmering, glittering cavalcade
Of knights and ladies and every one
In princely sheen arrayed;
And the king of them all, O he rode ahead,
With a helmet of gold, and a plume of red
That spurted about in the breeze and bled
In the bloom of the everglade.

And they rode high over the dewy lawn,
With brave, glad banners of every hue
That rolled in ripples, as they rode on
In splendor, two and two;
And the tinkling links of the golden reins
Of the steeds they rode rang such refrains
As the castanets in a dream of Spain's
Intensest gold and blue.

And they rode and rode; and the steeds they neighed
And pranced, and the sun on their glossy hides
Flickered and lightened and glanced and played
Like the moon on rippling tides;

And their manes were silken, and thick and strong,
And their tails were flossy, and fetlock-long,
And jostled in time to the teeming throng,
And their knightly song besides.

Clank of scabbard and jingle of spur,
And the fluttering sash of the queen went wild
In the wind, and the proud king glanced at her
As one at a wilful child--,
And as knight and lady away they flew,
And the banners flapped, and the falcon too,
And the lances flashed and the bugle blew,
He kissed his hand and smiled.

And then, like a slanting sunlit shower,
The pageant glittered across the plain,

And the turf spun back, and the wildweed flower
Was only a crimson stain.
And a dreamer's eyes they are downward cast,
As he blends these words with the wailing blast:
'It is the King of the Year rides past!'
And Autumn is here again.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Legend Glorified

'I deem that God is not disquieted'--
This in a mighty poet's rhymes I read;
And blazoned so forever doth abide
Within my soul the legend glorified.

Though awful tempests thunder overhead,
I deem that God is not disquieted,--
The faith that trembles somewhat yet is sure
Through storm and darkness of a way secure.

Bleak winters, when the naked spirit hears
The break of hearts, through stinging sleet of tears,
I deem that God is not disquieted;
Against all stresses am I clothed and fed.

Nay, even with fixed eyes and broken breath,
My feet dip down into the tides of death,
Nor any friend be left, nor prayer be said,
I deem that God is not disquieted.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Little Coat

Here's his ragged 'roundabout';
Turn the pockets inside out:
See; his pen-knife, lost to use,
Rusted shut with apple-juice;
Here, with marbles, top and string,
Is his deadly 'devil-sling,'
With its rubber, limp at last
As the sparrows of the past!
Beeswax--buckles--leather straps--
Bullets, and a box of caps,--
Not a thing of all, I guess,
But betrays some waywardness--
E'en these tickets, blue and red,
For the Bible-verses said--
Such as this his mem'ry kept--
'Jesus wept.'

Here's a fishing hook-and-line,
Tangled up with wire and twine,
And dead angle-worms, and some
Slugs of lead and chewing-gum,
Blent with scents that can but come
From the oil of rhodium.
Here--a soiled, yet dainty note,
That some little sweetheart wrote,
Dotting,--'Vine grows round the stump,'
And--'My sweetest sugar lump!'
Wrapped in this--a padlock key
Where he's filed a touch-hole--see!
And some powder in a quill
Corked up with a liver pill;
And a spongy little chunk
Of 'punk.'

Here's the little coat--but O!
Where is he we've censured so!
Don't you hear us calling, dear?
Back! come back, and never fear.--
You may wander where you will,

Over orchard, field and hill;
You may kill the birds, or do
Anything that pleases you!
Ah, this empty coat of his!
Every tatter worth a kiss;
Every stain as pure instead
As the white stars overhead:
And the pockets--homes were they
Of the little hands that play
Now no more--but, absent, thus
Beckon us.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Little Fat Doctor

He seemed so strange to me, every way--
In manner, and form, and size,
From the boy I knew but yesterday,--
I could hardly believe my eyes!

To hear his name called over there,
My memory thrilled with glee
And leaped to picture him young and fair
In youth, as he used to be.

But looking, only as glad eyes can,
For the boy I knew of yore,
I smiled on a portly little man
I had never seen before!--

Grave as a judge in courtliness--
Professor-like and bland--
A little fat doctor and nothing less,
With his hat in his kimboed hand.

But how we talked old times, and 'chaffed'
Each other with 'Minnie' and 'Jim'---
And how the little fat doctor laughed,
And how I laughed with him!

'And it's pleasant,' I thought, 'though I yearn to see
The face of the youth that was,
To know no boy could smile on me
As the little fat doctor does!'

James Whitcomb Riley

The Little Lady

O The Little Lady's dainty
As the picture in a book,
And her hands are creamy-whiter
Than the water-lilies look;
Her laugh's the undrown'd music
Of the maddest meadow-brook.--
Yet all in vain I praise The Little Lady!

Her eyes are blue and dewy
As the glimmering Summer-dawn,--
Her face is like the eglantine
Before the dew is gone;
And were that honied mouth of hers
A bee's to feast upon,
He'd be a bee bewildered, Little Lady!

Her brow makes light look sallow;
And the sunshine, I declare,
Is but a yellow jealousy
Awakened by her hair--
For O the dazzling glint of it
Nor sight nor soul can bear,--
So Love goes groping for The Little Lady.

And yet she's neither Nymph nor Fay,
Nor yet of Angelkind:--
She's but a racing school-girl, with
Her hair blown out behind
And tremblingly unbraided by
The fingers of the Wind,
As it wildly swoops upon The Little Lady.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Little Town O' Tailholt

You kin boast about yer cities, and their stiddy growth and size,
And brag about yer County-seats, and business enterprise,
And railroads, and factories, and all sich foolery--
But the little Town o' Tailholt is big enough fer me!

You kin harp about yer churches, with their steeples in the clouds,
And gas about yer graded streets, and blow about yer crowds;
You kin talk about yer 'theaters,' and all you've got to see--
But the little Town o' Tailholt is show enough fer me!

They hain't no style in our town-- hit's little-like and small--
They hain't no 'churches,' nuther--, jes' the meetin' house is all;
They's no sidewalks, to speak of-- but the highway's allus free,
And the little Town o' Tailholt is wide enough fer me!

Some find it discommodin'-like, I'm willin' to admit,
To hev but one post-office, and a womern keepin' hit,
And the drug-store, and shoe-shop, and grocery, all three--
But the little Town o' Tailholt is handy 'nough fer me!

You kin smile and turn yer nose up, and joke and hev yer fun,
And laugh and holler 'Tail-holts is better holts'n none!
Ef the city suits you better w'y, hit's where you'd ort'o be--
But the little Town o' Tailholt's good enough fer me!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Loehrs And The Hammonds

'Hey, Bud! O Bud!' rang out a gleeful call,--
'_The Loehrs is come to your house!_' And a small
But very much elated little chap,
In snowy linen-suit and tasseled cap,
Leaped from the back-fence just across the street
From Bixlers', and came galloping to meet
His equally delighted little pair
Of playmates, hurrying out to join him there--
'_The Loehrs is come!--The Loehrs is come!_' his glee
Augmented to a pitch of ecstasy
Communicated wildly, till the cry
'_The Loehrs is come!_' in chorus quavered high
And thrilling as some paeon of challenge or
Soul-stirring chant of armed conqueror.
And who this _avant courier_ of 'the Loehrs'?--
This happiest of all boys out-o'-doors--
Who but Will Pierson, with his heart's excess
Of summer-warmth and light and breeziness!
'From our front winder I 'uz first to see
'Em all a-drivin' into town!' bragged he--
'An' seen 'em turnin' up the alley where
Your folks lives at. An' John an' Jake wuz there
Both in the wagon;--yes, an' Willy, too;
An' Mary--Yes, an' Edith--with bran-new
An' purtiest-trimmed hats 'at ever wuz!--
An' Susan, an' Janey.--An' the _Hammonds-uz_
In their fine buggy 'at they're ridin' roun'
So much, all over an' aroun' the town
An' _ever_ 'wheres,--them _city_-people who's
A-visutin' at Loehrs-uz!

Glorious news!--
Even more glorious when verified
In the boys' welcoming eyes of love and pride,
As one by one they greeted their old friends
And neighbors.--Nor until their earth-life ends
Will that bright memory become less bright
Or dimmed indeed.

... Again, at candle-light,
The faces all are gathered. And how glad
The Mother's features, knowing that she had
Her dear, sweet Mary Loehr back again.--
She always was so proud of her; and then
The dear girl, in return, was happy, too,
And with a heart as loving, kind and true
As that maturer one which seemed to blend
As one the love of mother and of friend.
From time to time, as hand-in-hand they sat,
The fair girl whispered something low, whereat
A tender, wistful look would gather in
The mother-eyes; and then there would begin
A sudden cheerier talk, directed to
The stranger guests--the man and woman who,
It was explained, were coming now to make
Their temporary home in town for sake
Of the wife's somewhat failing health. Yes, they
Were city-people, seeking rest this way,
The man said, answering a query made
By some well meaning neighbor--with a shade
Of apprehension in the answer.... No,--
They had no _children_. As he answered so,
The man's arm went about his wife, and she
Leant toward him, with her eyes lit prayerfully:
Then she arose--he following--and bent
Above the little sleeping innocent
Within the cradle at the mother's side--
He patting her, all silent, as she cried.--
Though, haply, in the silence that ensued,
His musings made melodious interlude.

In the warm, health-giving weather
My poor pale wife and I
Drive up and down the little town
And the pleasant roads thereby:
Out in the wholesome country
We wind, from the main highway,
In through the wood's green solitudes--
Fair as the Lord's own Day.

We have lived so long together.

And joyed and mourned as one,
That each with each, with a look for speech,
Or a touch, may talk as none
But Love's elect may comprehend--
Why, the touch of her hand on mine
Speaks volume-wise, and the smile of her eyes,
To me, is a song divine.

There are many places that lure us:--
'The Old Wood Bridge' just west
Of town we know--and the creek below,
And the banks the boys love best:
And 'Beech Grove,' too, on the hill-top;
And 'The Haunted House' beyond,
With its roof half off, and its old pump-trough
Adrift in the roadside pond.

We find our way to 'The Marshes'--
At least where they used to be;
And 'The Old Camp Grounds'; and 'The Indian Mounds,'
And the trunk of 'The Council Tree':
We have crunched and splashed through 'Flint-bed Ford';
And at 'Old Big Bee-gum Spring'
We have stayed the cup, half lifted up.
Hearing the redbird sing.

And then, there is 'Wesley Chapel,'
With its little graveyard, lone
At the crossroads there, though the sun sets fair
On wild-rose, mound and stone ...
A wee bed under the willows--
My wife's hand on my own--
And our horse stops, too ... And we hear the coo
Of a dove in undertone.

The dusk, the dew, and the silence.
'Old Charley' turns his head
Homeward then by the pike again,
Though never a word is said--
One more stop, and a lingering one--
After the fields and farms,--
At the old Toll Gate, with the woman await

With a little girl in her arms.

The silence sank--Floretty came to call
The children in the kitchen, where they all
Went helter-skeltering with shout and din
Enough to drown most sanguine silence in,--
For well indeed they knew that summons meant
Taffy and popcorn--so with cheers they went.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Lost Kiss

I put by the half-written poem,
While the pen, idly trailed in my hand,
Writes on--, 'Had I words to complete it,
Who'd read it, or who'd understand?'
But the little bare feet on the stairway,
And the faint, smothered laugh in the hall,
And the eerie-low lisp on the silence,
Cry up to me over it all.

So I gather it up-- where was broken
The tear-faded thread of my theme,
Telling how, as one night I sat writing,
A fairy broke in on my dream,
A little inquisitive fairy--
My own little girl, with the gold
Of the sun in her hair, and the dewy
Blue eyes of the fairies of old.

'Twas the dear little girl that I scolded--
'For was it a moment like this,'
I said, 'when she knew I was busy,
To come romping in for a kiss--?
Come rowdying up from her mother,
And clamoring there at my knee
For 'One 'ittle kiss for my dolly,
And one 'ittle uzzer for me!'

God pity, the heart that repelled her,
And the cold hand that turned her away,
And take, from the lips that denied her,
This answerless prayer of to-day!
Take Lord, from my mem'ry forever
That pitiful sob of despair,
And the patter and trip of the little bare feet,
And the one piercing cry on the stair!

I put by the half-written poem,
While the pen, idly trailed in my hand
Writes on--, 'Had I words to complete it

Who'd read it, or who'd understand?
But the little bare feet on the stairway,
And the faint, smothered laugh in the hall,
And the eerie-low lisp on the silence,
Cry up to me over it all.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Lost Path

Alone they walked--their fingers knit together,
And swaying listlessly as might a swing
Wherein Dan Cupid dangled in the weather
Of some sun-flooded afternoon of Spring.

Within the clover-fields the tickled cricket
Laughed lightly as they loitered down the lane,
And from the covert of the hazel-thicket
The squirrel peeped and laughed at them again.

The bumble-bee that tipped the lily-vases
Along the road-side in the shadows dim,
Went following the blossoms of their faces
As though their sweets must needs be shared with him.

Between the pasture bars the wondering cattle
Stared wistfully, and from their mellow bells
Shook out a welcoming whose dreamy rattle
Fell swooningly away in faint farewells.

And though at last the gloom of night fell o'er them,
And folded all the landscape from their eyes,
They only know the dusky path before them
Was leading safely on to Paradise.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Lost Thrill

I grow so weary, someway, of all things
That love and loving have vouchsafed to me,
Since now all dreamed-of sweets of ecstasy
Am I possessed of: The caress that clings—
The lips that mix with mine with murmurings
No language may interpret, and the free,
Unfettered brood of kisses, hungrily
Feasting in swarms on honeyed blossomings
Of passion's fullest flower—For yet I miss
The essence that alone makes love divine—
The subtle flavoring no tang of this
Weak wine of melody may here define:—
A something found and lost in the first kiss
A lover ever poured through lips of mine.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Lugubrious Whing-Whang

The rhyme o' The Raggedy Man's 'at's best
Is Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs,--
'Cause that-un's the strangest of all o' the rest,
An' the worst to learn, an' the last one guessed,
An' the funniest one, an' the foolishhest.--
Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs!

I don't know what in the world it means--
Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs!--
An' nen when I _tell_ him I don't, he leans
Like he was a-grindin' on some machines
An' says: Ef I _don't_, w'y, I don't know _beans!_
Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs!--

Out on the margin of Moonshine Land,
Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs!
Out where the Whing-Whang loves to stand,
Writing his name with his tail in the sand,
And swiping it out with his oogerish hand;
Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs!

Is it the gibber of Gungs or Keeks?
Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs!
Or what _is_ the sound that the Whing-Whang seeks?--
Crouching low by the winding creeks
And holding his breath for weeks and weeks!
Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs!

Aroint him the wraithest of wraithly things!
Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs!
'Tis a fair Whing-Whangess, with phosphor rings
And bridal-jewels of fangs and stings;
And she sits and as sadly and softly sings
As the mildewed whir of her own dead wings,--
Tickle me, Dear,
Tickle me here,
Tickle me, Love, in these Lonesome Ribs!

The Merman

I

Who would be
A merman gay,
Singing alone,
Sitting alone,
With a mermaid's knee,
For instance--hey--
For a throne?

II

I would be a merman gay;
I would sit and sing the whole day long;
I would fill my lungs with the strongest brine,
And squirt it up in a spray of song,
And soak my head in my liquid voice;
I'd curl my tail in curves divine,
And let each curve in a kink rejoice.
I'd tackle the mermaids under the sea,
And yank 'em around till they yanked me,
Sportively, sportively;
And then we would wiggle away, away,
To the pea-green groves on the coast of day,
Chasing each other sportively.

III

There would be neither moon nor star;
But the waves would twang like a wet guitar
Low thunder and thrum in the darkness grum--
Neither moon nor star;
We would shriek aloud in the dismal dales--
Shriek at each other and squawk and squeal,
"All night!" rakishly, rakishly;
They would pelt me with oysters and wiggletails,
Laughing and clapping their hands at me,
"All night!" prankishly, prankishly;
But I would toss them back in mine,

Lobsters and turtles of quaint design;
Then leaping out in an abrupt way,
I'd snatch them bald in my devilish glee,
And skip away when they snatched at me,
Fiendishly, fiendishly.
O, what a jolly life I'd lead,
Ah, what a "bang-up" life indeed!
Soft are the mermaids under the sea--
We would live merrily, merrily.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Mulberry Tree

It's many's the scenes which is dear to my mind
As I think of my childhood so long left behind;
The home of my birth, with it's old puncheon-floor,
And the bright morning-glories that grewed round the door;
The warped clab-board roof whare the rain it run off
Into streams of sweet dreams as I laid in the loft,
Countin' all of the joys that was dearest to me,
And a-thinkin' the most of the mulberry tree.

And to-day as I dream, with both eyes wide-awake,
I can see the old tree, and its limbs as they shake,
And the long purple berries that rained on the ground
Whare the pastur' was bald whare we trommpt it around.
And again, peekin' up through the thick leafy shade,
I can see the glad smiles of the friends when I strayed
With my little bare feet from my own mother's knee
To foller them off to the mulberry tree.

Leanin' up in the forks, I can see the old rail,
And the boy climbin' up it, claw, tooth, and toe-nail,
And in fancy can hear, as he spits on his hands,
The ring of his laugh and the rip of his pants.
But that rail led to glory, as certin and shore
As I'll never climb thare by that rout' any more--
What was all the green lauruls of Fame unto me,
With my brows in the boughs of the mulberry tree!

Then it's who can fergit the old mulberry tree
That he knowed in the days when his thoughts was as free
As the flutterin' wings of the birds that flew out
Of the tall wavin' tops as the boys come about?
O, a crowd of my memories, laughin' and gay,
Is a-climbin' the fence of that pastur' to-day,
And, a-pantin' with joy, as us boys ust to be,
They go racin' acrost fer the mulberry tree.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Nine Little Goblins

They all climbed up on a high board-fence--
Nine little Goblins, with green-glass eyes--
Nine little Goblins that had no sense,
And couldn't tell coppers from cold mince pies;
And they all climbed up on the fence, and sat--
And I asked them what they were staring at.

And the first one said, as he scratched his head
With a queer little arm that reached out of his ear
And rasped its claws in his hair so red--
'This is what this little arm is fer!'
And he scratched and stared, and the next one said,
'How on earth do _you_ scratch your head?'

And he laughed like the screech of a rusty hinge--
Laughed and laughed till his face grew black;
And when he choked, with a final twinge
Of his stifling laughter, he thumped his back
With a fist that grew on the end of his tail
Till the breath came back to his lips so pale.

And the third little Goblin leered round at me--
And there were no lids on his eyes at all--
And he clucked one eye, and he says, says he,
'What is the style of your socks this fall?'
And he clapped his heels--and I sighed to see
That he had hands where his feet should be.

Then a bald-faced Goblin, gray and grim,
Bowed his head, and I saw him slip
His eyebrows off, as I looked at him,
And paste them over his upper lip;
And then he moaned in remorseful pain--
'Would--Ah, would I'd me brows again!'

And then the whole of the Goblin band
Rocked on the fence-top to and fro,
And clung, in a long row, hand in hand,
Singing the songs that they used to know--

Singing the songs that their grandsires sung
In the goo-goo days of the Goblin-tongue.

And ever they kept their green-glass eyes
Fixed on me with a stony stare--
Till my own grew glazed with a dread surmise,
And my hat whooped up on my lifted hair,
And I felt the heart in my breast snap to
As you've heard the lid of a snuff-box do.

And they sang 'You're asleep! There is no board-fence,
And never a Goblin with green-glass eyes!--
'Tis only a vision the mind invents
After a supper of cold mince-pies,--
And you're doomed to dream this way,' they said,--
'_And you sha'n't wake up till you're clean plum dead!_'

James Whitcomb Riley

The Old Days

The old days--the far days--
The overdear and fair!--
The old days--the lost days--
How lovely they were!
The old days of Morning,
With the dew-drench on the flowers
And apple-buds and blossoms
Of those old days of ours.

Then was the real gold
Spendthrift Summer flung;
Then was the real song
Bird or Poet sung!
There was never censure then,--
Only honest praise--
And all things were worthy of it
In the old days.

There bide the true friends--
The first and the best;
There clings the green grass
Close where they rest:
Would they were here? No;--
Would we were there!...
The old days--the lost days--
How lovely they were!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Old Guitar

Neglected now is the old guitar
And moldering into decay;
Fretted with many a rift and scar
That the dull dust hides away,
While the spider spins a silver star
In its silent lips to-day.

The keys hold only nerveless strings--
The sinews of brave old airs
Are pulseless now; and the scarf that clings
So closely here declares
A sad regret in its ravelings
And the faded hue it wears.

But the old guitar, with a lenient grace,
Has cherished a smile for me;
And its features hint of a fairer face
That comes with a memory
Of a flower-and-perfume-haunted place
And a moonlit balcony.

Music sweeter than words confess,
Or the minstrel's powers invent,
Thrilled here once at the light caress
Of the fairy hands that lent
This excuse for the kiss I press
On the dear old instrument.

The rose of pearl with the jeweled stem
Still blooms; and the tiny sets
In the circle all are here; the gem
In the keys, and the silver frets;
But the dainty fingers that danced o'er them--
Alas for the heart's regrets!--

Alas for the loosened strings to-day,
And the wounds of rift and scar
On a worn old heart, with its roundelay
Enthralled with a stronger bar

That Fate weaves on, through a dull decay
Like that of the old guitar!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Old Hay-Mow

The Old Hay-mow's the place to play
Fer boys, when it's a rainy day!
I good-'eal ruther be up there
Than down in town, er anywhere!

When I play in our stable-loft,
The good old hay's so dry an' soft,
An' feels so fine, an' smells so sweet,
I 'most ferget to go an' eat.

An' one time wunst I _did_ ferget
To go 'tel dinner was all et,--
An' they had short-cake--an'--Bud he
Hogged up the piece Ma saved fer me!

Nen I won't let him play no more
In our hay-mow where I keep store
An' got hen-eggs to sell,--an' shoo
The cackle-un old hen out, too!

An' nen, when Aunty she was here
A-visitun from Rensselaer,
An' bringed my little cousin,--_he_
Can come up there an' play with me.

But, after while--when Bud he bets
'At I can't turn no summersetts,--
I let him come up, ef he can
Ac' ha'f-way like a gentleman!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Old Home By The Mill

This is 'The old Home by the Mill'--far we still call it so,
Although the old mill, roof and sill, is all gone long ago.
The old home, though, and old folks, and the old spring, and a few
Old cat-tails, weeds and hartychokes, is left to welcome you!

Here, Marg'et, fetch the man a tin to drink out of' Our spring
Keeps kindo-sorto cavin' in, but don't 'taste' anything!
She's kindo agein', Marg'et is--'the old process,' like me,
All ham-stringed up with rheumatiz, and on in seventy-three.

Jes' me and Marg'et lives alone here--like in long ago;
The childern all put off and gone, and married, don't you know?
One's millin' way out West somewhere; two other miller-boys
In Minnyopolis they air; and one's in Illinoise.

The oldest gyrl--the first that went--married and died right here;
The next lives in Winn's Settlement--for purt' nigh thirty year!
And youngest one--was allus far the old home here--but no!--
Her man turns in and he packs her 'way off to Idyho!

I don't miss them like _Marg'et_ does--'cause I got _her_, you see;
And when she pines for them--that's 'cause _she's_ only jes' got
me!

I laugh, and joke her 'bout it all.--But talkin' sense, I'll say,
When she was tuk so bad last Fall, I laughed the t'other way!

I haint so favorble impressed 'bout dyin'; but ef I
Found I was only second-best when _us two_ come to die,
I'd 'dopt the 'new process' in full, ef _Marg'et_ died, you see,--
I'd jes' crawl in my grave and pull the green grass over me!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Old Retired Sea Captain

The old sea captain has sailed the seas
So long, that the waves at mirth,
Or the waves gone wild, and the crests of these,
Were as near playmates from birth:
He has loved both the storm and the calm, because
They seemed as his brothers twain,--
The flapping sail was his soul's applause,
And his rapture, the roaring main.

But now--like a battered hulk seems he,
Cast high on a foreign strand,
Though he feels 'in port,' as it need must be,
And the stay of a daughter's hand--
Yet ever the round of the listless hours,--
His pipe, in the languid air--
The grass, the trees, and the garden flowers,
And the strange earth everywhere!

And so betimes he is restless here
In this little inland town,
With never a wing in the atmosphere
But the wind-mill's, up and down;
His daughter's home in this peaceful vale,
And his grandchild 'twixt his knees--
But never the hail of a passing sail,
Nor the surge of the angry seas!

He quits his pipe, and he snaps its neck--
Would speak, though he coughs instead,
Then paces the porch like a quarter-deck
With a reeling mast o'erhead!
Ho! the old sea captain's cheeks glow warm,
And his eyes gleam grim and weird,
As he mutters about, like a thunder-storm,
In the cloud of his beetling beard.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Old Swimmin' Hole

Oh! the old swimmin'-hole! whare the crick so still and deep
Looked like a baby-river that was laying half asleep,
And the gurgle of the worter round the drift jest below
Sounded like the laugh of something we onc't ust to know
Before we could remember anything but the eyes
Of the angels lookin' out as we left Paradise;
But the merry days of youth is beyond our controle,
And it's hard to part ferever with the old swimmin'-hole.

Oh! the old swimmin'-hole! In the happy days of yore,
When I ust to lean above it on the old sickamore,
Oh! it showed me a face in its warm sunny tide
That gazed back at me so gay and glorified,
It made me love myself, as I leaped to caress
My shadder smilin' up at me with sich tenderness.
But them days is past and gone, and old Time's tuck his toll
From the old man come back to the old swimmin'-hole.

Oh! the old swimmin'-hole! In the long, lazy days
When the humdrum of school made so many run-a-ways,
How plesant was the jurney down the old dusty lane,
Whare the tracks of our bare feet was all printed so plane
You could tell by the dent of the heel and the sole
They was lots o' fun on hands at the old swimmin'-hole.
But the lost joys is past! Let your tears in sorrow roll
Like the rain that ust to dapple up the old swimmin'-hole.

Thare the bullrushes growed, and the cattails so tall,
And the sunshine and shadder fell over it all;
And it mottled the worter with amber and gold
Tel the glad lilies rocked in the ripples that rolled;
And the snake-feeder's four gauzy wings fluttered by
Like the ghost of a daisy dropped out of the sky,
Or a wownded apple-blossom in the breeze's controle
As it cut acrost some orchard to'rds the old swimmin'-hole.

Oh! the old swimmin'-hole! When I last saw the place,
The scenes was all changed, like the change in my face;
The bridge of the railroad now crosses the spot

Whare the old divin'-log lays sunk and fergot.
And I stray down the banks whare the trees ust to be -
But never again will theyr shade shelter me!
And I wish in my sorrow I could strip to the soul,
And dive off in my grave like the old swimmin'-hole.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Old Times Were The Best

Friends, my heart is half awearry
Of its happiness to-night:
Though your songs are gay and cheery,
And your spirits feather-light,
There's a ghostly music haunting
Still the heart of every guest
And a voiceless chorus chanting
That the Old Times were the best.

CHORUS

All about is bright and pleasant
With the sound of song and jest,
Yet a feeling's ever present
That the Old Times were the best.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Old Tramp

A Old Tramp slep' in our stable wunst,
An' The Raggedy Man he caught
An' roust him up, an' chased him off
Clean out through our back lot!

An' th' Old Tramp hollered back an' said,--
'You're a _purty_ man!--_You_ air!--
With a pair o' eyes like two fried eggs,
An' a nose like a Bartlutt pear!'

James Whitcomb Riley

The Old Trundle-Bed

O the old trundle-bed where I slept when a boy!
What canopied king might not covet the joy?
The glory and peace of that slumber of mine,
Like a long, gracious rest in the bosom divine:
The quaint, homely couch, hidden close from the light,
But daintily drawn from its hiding at night.
O a nest of delight, from the foot to the head,
Was the queer little, clear little, old trundle-bed!

O the old trundle-bed, where I wondering saw
The stars through the window, and listened with awe
To the sigh of the winds as they tremblingly crept
Through the trees where the robin so restlessly slept:
Where I heard the low, murmurous chirp of the wren,
And the katydid listlessly chirrup again,
Till my fancies grew faint and were drowsily led
Through the maze of the dreams of the old trundle bed.

O the old trundle-bed! O the old trundle-bed!
With its plump little pillow, and old-fashioned spread;
Its snowy-white sheets, and the blankets above,
Smoothed down and tucked round with the touches of love;
The voice of my mother to lull me to sleep
With the old fairy-stories my memories keep
Still fresh as the lilies that bloom o'er the head
Once bowed o'er my own in the old trundle-bed.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Old Year And The New

I.

As one in sorrow looks upon
The dead face of a loyal friend,
By the dim light of New Year's dawn
I saw the Old Year end.

Upon the pallid features lay
The dear old smile--so warm and bright
Ere thus its cheer had died away
In ashes of delight.

The hands that I had learned to love
With strength of passion half divine,
Were folded now, all heedless of
The emptiness of mine.

The eyes that once had shed their bright
Sweet looks like sunshine, now were dull,
And ever lidded from the light
That made them beautiful.

II.

The chimes of bells were in the air,
And sounds of mirth in hall and street,
With pealing laughter everywhere
And throb of dancing feet:

The mirth and the convivial din
Of revelers in wanton glee,
With tunes of harp and violin
In tangled harmony.

But with a sense of nameless dread,
I turned me, from the merry face
Of this newcomer, to my dead;
And, kneeling there a space,

I sobbed aloud, all tearfully:--
By this dear face so fixed and cold,
O Lord, let not this New Year be
As happy as the old!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Old-Home Folks

Such was the Child-World of the long-ago--
The little world these children used to know:--
Johnty, the oldest, and the best, perhaps,
Of the five happy little Hoosier chaps
Inhabiting this wee world all their own.--
Johnty, the leader, with his native tone
Of grave command--a general on parade
Whose each punctilious order was obeyed
By his proud followers.

But Johnty yet--
After all serious duties--could forget
The gravity of life to the extent,
At times, of kindling much astonishment
About him: With a quick, observant eye,
And mind and memory, he could supply
The tamest incident with liveliest mirth;
And at the most unlooked-for times on earth
Was wont to break into some travesty
On those around him--feats of mimicry
Of this one's trick of gesture--that one's walk--
Or this one's laugh--or that one's funny talk,--
The way 'the watermelon-man' would try
His humor on town-folks that wouldn't buy;--
How he drove into town at morning--then
At dusk (alas!) how he drove out again.

Though these divertissements of Johnty's were
Hailed with a hearty glee and relish, there
Appeared a sense, on his part, of regret--
A spirit of remorse that would not let
Him rest for days thereafter.--Such times he,
As some boy said, 'jist got too overly
Blame good fer common boys like us, you know,
To '_so_ciate with--less'n we 'ud go
And jine his church!'

Next after Johnty came
His little tow-head brother, Bud by name.--

And O how white his hair was--and how thick
His face with freckles,--and his ears, how quick
And curious and intrusive!--And how pale
The blue of his big eyes;--and how a tale
Of Giants, Trolls or Fairies, bulged them still
Bigger and bigger!--and when 'Jack' would kill
The old 'Four-headed Giant,' Bud's big eyes
Were swollen truly into giant-size.
And Bud was apt in make-believes--would hear
His Grandma talk or read, with such an ear
And memory of both subject and big words,
That he would take the book up afterwards
And feign to 'read aloud,' with such success
As caused his truthful elders real distress.
But he must have big words--they seemed to give
Extremes range to the superlative--
That was his passion. 'My Gran'ma,' he said,
One evening, after listening as she read
Some heavy old historical review--
With copious explanations thereunto
Drawn out by his inquiring turn of mind,--
'My Gran'ma she's read all books--ever' kind
They is, 'at tells all 'bout the land an' sea
An' Nations of the Earth!--An' she is the
Historicul-est woman ever wuz!'
(Forgive the verse's chuckling as it does
In its erratic current.--Oftentimes
The little willowy waterbrook of rhymes
Must falter in its music, listening to
The children laughing as they used to do.)

Who shall sing a simple ditty all about the Willow,
Dainty-fine and delicate as any bending spray
That dandles high the happy bird that flutters there to trill a
Tremulously tender song of greeting to the May.

Ah, my lovely Willow!--Let the Waters lilt your graces,--
They alone with limpid kisses lave your leaves above,
Flashing back your sylvan beauty, and in shady places
Peering up with glimmering pebbles, like the eyes of love.

Next, Maymie, with her hazy cloud of hair,

And the blue skies of eyes beneath it there.
Her dignified and 'little lady' airs
Of never either romping up the stairs
Or falling down them; thoughtful everyway
Of others first--The kind of child at play
That 'gave up,' for the rest, the ripest pear
Or peach or apple in the garden there
Beneath the trees where swooped the airy swing--
She pushing it, too glad for anything!
Or, in the character of hostess, she
Would entertain her friends delightfully
In her play-house,--with strips of carpet laid
Along the garden-fence within the shade
Of the old apple-trees--where from next yard
Came the two dearest friends in her regard,
The little Crawford girls, Ella and Lu--
As shy and lovely as the lilies grew
In their idyllic home,--yet sometimes they
Admitted Bud and Alex to their play,
Who did their heavier work and helped them fix
To have a 'Festibul'--and brought the bricks
And built the 'stove,' with a real fire and all,
And stovepipe-joint for chimney, looming tall
And wonderfully smoky--even to
Their childish aspirations, as it blew
And swooped and swirled about them till their sight
Was feverish even as their high delight.
Then Alex, with his freckles, and his freaks
Of temper, and the peach-bloom of his cheeks,
And '_amber-colored_ hair'--his mother said
'Twas that, when others laughed and called it '_red_'
And Alex threw things at them--till they'd call
A truce, agreeing "'t'uz n't red _ut-tall_!"

But Alex was affectionate beyond
The average child, and was extremely fond
Of the paternal relatives of his
Of whom he once made estimate like this:--
'_I'm_ only got _two_ brothers,--but my _Pa_
He's got most brothers'n you ever saw!--
He's got _seben_ brothers!--Yes, an' they're all my
Seben Uncles!--Uncle John, an' Jim,--an' I'

Got Uncle George, an' Uncle Andy, too,
An' Uncle Frank, an' Uncle Joe.--An' you
Know Uncle _Mart_.--An', all but _him_, they're great
Big mens!--An' nen s Aunt Sarah--she makes eight!--
I'm got _eight_ uncles!--'cept Aunt Sarah _can't_
Be ist my _uncle_ 'cause she's ist my _aunt_!

Then, next to Alex--and the last indeed
Of these five little ones of whom you read--
Was baby Lizzie, with her velvet lisp,--
As though her Elfin lips had caught some wisp
Of floss between them as they strove with speech,
Which ever seemed just in yet out of reach--
Though what her lips missed, her dark eyes could say
With looks that made her meaning clear as day.

And, knowing now the children, you must know
The father and the mother they loved so:--
The father was a swarthy man, black-eyed,
Black-haired, and high of forehead; and, beside
The slender little mother, seemed in truth
A very king of men--since, from his youth,
To his hale manhood _now_--(worthy as then,--
A lawyer and a leading citizen
Of the proud little town and county-seat--
His hopes his neighbors', and their fealty sweet)--
He had known outdoor labor--rain and shine--
Bleak Winter, and bland Summer--foul and fine.
So Nature had ennobled him and set
Her symbol on him like a coronet:
His lifted brow, and frank, reliant face.--
Superior of stature as of grace,
Even the children by the spell were wrought
Up to heroics of their simple thought,
And saw him, trim of build, and lithe and straight
And tall, almost, as at the pasture-gate
The towering ironweed the scythe had spared
For their sakes, when The Hired Man declared
It would grow on till it became a _tree_,
With cocoanuts and monkeys in--maybe!

Yet, though the children, in their pride and awe

And admiration of the father, saw
A being so exalted--even more
Like adoration was the love they bore
The gentle mother.--Her mild, plaintive face
Was purely fair, and haloed with a grace
And sweetness luminous when joy made glad
Her features with a smile; or saintly sad
As twilight, fell the sympathetic gloom
Of any childish grief, or as a room
Were darkened suddenly, the curtain drawn
Across the window and the sunshine gone.
Her brow, below her fair hair's glimmering strands,
Seemed meetest resting-place for blessing hands
Or holiest touches of soft finger-tips
And little roseleaf-cheeks and dewy lips.

Though heavy household tasks were pitiless,
No little waist or coat or checkered dress
But knew her needle's deftness; and no skill
Matched hers in shaping pleat or flounce or frill;
Or fashioning, in complicate design,
All rich embroideries of leaf and vine,
With tiniest twining tendril,--bud and bloom
And fruit, so like, one's fancy caught perfume
And dainty touch and taste of them, to see
Their semblance wrought in such rare verity.

Shrined in her sanctity of home and love,
And love's fond service and reward thereof,
Restore her thus, O blessed Memory!--
Throned in her rocking-chair, and on her knee
Her sewing--her workbasket on the floor
Beside her,--Springtime through the open door
Balmily stealing in and all about
The room; the bees' dim hum, and the far shout
And laughter of the children at their play,
And neighbor-children from across the way
Calling in gleeful challenge--save alone
One boy whose voice sends back no answering tone--
The boy, prone on the floor, above a book
Of pictures, with a rapt, ecstatic look--
Even as the mother's, by the selfsame spell,

Is lifted, with a light ineffable--
As though her senses caught no mortal cry,
But heard, instead, some poem going by.

The Child-heart is so strange a little thing--
So mild--so timorously shy and small.--
When _grown-up_ hearts throb, it goes scampering
Behind the wall, nor dares peer out at all!--
It is the veriest mouse
That hides in any house--
So wild a little thing is any Child-heart!

_Child-heart!--mild heart!--
Ho, my little wild heart!--
Come up here to me out o' the dark,
Or let me come to you!_

So lorn at times the Child-heart needs must be.
With never one maturer heart for friend
And comrade, whose tear-ripened sympathy
And love might lend it comfort to the end,--
Whose yearnings, aches and stings.
Over poor little things
Were pitiful as ever any Child-heart.

_Child-heart!--mild heart!--
Ho, my little wild heart!--
Come up here to me out o' the dark,
Or let me come to you!_

Times, too, the little Child-heart must be glad--
Being so young, nor knowing, as _we_ know.
The fact from fantasy, the good from bad,
The joy from woe, the--_all_ that hurts us so!
What wonder then that thus
It hides away from us?--
So weak a little thing is any Child-heart!

_Child-heart!--mild heart!--
Ho, my little wild heart!--
Come up here to me out o' the dark,
Or let me come to you!_

Nay, little Child-heart, you have never need
To fear _us_,--we are weaker far than you--
Tis _we_ who should be fearful--we indeed
Should hide us, too, as darkly as you do,--
Safe, as yourself, withdrawn,
Hearing the World roar on
Too willful, woful, awful for the Child-heart!

_Child-heart!--mild heart!--
Ho, my little wild heart!--
Come up here to me out o' the dark,
Or let me come to you!_

The clock chats on confidingly; a rose
Taps at the window, as the sunlight throws
A brilliant, jostling checkerwork of shine
And shadow, like a Persian-loom design,
Across the homemade carpet--fades,--and then
The dear old colors are themselves again.
Sounds drop in visiting from everywhere--
The bluebird's and the robin's trill are there,
Their sweet liquidity diluted some
By dewy orchard spaces they have come:
Sounds of the town, too, and the great highway--
The Mover-wagons' rumble, and the neigh
Of overtraveled horses, and the bleat
Of sheep and low of cattle through the street--
A Nation's thoroughfare of hopes and fears,
First blazed by the heroic pioneers
Who gave up old-home idols and set face
Toward the unbroken West, to found a race
And tame a wilderness now mightier than
All peoples and all tracts American.
Blent with all outer sounds, the sounds within:--
In mild remoteness falls the household din
Of porch and kitchen: the dull jar and thump
Of churning; and the 'glung-glung' of the pump,
With sudden pad and skurry of bare feet
Of little outlaws, in from field or street:
The clang of kettle,--rasp of damper-ring
And bang of cookstove-door--and everything

That jingles in a busy kitchen lifts
Its individual wrangling voice and drifts
In sweetest tinny, coppery, pewtery tone
Of music hungry ear has ever known
In wildest famished yearning and conceit
Of youth, to just cut loose and eat and eat!--
The zest of hunger still incited on
To childish desperation by long-drawn
Breaths of hot, steaming, wholesome things that stew
And blubber, and up-tilt the pot-lids, too,
Filling the sense with zestful rumors of
The dear old-fashioned dinners children love:
Redolent savorings of home-cured meats,
Potatoes, beans, and cabbage; turnips, beets
And parsnips--rarest composite entire
That ever pushed a mortal child's desire
To madness by new-grated fresh, keen, sharp
Horseradish--tang that sets the lips awarp
And watery, anticipating all
The cloyed sweets of the glorious festival.--
Still add the cinnamony, spicy scents
Of clove, nutmeg, and myriad condiments
In like-alluring whiffs that prophesy
Of sweltering pudding, cake, and custard pie--
The swooning-sweet aroma haunting all
The house--upstairs and down--porch, parlor, hall
And sitting-room--invading even where
The Hired Man sniffs it in the orchard-air,
And pauses in his pruning of the trees
To note the sun minutely and to--sneeze.

Then Cousin Rufus comes--the children hear
His hale voice in the old hall, ringing clear
As any bell. Always he came with song
Upon his lips and all the happy throng
Of echoes following him, even as the crowd
Of his admiring little kinsmen--proud
To have a cousin _grown_--and yet as young
Of soul and cheery as the songs he sung.

He was a student of the law--intent
Soundly to win success, with all it meant;

And so he studied--even as he played,--
With all his heart: And so it was he made
His gallant fight for fortune--through all stress
Of battle bearing him with cheeriness
And wholesome valor.

And the children had
Another relative who kept them glad
And joyous by his very merry ways--
As blithe and sunny as the summer days,--
Their father's youngest brother--Uncle Mart.
The old 'Arabian Nights' he knew by heart--
'Baron Munchausen,' too; and likewise 'The
Swiss Family Robinson.'--And when these three
Gave out, as he rehearsed them, he could go
Straight on in the same line--a steady flow
Of arabesque invention that his good
Old mother never clearly understood.
He was to be a printer--wanted, though,
To be an actor.--But the world was 'show'
Enough for him,--theatric, airy, gay,--
Each day to him was jolly as a play.
And some poetic symptoms, too, in sooth,
Were certain.--And, from his apprentice youth,
He joyed in verse-quotations--which he took
Out of the old 'Type Foundry Specimen Book.'
He craved and courted most the favor of
The children.--They were foremost in his love;
And pleasing them, he pleased his own boy-heart
And kept it young and fresh in every part.
So was it he devised for them and wrought
To life his quaintest, most romantic thought:--
Like some lone castaway in alien seas,
He built a house up in the apple-trees,
Out in the corner of the garden, where
No man-devouring native, prowling there,
Might pounce upon them in the dead o' night--
For lo, their little ladder, slim and light,
They drew up after them. And it was known
That Uncle Mart slipped up sometimes alone
And drew the ladder in, to lie and moon
Over some novel all the afternoon.

And one time Johnty, from the crowd below,--
Outraged to find themselves deserted so--
Threw bodily their old black cat up in
The airy fastness, with much yowl and din.
Resulting, while a wild periphery
Of cat went circling to another tree,
And, in impassioned outburst, Uncle Mart
Loomed up, and thus relieved his tragic heart:

"_Hence, long-tailed, ebon-eyed, nocturnal ranger!
What led thee hither 'mongst the types and cases?
Didst thou not know that running midnight races
O'er standing types was fraught with imminent danger?
Did hunger lead thee--didst thou think to find
Some rich old cheese to fill thy hungry maw?
Vain hope! for none but literary jaw
Can masticate our cookery for the mind!_"

So likewise when, with lordly air and grace,
He strode to dinner, with a tragic face
With ink-spots on it from the office, he
Would aptly quote more 'Specimen-poetry--'
Perchance like "Labor's bread is sweet to eat,
(_Ahem!_) And toothsome is the toiler's meat."

Ah, could you see them _all_, at lull of noon!--
A sort of _boisterous_ lull, with clink of spoon
And clatter of deflecting knife, and plate
Dropped saggingly, with its all-bounteous weight,
And dragged in place voraciously; and then
Pent exclamations, and the lull again.--
The garland of glad faces 'round the board--
Each member of the family restored
To his or her place, with an extra chair
Or two for the chance guests so often there.--
The father's farmer-client, brought home from
The courtroom, though he 'didn't _want_ to come
Tel he jist saw he _hat_ to!' he'd explain,
Invariably, time and time again,
To the pleased wife and hostess, as she pressed
Another cup of coffee on the guest.--
Or there was Johnty's special chum, perchance,

Or Bud's, or both--each childish countenance
Lit with a higher glow of youthful glee,
To be together thus unbrokenly,--
Jim Offutt, or Eck Skinner, or George Carr--
The very nearest chums of Bud's these are,--
So, very probably, one of the three,
At least, is there with Bud, or ought to be.
Like interchange the town-boys each had known--
His playmate's dinner better than his own--
Yet blest that he was ever made to stay
At Almon Keefer's, any blessed day,
For any meal!... Visions of biscuits, hot
And flaky-perfect, with the golden blot
Of molten butter for the center, clear,
Through pools of clover-honey--dear-o-dear!--
With creamy milk for its divine 'farewell':
And then, if any one delectable
Might yet exceed in sweetness, O restore
The cherry-cobbler of the days of yore
Made only by Al Keefer's mother!--Why,
The very thought of it ignites the eye
Of memory with rapture--cloys the lip
Of longing, till it seems to ooze and drip
With veriest juice and stain and overwaste
Of that most sweet delirium of taste
That ever visited the childish tongue,
Or proved, as now, the sweetest thing unsung.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Orchard Lands Of Long Ago

The orchard lands of Long Ago!
O drowsy winds, awake, and blow
The snowy blossoms back to me,
And all the buds that used to be!
Blow back along the grassy ways
Of truant feet, and lift the haze
Of happy summer from the trees
That trail their tresses in the seas
Of grain that float and overflow
The orchard lands of Long Ago!

Blow back the melody that slips
In lazy laughter from the lips
That marvel much if any kiss
Is sweeter than the apple's is.
Blow back the twitter of the birds--
The lisp, the titter, and the words
Of merriment that found the shine
Of summer-time a glorious wine
That drenched the leaves that loved it so,
In orchard lands of Long Ago!

O memory! alight and sing
Where rosy-bellied pippins cling,
And golden russets glint and gleam,
As, in the old Arabian dream,
The fruits of that enchanted tree
The glad Aladdin robbed for me!
And, drowsy winds, awake and fan
My blood as when it overran
A heart ripe as the apples grow
In orchard lands of Long Ago!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Passing Of A Heart

O touch me with your hands--
For pity's sake!
My brow throbs ever on with such an ache
As only your cool touch may take away;
And so, I pray
You, touch me with your hands!

Touch--touch me with your hands.--
Smooth back the hair
You once caressed, and kissed, and called so fair
That I did dream its gold would wear away,
And lo, to-day--
O touch me with your hands!

Just touch me with your hands,
And let them press
My weary eyelids with the old caress,
And lull me till I sleep. Then go your way,
That Death may say:
He touched her with his hands.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Pathos Of Applause

The greeting of the company throughout
Was like a jubilee,--the children's shout
And fusillading hand-claps, with great guns
And detonations of the older ones,
Raged to such tumult of tempestuous joy,
It even more alarmed than pleased the boy;
Till, with a sudden twitching lip, he slid
Down to the floor and dodged across and hid
His face against his mother as she raised
Him to the shelter of her heart, and praised
His story in low whisperings, and smoothed
The 'amber-colored hair,' and kissed, and soothed
And lulled him back to sweet tranquillity--
'And 'ats a sign 'at you're the Ma fer me!
He lisped, with gurgling ecstasy, and drew
Her closer, with shut eyes; and feeling, too,
If he could only _purr_ now like a cat,
He would undoubtedly be doing that!

'And now'--the serious host said, lifting there
A hand entreating silence;--'now, aware
Of the good promise of our Traveler guest
To add some story with and for the rest,
I think I favor you, and him as well,
Asking a story I have heard him tell,
And know its truth,in each minute detail:'
Then leaning on his guest's chair, with a hale
Hand-pat by way of full indorsement, he
Said, 'Yes--the Free-Slave story--certainly.'

The old man, with his waddy notebook out,
And glittering spectacles, glanced round about
The expectant circle, and still firmer drew
His hat on, with a nervous cough or two:
And, save at times the big hard words, and tone
Of gathering passion--all the speaker's own,--
The tale that set each childish heart astir
Was thus told by 'The Noted Traveler.'

The Pet Coon

Noey Bixler ketched him, and fetched him in to me
When he's ist a little teenty-weenty baby-coon
'Bout as big as little pups, an' tied him to a tree;
An' Pa gived Noey fifty cents, when he come home at noon.
Nen he buyed a chain fer him, an' little collar, too,
An' sawed a hole in a' old tub an' turnt it upside-down;
An' little feller'd stay in there and won't come out fer you--
'Tendin' like he's kindo' skeered o' boys 'at lives in town.

Now he aint afeard a bit! he's ist so fat an' tame,
We on'y chain him up at night, to save the little chicks.
Holler 'Greedy! Greedy!' to him, an' he knows his name,
An' here he'll come a-waddle-un, up fer any tricks!
He'll climb up my leg, he will, an' waller in my lap,
An' poke his little black paws 'way in my pockets where
They's beechnuts, er chinkypins, er any little scrap
Of anything, 'at's good to eat--an' _he_ don't care!

An' he's as spunky as you please, an' don't like dogs at all.--
Billy Miller's black-an'-tan tackled him one day,
An' 'Greedy' he ist kindo' doubled all up like a ball,
An' Billy's dog he gived a yelp er two an' runned away!
An' nen when Billy fighted me, an' hit me with a bone,
An' Ma she purt'nigh ketched him as he dodged an' skooted thro'
The fence, she says, 'You better let my little boy alone,
Er 'Greedy,' next he whips yer dog, shall whip you, too!'

James Whitcomb Riley

The Pixy People

It was just a very
Merry fairy dream!--
All the woods were airy
With the gloom and gleam;
Crickets in the clover
Clattered clear and strong,
And the bees droned over
Their old honey-song.

In the mossy passes,
Saucy grasshoppers
Leapt about the grasses
And the thistle-burs;
And the whispered chuckle
Of the katydid
Shook the honeysuckle
Blossoms where he hid.

Through the breezy mazes
Of the lazy June,
Drowsy with the hazes
Of the dreamy noon,
Little Pixy people
Winged above the walk,
Pouring from the steeple
Of a mullein-stalk.

One--a gallant fellow--
Evidently King,--
Wore a plume of yellow
In a jewelled ring
On a pansy bonnet,
Gold and white and blue,
With the dew still on it,
And the fragrance, too.

One--a dainty lady,--
Evidently Queen,--
Wore a gown of shady

Moonshine and green,
With a lace of gleaming
Starlight that sent
All the dewdrops dreaming
Everywhere she went.

One wore a waistcoat
Of roseleaves, out and in,
And one wore a faced-coat
Of tiger-lily-skin;
And one wore a neat coat
Of palest galingale;
And one a tiny street-coat,
And one a swallow-tail.

And Ho! sang the King of them,
And Hey! sang the Queen;
And round and round the ring of them
Went dancing o'er the green;
And Hey! sang the Queen of them,
And Ho! sang the King--
And all that I had seen of them
--Wasn't anything!

It was just a very
Merry fairy dream!--
All the woods were airy
With the gloom and gleam;
Crickets in the clover
Clattered clear and strong,
And the bees droned over
Their old honey-song!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Plaint Human

Season of snows, and season of flowers,
Seasons of loss and gain!--
Since grief and joy must alike be ours,
Why do we still complain?

Ever our failing, from sun to sun,
O my intolerent brother!--
We want just a little too little of one,
And much too much of the other.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Quest

I am looking for Love. Has he passed this way,
With eyes as blue as the skies of May,
And a face as fair as the summer dawn?--
You answer back, but I wander on,--
For you say: 'Oh, yes; but his eyes were gray,
And his face as dim as a rainy day.'

Good friends, I query, I search for Love;
His eyes are as blue as the skies above,
And his smile as bright as the midst of May
When the truce-bird pipes: Has he passed this way?
And one says: 'Ay; but his face, alack!
Frowned as he passed, and his eyes were black.'

O who will tell me of Love? I cry!
His eyes are as blue as the mid-May sky,
And his face as bright as the morning sun;
And you answer and mock me, every one,
That his eyes were dark, and his face was wan,
And he passed you frowning and wandered on.

But stout of heart will I onward fare,
Knowing my Love is beyond--somewhere,--
The Love I seek, with the eyes of blue,
And the bright, sweet smile unknown of you;
And on from the hour his trail is found
I shall sing sonnets the whole year round.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Quiet Lodger

The man that rooms next door to me:
Two weeks ago, this very night,
He took possession quietly,
As any other lodger might--
But why the room next mine should so
Attract him I was vexed to know,--
Because his quietude, in fine,
Was far superior to mine.

'Now, I like quiet, truth to tell,
A tranquil life is sweet to me--
But _this_, ' I sneered, 'suits me too well.--
He shuts his door so noiselessly,
And glides about so very mute,
In each mysterious pursuit,
His silence is oppressive, and
Too deep for me to understand.'

Sometimes, forgetting book or pen,
I've found my head in breathless poise
Lifted, and dropped in shame again,
Hearing some alien ghost of noise--
Some smothered sound that seemed to be
A trunk-lid dropped unguardedly,
Or the crisp writhings of some quire
Of manuscript thrust in the fire.

Then I have climbed, and closed in vain
My transom, opening in the hall;
Or close against the window-pane
Have pressed my fevered face,--but all
The day or night without held not
A sight or sound or counter-thought
To set my mind one instant free
Of this man's silent mastery.

And often I have paced the floor
With muttering anger, far at night,
Hearing, and cursing, o'er and o'er,

The muffled noises, and the light
And tireless movements of this guest
Whose silence raged above my rest
Hoarser than howling storms at sea--
The man that rooms next door to me.

But twice or thrice, upon the stair,
I've seen his face--most strangely wan,--
Each time upon me unaware
He came--smooth'd past me, and was gone.
So like a whisper he went by,
I listened after, ear and eye,
Nor could my chafing fancy tell
The meaning of one syllable.

Last night I caught him, face to face,--
He entering his room, and I
Glaring from mine: He paused a space
And met my scowl all shrinkingly,
But with full gentleness: The key
Turned in his door--and I could see
It tremblingly withdrawn and put
Inside, and then--the door was shut.

Then silence. _Silence_!--why, last night
The silence was tumultuous,
And thundered on till broad daylight;--
O never has it stunned me thus!--
It rolls, and moans, and mumbles yet.--
Ah, God! how loud may silence get
When man mocks at a brother man
Who answers but as silence can!

The silence grew, and grew, and grew,
Till at high noon to-day 'twas heard
Throughout the house; and men flocked through
The echoing halls, with faces blurred
With pallor, gloom, and fear, and awe,
And shuddering at what they saw--
The quiet lodger, as he lay
Stark of the life he cast away.

* * * * *

So strange to-night--those voices there,
Where all so quiet was before;
They say the face has not a care
Nor sorrow in it any more--
His latest scrawl:--'Forgive me--You
Who prayed, 'they know not what they do!'
My tears wilt never let me see
This man that rooms next door to me!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Raggedy Man

1 O the Raggedy Man! He works fer Pa;
2 An' he's the goodest man ever you saw!
3 He comes to our house every day,
4 An' waters the horses, an' feeds 'em hay;
5 An' he opens the shed -- an' we all ist laugh
6 When he drives out our little old wobble-ly calf;
7 An' nen -- ef our hired girl says he can --
8 He milks the cow fer 'Lizabuth Ann. --
9 Ain't he a' awful good Raggedy Man?
10 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

11 W'y, The Raggedy Man -- he's ist so good,
12 He splits the kindlin' an' chops the wood;
13 An' nen he spades in our garden, too,
14 An' does most things 'at boys can't do. --
15 He clumbed clean up in our big tree
16 An' shooked a' apple down fer me --
17 An' 'nother 'n', too, fer 'Lizabuth Ann --
18 An' 'nother 'n', too, fer The Raggedy Man. --
19 Ain't he a' awful kind Raggedy Man?
20 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

21 An' The Raggedy Man one time say he
22 Pick' roast' rambos from a' orchurd-tree,
23 An' et 'em -- all ist roast' an' hot! --
24 An' it's so, too! -- 'cause a corn-crib got
25 Afire one time an' all burn' down
26 On "The Smoot Farm," 'bout four mile from town --
27 On "The Smoot Farm"! Yes -- an' the hired han'
28 'At worked there nen 'uz The Raggedy Man! --
29 Ain't he the beatin'est Raggedy Man?
30 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

31 The Raggedy Man's so good an' kind
32 He'll be our "horsey," an' "haw" an' mind
33 Ever'thing 'at you make him do --
34 An' won't run off -- 'less you want him to!
35 I drivd him wunst way down our lane
36 An' he got skeered, when it 'menced to rain,

37 An' ist rared up an' squealed and run
 38 Purt' nigh away! -- an' it's all in fun!
 39 Nen he skeered ag'in at a' old tin can ...
 40 Whoa! y' old runaway Raggedy Man!
 41 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

42 An' The Raggedy Man, he knows most rhymes,
 43 An' tells 'em, ef I be good, sometimes:
 44 Knows 'bout Giunts, an' Griffuns, an' Elves,
 45 An' the Squidgicum-Squees 'at swallers the'rselfes:
 46 An', wite by the pump in our pasture-lot,
 47 He showed me the hole 'at the Wunks is got,
 48 'At lives 'way deep in the ground, an' can
 49 Turn into me, er 'Lizabuth Ann!
 50 Er Ma, er Pa, er The Raggedy Man!
 51 Ain't he a funny old Raggedy Man?
 52 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

53 An' wunst, when The Raggedy Man come late,
 54 An' pigs ist root' thue the garden-gate,
 55 He 'tend like the pigs 'uz bears an' said,
 56 "Old Bear-shooter'll shoot 'em dead!"
 57 An' race' an' chase' 'em, an' they'd ist run
 58 When he pint his hoe at 'em like it's a gun
 59 An' go "Bang! -- Bang!" nen 'tend he stan'
 60 An' load up his gun ag'in! Raggedy Man!
 61 He's an old Bear-shooter Raggedy Man!
 62 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

63 An' sometimes The Raggedy Man lets on
 64 We're little prince-children, an' old King's gone
 65 To git more money, an' lef' us there --
 66 And Robbers is ist thick ever'where;
 67 An' nen -- ef we all won't cry, fer shore --
 68 The Raggedy Man he'll come and "'splore
 69 The Castul-halls," an' steal the "gold" --
 70 An' steal us, too, an' grab an' hold
 71 An' pack us off to his old "Cave"! -- An'
 72 Haymow's the "cave" o' The Raggedy Man! --
 73 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

74 The Raggedy Man -- one time, when he

75 Wuz makin' a little bow-'n'-orry fer me,
76 Says "When you're big like your Pa is,
77 Air you go' to keep a fine store like his --
78 An' be a rich merchunt -- an' wear fine clothes? --
79 Er what air you go' to be, goodness knows?"
80 An' nen he laughed at 'Lizabuth Ann,
81 An' I says "'M go' to be a Raggedy Man! --
82 I'm ist go' to be a nice Raggedy Man!"
83 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Rain

I.

The rain! the rain! the rain!
It gushed from the skies and streamed
Like awful tears; and the sick man thought
How pitiful it seemed!
And he turned his face away,
And stared at the wall again,
His hopes nigh dead and his heart worn out.
O the rain! the rain! the rain!

II.

The rain! the rain! the rain!
And the broad stream brimmed the shores;
And ever the river crept over the reeds
And the roots of the sycamores:
A corpse swirled by in a drift
Where the boat had snapt its chain--
And a hoarse-voiced mother shrieked and raved.
O the rain! the rain! the rain!

III.

The rain! the rain! the rain!--
Pouring, with never a pause,
Over the fields and the green byways--
How beautiful it was!
And the new-made man and wife
Stood at the window-pane
Like two glad children kept from school.--
O the rain! the rain! the rain!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Rainy Morning

The dawn of the day was dreary,
And the lowering clouds o'erhead
Wept in a silent sorrow
Where the sweet sunshine lay dead;
And a wind came out of the eastward
Like an endless sigh of pain,
And the leaves fell down in the pathway
And writhed in the falling rain.

I had tried in a brave endeavor
To chord my harp with the sun,
But the strings would slacken ever,
And the task was a weary one:
And so, like a child impatient
And sick of a discontent,
I bowed in a shower of tear-drops
And mourned with the instrument.

And lo! as I bowed, the splendor
Of the sun bent over me,
With a touch as warm and tender
As a father's hand might be:
And, even as I felt its presence,
My clouded soul grew bright,
And the tears, like the rain of morning,
Melted in mists of light.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Rambo-Tree

When Autumn shakes the rambo-tree--
It's a long, sweet way across the orchard!--
The bird sings low as the bumble-bee--
It's a long, sweet way across the orchard!--
The poor shote-pig he says, says he:
'When Autumn shakes the rambo-tree
There's enough for you and enough for me.'--
It's a long, sweet way across the orchard.

For just two truant lads like we,
When Autumn shakes the rambo-tree
There's enough for you and enough for me--
It's a long, sweet way across the orchard.

When Autumn shakes the rambo-tree--
It's a long, sweet way across the orchard!--
The mole digs out to peep and see--
It's a long, sweet way across the orchard!--
The dusk sags down, and the moon swings free,
There's a far, lorn call, 'Pig- _gee_!' 'Pig- _gee_!'
And two boys--glad enough for three.--
It's a long, sweet way across the orchard.

For just two truant lads like we,
When Autumn shakes the rambo-tree
There's enough for you and enough for me--
It's a long, sweet way across the orchard.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Rapture Of The Year

While skies glint bright with bluest light
Through clouds that race o'er fields and town,
And leaves go dancing left and right,
And orchard apples tumble down;
While school-girls sweet, in lane or street,
Lean 'gainst the wind and feel and hear
Its glad heart like a lover's beat,--
So reigns the rapture of the year.

*The ho! and hey! and whop-hooray!
Though winter clouds be looming,
Remember a November day
Is merrier than mildest May
With all her blossoms blooming.*

While birds in scattered flight are blown
Aloft and lost in dusky mist,
And truant boys scud home alone
'Neath skies of gold and amethyst;
While twilight falls, and Echo calls
Across the haunted atmosphere,
With low, sweet laughs at intervals,--
So reigns the rapture of the year.

*The ho! and hey! and whop-hooray!
Though winter clouds be looming,
Remember a November day
Is merrier than mildest May
With all her blossoms blooming.*

James Whitcomb Riley

The Rider Of The Knee

Knightly Rider of the Knee
Of Proud-prancing Unclery!
Gaily mount, and wave the sign
Of that mastery of thine.

Pat thy steed and turn him free,
Knightly Rider of the Knee!
Sit thy charger as a throne--
Lash him with thy laugh alone:

Sting him only with the spur
Of such wit as may occur,
Knightly Rider of the Knee,
In thy shriek of ecstasy.

Would, as now, we might endure,
Twain as one--thou miniature
Ruler, at the rein of me--
Knightly Rider of the Knee!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Ripest Peach

The ripest peach is highest on the tree --
And so her love, beyond the reach of me,
Is dearest in my sight. Sweet breezes, bow
Her heart down to me where I worship now!

She looms aloft where every eye may see
The ripest peach is highest on the tree.
Such fruitage as her love I know, alas!
I may not reach here from the orchard grass.

I drink the sunshine showered past her lips
As roses drain the dewdrop as it drips.
The ripest peach is highest on the tree,
And so mine eyes gaze upward eagerly.

Why -- why do I not turn away in wrath
And pluck some heart here hanging in my path? --
Love's lower boughs bend with them -- but, ah me!
The ripest peach is highest on the tree!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Rose

It tossed its head at the wooing breeze;
And the sun, like a bashful swain,
Beamed on it through the waving trees
With a passion all in vain,--
For my rose laughed in a crimson glee,
And hid in the leaves in wait for me.

The honey-bee came there to sing
His love through the languid hours,
And vaunt of his hives, as a proud old king
Might boast of his palace-towers:
But my rose bowed in a mockery,
And hid in the leaves in wait for me.

The humming-bird, like a courtier gay,
Dipped down with a dalliant song,
And twanged his wings through the roundelay
Of love the whole day long:
Yet my rose turned from his minstrelsy
And hid in the leaves in wait for me.

The firefly came in the twilight dim
My red, red rose to woo--
Till quenched was the flame of love in him,
And the light of his lantern too,
As my rose wept with dewdrops three
And hid in the leaves in wait for me.

And I said: I will cull my own sweet rose--
Some day I will claim as mine
The priceless worth of the flower that knows
No change, but a bloom divine--
The bloom of a fadeless constancy
That hides in the leaves in wait for me!

But time passed by in a strange disguise,
And I marked it not, but lay
In a lazy dream, with drowsy eyes,
Till the summer slipped away,

And a chill wind sang in a minor key:
'Where is the rose that waits for thee?'

.....

I dream to-day, o'er a purple stain
Of bloom on a withered stalk,
Pelted down by the autumn rain
In the dust of the garden-walk,
That an Angel-rose in the world to be
Will hide in the leaves in wait for me.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Runaway Boy

Wunst I sassed my Pa, an' he
Won't stand that, an' punished me,--
Nen when he was gone that day,
I slipped out an' runned away.

I tooked all my copper-cents,
An' clumbed over our back fence
In the jimpson-weeds 'at growed
Ever'where all down the road.

Nen I got out there, an' nen
I runned some--an' runned again
When I met a man 'at led
A big cow 'at shooked her head.

I went down a long, long lane
Where was little pigs a-play'n';
An' a grea'-big pig went 'Booh!'
An' jumped up, an' skeered me too.

Nen I scampered past, an' they
Was somebody hollered 'Hey!'
An' I ist looked ever'where,
An' they was nobody there.

I Want to, but I'm 'fraid to try
To go back.... An' by-an'-by
Somepin' hurts my throat inside--
An' I want my Ma--an' cried.

Nen a grea'-big girl come through
Where's a gate, an' telled me who
Am I? an' ef I tell where
My home's at she'll show me there.

But I couldn't ist but tell
What's my name; an' she says well,
An' she tooked me up an' says
She know where I live, she guess.

Nen she telled me hug wite close
Round her neck!--an' off she goes
Skippin' up the street! An' nen
Purty soon I'm home again.

An' my Ma, when she kissed me,
Kissed the _big girl_ too, an' _she_
Kissed me--ef I p'omise _shore_
I won't run away no more!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Same Old Story

The same old story told again--
The maiden droops her head,
The ripening glow of her crimson cheek
Is answering in her stead.
The pleading tone of a trembling voice
Is telling her the way
He loved her when his heart was young
In Youth's sunshiny day:
The trembling tongue, the longing tone,
Imploringly ask why
They can not be as happy now
As in the days gone by.
And two more hearts, tumultuous
With overflowing joy,
Are dancing to the music
Which that dear, provoking boy
Is twanging on his bowstring,
As, fluttering his wings,
He sends his love-charged arrows
While merrily he sings:
'Ho! ho! my dainty maiden,
It surely can not be
You are thinking you are master
Of your heart, when it is me.'
And another gleaming arrow
Does the little god's behest,
And the dainty little maiden
Falls upon her lover's breast.
'The same old story told again,'
And listened o'er and o'er,
Will still be new, and pleasing, too,
Till 'Time shall be no more.'

James Whitcomb Riley

The Serenade

The midnight is not more bewildering
To her drowsed eyes, than to her ears, the sound
Of dim, sweet singing voices, interwound
With purl of flute and subtle twang of string,
Strained through the lattice, where the roses cling
And, with their fragrance, waft the notes around
Her haunted senses. Thirsting beyond bound
Of her slow-yielding dreams, the lilt and swing
Of the mysterious delirious tune,
She drains like some strange opiate, with awed eyes
Upraised against her casement, where aswoon,
The stars fail from her sight, and up the skies
Of alien azure rolls the full round moon
Like some vast bubble blown of summer noon.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Sermon Of The Rose

Wilful we are in our infirmity
Of childish questioning and discontent.
Whate'er befalls us is divinely meant--
Thou Truth the clearer for thy mystery!
Make us to meet what is or is to be
With fervid welcome, knowing it is sent
To serve us in some way full excellent,
Though we discern it all belatedly.
The rose buds, and the rose blooms and the rose
Bows in the dews, and in its fulness, lo,
Is in the lover's hand,--then on the breast
Of her he loves,--and there dies.--And who knows
Which fate of all a rose may undergo
Is fairest, dearest, sweetest, loveliest?

Nay, we are children: we will not mature.
A blessed gift must seem a theft; and tears
Must storm our eyes when but a joy appears
In drear disguise of sorrow; and how poor
We seem when we are richest,--most secure
Against all poverty the lifelong years
We yet must waste in childish doubts and fears
That, in despite of reason, still endure!
Alas! the sermon of the rose we will
Not wisely ponder; nor the sobs of grief
Lulled into sighs of rapture; nor the cry
Of fierce defiance that again is still.
Be patient--patient with our frail belief,
And stay it yet a little ere we die.

O opulent life of ours, though dispossessed
Of treasure after treasure! Youth most fair
Went first, but left its priceless coil of hair--
Moaned over sleepless nights, kissed and caressed
Through drip and blur of tears the tenderest.
And next went Love--the ripe rose glowing there
Her very sister!... It is here; but where
Is she, of all the world the first and best?
And yet how sweet the sweet earth after rain--

How sweet the sunlight on the garden wall
Across the roses--and how sweetly flows
The limpid yodel of the brook again!
And yet--and yet how sweeter after all,
The smouldering sweetness of a dead red rose!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Shoemaker

Thou Poet, who, like any lark,
Dost whet thy beak and trill
From misty morn till murky dark,
Nor ever pipe thy fill:
Hast thou not, in thy cheery note,
One poor chirp to confer--
One verseful twitter to devote
Unto the Shoe-ma-ker?

At early dawn he doth peg in
His noble work and brave;
And eke from cark and wordly sin
He seeketh soles to save;
And all day long, with quip and song,
Thus stitcheth he the way
Our feet may know the right from wrong,
Nor ever go a stray.

Soak kip in mind the Shoe-ma-ker,
Nor slight his lasting fame:
Always he waxeth tenderer
In warmth of our acclaim;--
Aye, more than any artisan
We glory in his art
Who ne'er, to help the under man,
Neglects the upper part.

But toe the mark for him, and heel
Respond to thee in kine--
Or kid--or calf, shouldst thou reveal
A taste so superfine:
Thus let him jest--join in his laugh--
Draw on his stock, and be
A shoer'd there's no rival half
Sole liberal as he.

Then, Poet, hail the Shoe-ma-ker
For all his goodly deeds,--
Yea, bless him free for booting thee--

The first of all thy needs!
And when at last his eyes grow dim,
And nerveless drops his clamp,
In golden shoon pray think of him
Upon his latest tramp.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Shower

The landscape, like the awed face of a child,
Grew curiously blurred; a hush of death
Fell on the fields, and in the darkened wild
The zephyr held its breath.

No wavering glamour-work of light and shade
Dappled the shivering surface of the brook;
The frightened ripples in their ambushade
Of willows thrilled and shook.

The sullen day grew darker, and anon
Dim flashes of pent anger lit the sky;
With rumbling wheels of wrath came rolling on
The storm's artillery.

The cloud above put on its blackest frown,
And then, as with a vengeful cry of pain,
The lightning snatched it, ripped and flung it down
In ravelled shreds of rain:

While I, transfigured by some wondrous art,
Bowed with the thirsty lilies to the sod,
My empty soul brimmed over, and my heart
Drenched with the love of God.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Silent Victors

MAY 30, 1878,

Dying for victory, cheer on cheer
Thundered on his eager ear.

--CHARLES L. HOLSTEIN.

I

Deep, tender, firm and true, the Nation's heart
Throbs for her gallant heroes passed away,
Who in grim Battle's drama played their part,
And slumber here to-day.--

Warm hearts that beat their lives out at the shrine
Of Freedom, while our country held its breath
As brave battalions wheeled themselves in line
And marched upon their death:

When Freedom's Flag, its natal wounds scarce healed,
Was torn from peaceful winds and flung again
To shudder in the storm of battle-field--
The elements of men,--

When every star that glittered was a mark
For Treason's ball, and every rippling bar
Of red and white was sullied with the dark
And purple stain of war:

When angry guns, like famished beasts of prey,
Were howling o'er their gory feast of lives,
And sending dismal echoes far away
To mothers, maids, and wives:--

The mother, kneeling in the empty night,
With pleading hands uplifted for the son
Who, even as she prayed, had fought the fight--
The victory had won:

The wife, with trembling hand that wrote to say

The babe was waiting for the sire's caress--
The letter meeting that upon the way,--
The babe was fatherless:

The maiden, with her lips, in fancy, pressed
Against the brow once dewy with her breath,
Now lying numb, unknown, and uncaressed
Save by the dews of death.

II

What meed of tribute can the poet pay
The Soldier, but to trail the ivy-vine
Of idle rhyme above his grave to-day
In epitaph design?--

Or wreath with laurel-words the icy brows
That ache no longer with a dream of fame,
But, pillowed lowly in the narrow house,
Renowned beyond the name.

The dewy tear-drops of the night may fall,
And tender morning with her shining hand
May brush them from the grasses green and tall
That undulate the land.--

Yet song of Peace nor din of toil and thrift,
Nor chanted honors, with the flowers we heap,
Can yield us hope the Hero's head to lift
Out of its dreamless sleep:

The dear old Flag, whose faintest flutter flies
A stirring echo through each patriot breast,
Can never coax to life the folded eyes
That saw its wrongs redressed--

That watched it waver when the fight was hot,
And blazed with newer courage to its aid,
Regardless of the shower of shell and shot
Through which the charge was made;--

And when, at last, they saw it plume its wings,

Like some proud bird in stormy element,
And soar untrammelled on its wanderings,
They closed in death, content.

III

O Mother, you who miss the smiling face
Of that dear boy who vanished from your sight,
And left you weeping o'er the vacant place
He used to fill at night,--

Who left you dazed, bewildered, on a day
That echoed wild huzzas, and roar of guns
That drowned the farewell words you tried to say
To incoherent ones;--

Be glad and proud you had the life to give--
Be comforted through all the years to come,--
Your country has a longer life to live,
Your son a better home.

O Widow, weeping o'er the orphaned child,
Who only lifts his questioning eyes to send
A keener pang to grief unreconciled,--
Teach him to comprehend

He had a father brave enough to stand
Before the fire of Treason's blazing gun,
That, dying, he might will the rich old land
Of Freedom to his son.

And, Maiden, living on through lonely years
In fealty to love's enduring ties,--
With strong faith gleaming through the tender tears
That gather in your eyes,

Look up! and own, in gratefulness of prayer,
Submission to the will of Heaven's High Host:--
I see your Angel-soldier pacing there,
Expectant at his post.--

I see the rank and file of armies vast,

That muster under one supreme control;
I hear the trumpet sound the signal-blast--
The calling of the roll--

The grand divisions falling into line
And forming, under voice of One alone
Who gives command, and joins with tongue divine
The hymn that shakes the Throne.

IV

And thus, in tribute to the forms that rest
In their last camping-ground, we strew the bloom
And fragrance of the flowers they loved the best,
In silence o'er the tomb.

With reverent hands we twine the Hero's wreath
And clasp it tenderly on stake or stone
That stands the sentinel for each beneath
Whose glory is our own.

While in the violet that greets the sun,
We see the azure eye of some lost boy;
And in the rose the ruddy cheek of one
We kissed in childish joy,--

Recalling, haply, when he marched away,
He laughed his loudest though his eyes were wet.--
The kiss he gave his mother's brow that day
Is there and burning yet:

And through the storm of grief around her tossed,
One ray of saddest comfort she may see,--
Four hundred thousand sons like hers were lost
To weeping Liberty.

.
But draw aside the drapery of gloom,
And let the sunshine chase the clouds away
And gild with brighter glory every tomb
We decorate to-day:

And in the holy silence reigning round,
While prayers of perfume bless the atmosphere,
Where loyal souls of love and faith are found,
Thank God that Peace is here!

And let each angry impulse that may start,
Be smothered out of every loyal breast;
And, rocked within the cradle of the heart,
Let every sorrow rest.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Singer

While with Ambition's hectic flame
He wastes the midnight oil,
And dreams, high-throned on heights of fame,
To rest him from his toil,--

Death's Angel, like a vast eclipse,
Above him spreads her wings,
And fans the embers of his lips
To ashes as he sings.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Song Of Yesterday

I

But yesterday
I looked away
O'er happy lands, where sunshine lay
In golden blots,
Inlaid with spots
Of shade and wild forget-me-nots.

My head was fair
With flaxen hair,
And fragrant breezes, faint and rare,
And, warm with drouth
From out the south,
Blew all my curls across my mouth.

And, cool and sweet,
My naked feet
Found dewy pathways through the wheat;
And out again
Where, down the lane,
The dust was dimpled with the rain.

II

But yesterday! --
Adream, astray,
From morning's red to evening's dray,
O'er dales and hills
Of daffodils
And lorn sweet-fluting whippoorwills.

I knew nor cares
Nor tears nor prayers --
A mortal god, crowned unawares
With sunset -- and
A scepter-wand
Of apple-blossoms in my hand!

The dewy blue
Of twilight grew

To purple, with a star or two
Whose lispings rays
Failed in the blaze
Of sudden fireflies through the haze.

III

But yesterday
I heard the lay
Of summer birds, when I, as they
With breast and wing,
All quivering
With life and love, could only sing.

My head was leant
Where, with it, blent
A maiden's, o'er her instrument;
While all the night,
From vale to height,
Was filled with echoes of delight.

And all our dreams
Were lit with gleams
Of that lost land of reedy streams,
Along whose brim
Forever swim
Pan's lilies, laughing up at him.

IV

But yesterday! . . .
O blooms of May,
And summer roses -- where away?
O stars above;
And lips of love,
And all the honeyed sweets thereof! --

O lad and lass,
And orchard pass,
And briered lane, and daisied grass!
O gleam and gloom,
And woodland bloom,
And breezy breaths of all perfume! --

No more for me
Or mine shall be
Thy raptures -- save in memory, --
No more -- no more --
Till through the Door
Of Glory gleam the days of yore.

James Whitcomb Riley

The South Wind And The Sun

O The South Wind and the Sun!
How each loved the other one
Full of fancy--- full folly--
Full of jollity and fun!
How they romped and ran about,
Like two boys when school is out,
With glowing face, and lispig lip,
Low laugh, and lifted shout!

And the South Wind-- he was dressed
With a ribbon round his breast
That floated, flapped and fluttered
In a riotous unrest,
And a drapery of mist
From the shoulder and the wrist
Flowing backward with the motion
Of the waving hand he kissed.

And the Sun had on a crown
Wrought of gilded thistle-down,
And a scarf of velvet vapor,
And a ravelled-rainbow gown;
And his tinsel-tangled hair,
Tossed and lost upon the air,
Was glossier and flossier
Than any anywhere.

And the South Wind's eyes were two
Little dancing drops of dew,
As he puffed his cheeks, and pursed his lips,
And blew and blew and blew!
And the Sun's-- like diamond-stone,
Brighter yet than ever known,
As he knit his brows and held his breath,
And shone and shone and shone!

And this pair of merry fays
Wandered through the summer days;
Arm-in-arm they went together

Over heights of morning haze--
Over slanting slopes of lawn
They went on and on and on,
Where the daisies looked like star-tracks
Trailing up and down the dawn.

And where'er they found the top
Of a wheat-stalk droop and lop
They chucked it underneath the chin
And praised the lavish crop,
Till it lifted with the pride
Of the heads it grew beside,
And then the South Wind and the Sun
Went onward satisfied.

Over meadow-lands they tripped,
Where the dandelions dipped
In crimson foam of clover-bloom,
And dripped and dripped and dripped;
And they clinched the bumble-stings,
Gauming honey on their wings,
And bundling them in lily-bells,
With maudlin murmurings.

And the humming-bird that hung
Like a jewel up among
The tilted honeysuckle-horns,
They mesmerized, and swung
In the palpitating air,
Drowsed with odors strange and rare,
And with whispered laughter, slipped away,
And left him hanging there.

And they braided blades of grass
Where the truant had to pass;
And they wriggled through the rushes
And the reeds of the morass,
Where they danced, in rapture sweet,
O'er the leaves that laid a street
Of undulant mosaic for
The touches of their feet.

By the brook with mossy brink
Where the cattle came to drink.
They trilled and piped and whistled
With the thrush and bobolink,
Till the kine in listless pause,
Switched their tails in mute applause,
With lifted heads and dreamy eyes,
And bubble-dripping jaws.

And where the melons grew,
Streaked with yellow, green and blue
These jolly sprites went wandering
Through spangled paths of dew;
And the melons, here and there,
They made love to, everywhere
Turning their pink souls to crimson
With caresses fond and fair.

Over orchard walls they went,
Where the fruited boughs were bent
Till they brushed the sward beneath them
Where the shine and shadow blent;
And the great green pear they shook
Till the fallow hue forsook
Its features, and the gleam of gold
Laughed out in every look.

And they stroked the downy cheek
Of the peach, and smoothed it sleek,
And flushed it into splendor;
And with many an elfish freak,
Gave the russet's rust a wipe--
Prankt the rambo with a stripe,
And the wine-sap blushed its reddest
As they spanked the pippins ripe.

Through the woven ambushade
That the twining vines had made,
They found the grapes, in clusters,
Drinking up the shine and shade--
Plumpt like tiny skins of wine,
With a vintage so divine

That the tongue of fancy tingled
With the tang of muscadine.

And the golden-banded bees,
Droning o'er the flowery leas,
They bridled, reigned, and rode away
Across the fragrant breeze,
Till in hollow oak and elm
They had groomed and stabled them
In waxen stalls oozed with dews
Of rose and lily-stem.

Where the dusty highway leads,
High above the wayside weeds
They sowed the air with butterflies
Like blooming flower-seeds,
Till the dull grasshopper sprung
Half a man's height up, and hung
Tranced in the heat, with whirring wings,
And sung and sung and sung!

And they loitered, hand in hand,
Where the snipe along the sand
Of the river ran to meet them
As the ripple meets the land,
Till the dragon-fly, in light
Gauzy armor, burnished bright,
Came tilting down the waters
In a wild, bewildered flight.

And they heard the killdee's call,
And afar, the waterfall,
But the rustle of a falling leaf
They heard above it all;
And the trailing willow crept
Deeper in the tide that swept
The leafy shallop to the shore,
And wept and wept and wept!

And the fairy vessel veered
From its moorings-- tacked and steered
For the centre of the current

Sailed away and disappeared:
And the burthen that it bore
From the long-enchanted shore--
'Alas! The South Wind and the Sun!'
I murmur evermore.

For the South Wind and the Sun,
Each so loves the other one,
For all his jolly folly
And frivolity and fun,
That our love for them they weigh
As their fickle fancies may,
And when at last we love them most,
They laugh and sail away.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Speeding Of The King's Spite

A king--estranged from his loving Queen
By a foolish royal whim--
Tired and sick of the dull routine
Of matters surrounding him--
Issued a mandate in this wise.--
'THE DOWER OF MY DAUGHTER'S HAND
I WILL GIVE TO HIM WHO HOLDS THIS PRIZE,
THE STRANGEST THING IN THE LAND.'

But the King, sad sooth! in this grim decree
Had a motive low and mean;--
'Twas a royal piece of chicanery
To harry and spite the Queen;
For King though he was, and beyond compare,
He had ruled all things save one--
Then blamed the Queen that his only heir
Was a daughter--not a son.

The girl had grown, in the mother's care,
Like a bud in the shine and shower
That drinks of the wine of the balmy air
Till it blooms into matchless flower;
Her waist was the rose's stem that bore
The flower--and the flower's perfume--
That ripens on till it bulges o'er
With its wealth of bud and bloom.

And she had a lover--lowly sprung,--
But a purer, nobler heart
Never spake in a courtlier tongue
Or wooed with a dearer art:
And the fair pair paled at the King's decree;
But the smiling Fates contrived
To have them wed, in a secrecy
That the Queen HERSELF connived--

While the grim King's heralds scoured the land
And the countries roundabout,
Shouting aloud, at the King's command,

A challenge to knave or lout,
Prince or peasant,--'The mighty King
Would have ye understand
That he who shows him the strangest thing
Shall have his daughter's hand!'

And thousands flocked to the royal throne,
Bringing a thousand things
Strange and curious;--One, a bone--
The hinge of a fairy's wings;
And one, the glass of a mermaid queen,
Gemmed with a diamond dew,
Where, down in its reflex, dimly seen,
Her face smiled out at you.

One brought a cluster of some strange date,
With a subtle and searching tang
That seemed, as you tasted, to penetrate
The heart like a serpent's fang;
And back you fell for a spell entranced,
As cold as a corpse of stone,
And heard your brains, as they laughed and danced
And talked in an undertone.

One brought a bird that could whistle a tune
So piercingly pure and sweet,
That tears would fall from the eyes of the moon
In dewdrops at its feet;
And the winds would sigh at the sweet refrain,
Till they swooned in an ecstasy,
To waken again in a hurricane
Of riot and jubilee.

One brought a lute that was wrought of a shell
Luminous as the shine
Of a new-born star in a dewy dell,--
And its strings were strands of wine
That sprayed at the Fancy's touch and fused,
As your listening spirit leant
Drunken through with the airs that oozed
From the o'ersweet instrument.

One brought a tablet of ivory
Whereon no thing was writ,--
But, at night--and the dazzled eyes would see
Flickering lines o'er it,--
And each, as you read from the magic tome,
Lightened and died in flame,
And the memory held but a golden poem
Too beautiful to name.

Till it seemed all marvels that ever were known
Or dreamed of under the sun
Were brought and displayed at the royal throne,
And put by, one by one
Till a graybeard monster came to the King--
Haggard and wrinkled and old--
And spread to his gaze this wondrous thing,--
A gossamer veil of gold.--

Strangely marvelous--mocking the gaze
Like a tangle of bright sunshine,
Dipping a million glittering rays
In a baptism divine:
And a maiden, sheened in this gauze attire--
Sifting a glance of her eye--
Dazzled men's souls with a fierce desire
To kiss and caress her and--die.

And the grim King swore by his royal beard
That the veil had won the prize,
While the gray old monster blinked and leered
With his lashless, red-rimmed eyes,
As the fainting form of the princess fell,
And the mother's heart went wild,
Throbbing and swelling a muffled knell
For the dead hopes of her child.

But her clouded face with a faint smile shone,
As suddenly, through the throng,
Pushing his way to the royal throne,
A fair youth strode along,
While a strange smile hovered about his eyes,
As he said to the grim old King:--

'The veil of gold must lose the prize;
For I have a stranger thing.'

He bent and whispered a sentence brief;
But the monarch shook his head,
With a look expressive of unbelief--
'It can't be so,' he said;
'Or give me proof; and I, the King,
Give you my daughter's hand,--
For certes THAT IS a stranger thing--
THE STRANGEST THING IN THE LAND!'

Then the fair youth, turning, caught the Queen
In a rapturous caress,
While his lithe form towered in lordly mien,
As he said in a brief address:--
'My fair bride's mother is this; and, lo,
As you stare in your royal awe,
By this pure kiss do I proudly show
A LOVE FOR A MOTHER-IN-LAW!'

Then a thaw set in the old King's mood,
And a sweet Spring freshet came
Into his eyes, and his heart renewed
Its love for the favored dame:
But often he has been heard to declare
That 'he never could clearly see
How, in the deuce, such a strange affair
Could have ended so happily!'

James Whitcomb Riley

The Sphinx

I know all about the Sphinx--
I know even what she thinks,
Staring with her stony eyes
Up forever at the skies.

For last night I dreamed that she
Told me all the mystery--
Why for aeons mute she sat--:
She was just cut out for that!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Squirtgun Uncle Maked Me

Uncle Sidney, when he wuz here,
Maked me a squirtgun out o' some
Elder-bushes 'at grewed out near
Where wuz the brickyard--'way out clear
To where the toll-gate come!

So when we walked back home again,
He maked it, out in our woodhouse where
Wuz the old workbench, an' the old jack-plane,
An' the old 'pokeshave, an' the tools all lay'n'
Ist like he wants 'em there.

He sawed it first with the old hand-saw;
An' nen he peeled off the bark, an' got
Some glass an' scraped it; an' told 'bout Pa,
When he wuz a boy an' fooled his Ma,
An' the whippin' 'at he caught.

Nen Uncle Sidney, he took an' filed
A' old arn ramrod; an' one o' the ends
He screwed fast into the vise; an' smiled,
Thinkin', he said, o' when he wuz a child,
'Fore him an' Pa wuz mens.

He punched out the peth, an' nen he put
A plug in the end with a hole notched through;
Nen took the old drawey-knife an' cut
An' maked a handle 'at shoved clean shut
But ist where yer hand held to.

An' he wropt th'uther end with some string an' white
Piece o' the sleeve of a' old tored shirt;
An' nen he showed me to hold it tight,
An' suck in the water an' work it right
An' it 'ud ist squirt an' squirt!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Stepmother

First she come to our house,
Tommy run and hid;
And Emily and Bob and me
We cried jus' like we did
When Mother died,--and we all said
'At we all wisht 'at we was dead!

And Nurse she couldn't stop us,
And Pa he tried and tried,--
We sobbed and shook and wouldn't look,
But only cried and cried;
And nen someone--we couldn't jus'
Tell who--was cryin' same as us!

Our Stepmother! Yes, it was her,
Her arms around us all--
'Cause Tom slid down the bannister
And peeked in from the hall.--
And we all love her, too, because
She's purt nigh good as Mother was!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Touches Of Her Hand

The touches of her hands are like the fall
Of velvet snowflakes; like the touch of down
The peach just brushes 'gainst the garden wall;
The flossy fondlings of the thistle-wisp
Caught in the crinkle of a leaf of brown
The blighting frost hath turned from green to crisp.

Soft as the falling of the dusk at night,
The touches of her hands, and the delight--
The touches of her hands!
The touches of her hands are like the dew
That falls so softly down no one e'er knew
The touch thereof save lovers like to one
Astray in lights where ranged Endymion.

O rarely soft, the touches of her hands,
As drowsy zephyrs in enchanted lands;
Or pulse of dying fay; or fairy sighs;
Or--in between the midnight and the dawn,
When long unrest and tears and fears are gone--
Sleep, smoothing down the lids of weary eyes.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Town Karnteel

The Town Karnteel--! It's who'll reveal
Its praises jushtifiable?
For who can sing av anything
So lovely and reliable?
Whin Summer, Spring, or Winter lies
From Malin's Head to Tipperary,
There's no such town for interprise
Bechuxt Youghal and Londonderry!

There's not its likes in Ireland--
For twic't the week, be gorries!
They're playing jigs upon the band,
And joomping there in sacks-- and-- and--
And racing, wid wheelborries!

Kanteel-- it's there, like any fair,
The purty gurrls is plinty, sure--!
And man-alive! At forty-five
The leg's av me air twinty, sure!
I lave me cares, and hoein' too,
Behint me, as is sinsible,
And it's Karnteel I'm goin' to,
To cilebrate in principle!

For there's the town av all the land!
And twic't the week, be-gorries!
They're playing jigs upon the band,
And joomping there in sacks-- and-- and--
And racing, wid wheelborries!

And whilst I feel for owld Karnteel
That I've no phrases glorious,
It stands above the need av love
That boasts in voice uproarious--!
Lave that for Cork, and Dublin too,
And Armagh and Killarney thin--,
And Karnteel won't be troublin' you
Wid any jilous blarney, thin!

For there's the town av all the land
Where twic't the week, be-gorries!
They're playing jigs upon the band,
And joomping there in sacks-- and-- and--
And racing, wid wheelborries!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Train Misser

At Union Station

'Ll where in the world my eyes has bin--
Ef I hain't missed that train ag'in!
Chuff! And whistle! And toot! And ring!
But blast and blister the dasted train--!
How it does it I can't explain!
Git here thirty-five minutes before
The durn things due--! And, drat the thing
It'll manage to git past-shore!

The more I travel around, the more
I got no sense--! To stand right here
And let it beat me! 'Ll ding my melts!
I got no gumption, ner nothin' else!
Ticket Agent's a dad-burned bore--!
Sell you a tickets all they keer--!
Ticket Agents ort to all be

Prosecuted-- and that's jes what--!
How'd I know which train's fer me?
And how'd I know which train was not--?
Goern and comin' and gone astray,
And backin' and switchin' ever'-which-way!

Ef I could jes sneak round behind
Myse'f, where I could git full swing,
I'd lift my coat, and kick, by jing!
Till I jes got jerked up and fined--!
Fer here I stood, as a durn fool's apt
To, and let that train jes chuff and choo
Right apast me-- and mouth jes gapped
Like a blamed old sandwich warped in two!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Treasure Of The Wise Man

O the night was dark and the night was late,
And the robbers came to rob him;
And they picked the locks of his palace-gate,
The robbers that came to rob him--
They picked the locks of his palace-gate,
Seized his jewels and gems of state,
His coffers of gold and his priceless plate,--
The robbers that came to rob him.

But loud laughed he in the morning red!--
For of what had the robbers robbed him?--
Ho! hidden safe, as he slept in bed,
When the robbers came to rob him,--
They robbed him not of a golden shred
Of the childish dreams in his wise old head--
'And they're welcome to all things else,' he said,
When the robbers came to rob him.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Tree-Toad

"Scurious-like,' said the tree-toad,
'I've twittered far rain all day;
And I got up soon,
And I hollered till noon--
But the sun, hit blazed away,
Till I jest clumb down in a crawfish-hole,
Weary at heart, and sick at soul!

'Dozed away far an hour,
And I tackled the thing agin;
And I sung, and sung,
Till I knowed my lung
Was jest about give in;
And then, thinks I, ef hit don't rain now.
There're nothin' in singin', anyhow!

'Once in awhile some
Would come a drivin' past;
And he'd hear my cry,
And stop and sigh--
Till I jest laid back, at last,
And I hollered rain till I thought my th'oat
Would bust right open at ever' note!

'But _I fetched_ her! O _I fetched_ her!--
'Cause a little while ago,
As I kindo' set,
With one eye shet,
And a-singin' soft and low,
A voice drapped down on my fevered brain,
Sayin',--' Ef you'll jest hush I'll rain!'"

James Whitcomb Riley

The Twins

One 's the pictur' of his Pa,
And the _other_ of her Ma--
Jes the bossest pair o' babies 'at a mortal ever saw!
And we love 'em as the bees
Loves the blossoms of the trees,
A-ridin' and a-rompin' in the breeze!

One's got her Mammy's eyes--
Soft and blue as Apurl-skies--
With the same sort of a smile, like--Yes,
and mouth about her size,--
Dimples, too, in cheek and chin,
'At my lips jes _wallers_ in,
A-goin' to work, er gittin' home agin.

And the _other_--Well, they say
That he's got his Daddy's way
O' bein' ruther soberfied, er ruther extry gay,--
That he either cries his best,
Er he laughs his howlin'est--
Like all he lacked was buttons and a vest!

Look at _her_!--and look at _him_!--
Talk about yer 'Cheru-_bim_!'
Roll 'em up in dreams together, rosy arm and chubby limb!
O we love 'em as the bees
Loves the blossoms of the trees,
A-ridin' and a-rompin' in the breeze!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Wandering Jew

The stars are falling, and the sky
Is like a field of faded flowers;
The winds on weary wings go by;
The moon hides, and the tempest lowers;
And still through every clime and age
I wander on a pilgrimage
That all men know an idle quest,
For that the goal I seek is-- Rest!

I hear the voice of summer streams,
And following, I find the brink
Of cooling springs, with childish dreams
Returning as I bend to drink--
But suddenly, with startled eyes,
My face looks on its grim disguise
Of long gray beard; and so, distressed,
I hasten on, nor taste of rest.

I come upon a merry group
Of children in the dusky wood,
Who answer back the owlet's whoop,
That laughs as it had understood;
And I would pause a little space,
But that each happy blossom-face
Is like to one His hands have blessed
Who sent me forth in search of rest.

Sometimes I fain would stay my feet
In shady lanes, where huddled kine
Couch in the grasses cool and sweet,
And lift their patient eyes to mine;
But I, for thoughts that ever then
Go back to Bethlehem again,
Must needs fare on my weary quest,
And weep for very need of rest.

Is there no end? I plead in vain:
Lost worlds nor living answer me.
Since Pontius Pilate's awful reign

Have I not passed eternity?
Have I not drunk the fetid breath
Of every fevered phase of death,
And come unscathed through every pest
And scourge and plague that promised rest?

Have I not seen the stars go out
That shed their light o'er Galilee,
And mighty kingdoms tossed about
And crumbled clod-like in the sea?
Dead ashes of dead ages blow
And cover me like drifting snow,
And time laughs on as 'twere a jest
That I have any need of rest.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Watches Of The Night

O the waiting in the watches of the night!
In the darkness, desolation, and contrition and affright;
The awful hush that holds us shut away from all delight:
The ever weary memory that ever weary goes
Recounting ever over every aching loss it knows--
The ever weary eyelids gasping ever for repose--
In the dreary, weary watches of the night!

Dark--stifling dark--the watches of the night!
With tingling nerves at tension, how the blackness flashes white
With spectral visitations smitten past the inner sight!--
What shuddering sense of wrongs we've wrought
that may not be redressed--
Of tears we did not brush away--of lips we left unpressed,
And hands that we let fall, with all their loyalty unguessed!
Ah! the empty, empty watches of the night!

What solace in the watches of the night?--
What frailest staff of hope to stay--what faintest shaft of light?
Do we dream and dare believe it, that by never weight of right
Of our own poor weak deservings, we shall win the dawn at last--
Our famished souls find freedom from this penance for the past,
In a faith that leaps and lightens from the gloom
that flees aghast--
Shall we survive the watches of the night?

One leads us through the watches of the night--
By the ceaseless intercession of our loved ones lost to sight
He is with us through all trials, in His mercy and His might;--
With our mothers there about Him, all our sorrow disappears,
Till the silence of our sobbing is the prayer the Master hears,
And His hand is laid upon us with the tenderness of tears
In the waning of the watches of the night.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Way It Wuz

Las' July--an', I persume
'Bout as hot
As the ole Gran'-Jury room
Where they sot!--
Fight 'twixt Mike an' Dock McGriff--
'Pears to me jes' like as if
I'd a dremp' the whole blame thing--
Allus ha'nts me roun' the gizzard
When they're nightmares on the wing,
An' a feller's blood's jes' friz!
Seed the row from a to izzard--
'Cause I wuz a-standin' as clost to 'em
As me an' you is!

Tell you the way it wuz--
An' I do n't want to see,
Like some fellers does,
When they 're goern to be
Any kind o' fuss--
On'y makes a rumpus wuss
Far to interfere
When their dander's riz--
But I wuz a-standin' as clost to 'em
As me an' you is!

I wuz kind o' strayin'
Past the blame saloon--
Heerd some fiddler playin'
That 'ole hee-cup tune!
Sort o' stopped, you know,
Far a minit er so,
And wuz jes' about

Settin' down, when-- Jeemses-whizz!
Whole durn winder-sash fell out!
An' there laid Doc McGriff, and Mike
A-straddlin' him, all bloody-like,
An' both a-gittin' down to biz!--
An' I wuz a-standin' as clost to 'em

As me an' you is!

I wuz the on'y man aroun'--
(Durn old-fogy town!
'Peared more like, to me,
Sund'y 'an _Saturd'y!_)
Dog come 'crost the road
An' tuck a smell
An' put right back;
Mishler driv by 'ith a load
O' cantalo'pes he couldn't sell--
Too mad, 'y jack!
To even ast
What wuz up, as he went past!
Weather most outrageous hot!--
Fairly hear it sizz
Roun' Dock an' Mike--till Dock he shot,
An' Mike he slacked that grip o' his
An' fell, all spraddled out. Dock riz
'Bout half up, a-spittin' red,
An' shuck his head--
An' I wuz a-standin' as clost to 'em
As me an' you is!

An' Dock he says,
A-whisperin'-like,--
'It hain't no use
A-tryin'!--Mike
He's jes' ripped my daylights loose!--
Git that blame-don fiddler to
Let up, an' come out here--You
Got some burryin' to do,--
Mike makes _one_, an' I expects
In ten seconds I'll make _two_!
And he drapped back, where he riz,
'Crost Mike's body, black and blue,
Like a great big letter X!--
An' I wuz a-standin' as clost to 'em
As me an' you is!

James Whitcomb Riley

The Wife-Blessed

I.

In youth he wrought, with eyes a-blur,
Lorn-faced and long of hair--
In youth--in youth he painted her
A sister of the air--
Could clasp her not, but felt the stir
Of pinions everywhere.

II.

She lured his gaze, in braver days,
And tranced him sirenwise;
And he did paint her, through a haze
Of sullen paradise,
With scars of kisses on her face
And embers in her eyes.

III.

And now--nor dream nor wild conceit--
Though faltering, as before--
Through tears he paints her, as is meet,
Tracing the dear face o'er
With liliated patience meek and sweet
As Mother Mary wore.

James Whitcomb Riley

The Willow

Who shall sing a simple ditty about the Willow,
Dainty-fine and delicate as any bending spray
That dandles high the dainty bird that flutters there to trill a
Tremulously tender song of greeting to the May.

Bravest, too, of all the trees! -- none to match your daring,--
First of greens to greet the Spring and lead in leafy sheen;--
Aye, and you're the last -- almost into winter wearing
Still the leaf of loyalty -- still the badge of green.

Ah, my lovely willow! --let the waters lilt your graces,--
They alone with limped kisses lave your leaves above,
Flashing back your silvan beauty, and in shady places
Peering up with glimmering pebbles, like the eyes of love.

James Whitcomb Riley

Their Sweet Sorrow

They meet to say farewell: Their way
Of saying this is hard to say--.
He holds her hand an Instant, wholly
Distressed-- and she unclasps it slowly,

He lends his gaze evasively
Over the printed page that she
Recurr to, with a new-moon shoulder
Glimpsed from the lace-mists that infold her.

The clock, beneath its crystal cup,
Discreetly clicks-- 'Quick! Act! Speak up!'
A tension circles both her slender
Wrists-- and her raised eyes flash in splendor,

Even as he feels his dazzled own--.
Then blindingly, round either thrown,
They feel a stress of arms that ever
Strain tremblingly-- and 'Never! Never!'

Is whispered brokenly, with half
A sob, like a belated laugh--,
While cloyingly their blurred kiss closes--,
Sweet as the dew's lip to the rose's.

James Whitcomb Riley

Them Flowers

Take a feller 'at's sick and laid up on the shelf,
All shaky, and ga'nted, and pore--
Jes all so knocked out he can't handle hisself
With a stiff upper-lip any more;
Shet him up all alone in the gloom of a room
As dark as the tomb, and as grim,
And then take and send him some roses in bloom,
And you can have fun out o' him!

You've ketched him 'fore now--when his liver was sound
And his appetite notched like a saw--
A-mockin' you, mayby, fer romancin' round
With a big posy-bunch in yer paw;
But you ketch him, say, when his health is away,
And he's flat on his back in distress,
And _then_ you kin trot out yer little bokay
And not be insulted, I guess!

You see, it's like this, what his weaknesses is,--
Them flowers makes him think of the days
Of his innocent youth, and that mother o' his,
And the roses that _she_ us't to raise:--
So here, all alone with the roses you send--
Bein' sick and all trimbly and faint,--
My eyes is--my eyes is--my eyes is--old friend--
Is a-leakin'--I'm blamed ef they ain't!

James Whitcomb Riley

There Was A Cherry-Tree

There was a cherry-tree. Its bloomy snows
Cool even now the fevered sight that knows
No more its airy visions of pure joy --
As when you were a boy.

There was a cherry-tree. The Bluejay sat
His blue against its white -- O blue as jet
He seemed there then!-- But now -- Whoever knew
He was so pale a blue!

There was a cherry-tree -- our child-eyes saw
The miracle:-- Its pure white snows did thaw
Into a crimson fruitage, far too sweet
But for a boy to eat.

There was a cherry-tree, give thanks and joy!--
There was a bloom of snow -- There was a boy --
There was a bluejay of the realest blue --
And fruit for both of you.

James Whitcomb Riley

Thinkin' Back

I've ben thinkin' back, of late,
S'prisin'!--And I'm here to state
I'm suspicious it's a sign
Of _age_, maybe, or decline
Of my faculties,--and yit
I'm not _feelin'_ old a bit--
Any more than sixty-four
Ain't no _young_ man any more!

Thinkin' back's a thing 'at grows
On a feller, I suppose--
Older 'at he gits, i jack,
More he keeps a-thinkin' back!
Old as old men git to be,
Er as middle-aged as me,
Folks'll find us, eye and mind
Fixed on what we've left behind--
Rehabilitatin'-like
Them old times we used to hike
Out barefooted fer the crick,
'Long 'bout _Aprile first_--to pick
Out some 'warmest' place to go
In a-swimmin'-- _Ooh! my-oh!_
Wonder now we hadn't died!
Grate horseradish on my hide
Jes' _a-thinkin'_ how cold then
That-'ere worter must 'a' ben!

Thinkin' back--W'y, goodness me!
I kin call their names and see
Every little tad I played
With, er fought, er was afraid
Of, and so made _him_ the best
Friend I had of all the rest!

Thinkin' back, I even hear
Them a-callin', high and clear,
Up the crick-banks, where they seem
Still hid in there--like a dream--

And me still a-pantin' on
The green pathway they have gone!
Still they hide, by bend er ford--
Still they hide--but, thank the Lord,
(Thinkin' back, as I have said),
I hear laughin' on ahead!

James Whitcomb Riley

Thomas The Pretender

Tommy's alluz playin' jokes,
An' actin' up, an' foolin' folks;
An' wunst one time he creep
In Pa's big chair, he did, one night,
An' squint an' shut his eyes bofe tight,
An' say, 'Now I 'm asleep.'
An' nen we knowed, an' Ma know' too,
He ain't asleep no more 'n you!

An' wunst he clumbed on our back'fence
An' flop his arms an' nen commence
To crow, like he's a hen;
But when he failed off, like he done,
He didn't fool us childern none,
Ner didn't crow again.
An' our Hired Man, as he come by,
Says, 'Tom can't crow, but he kin cry.'

James Whitcomb Riley

Thoughts Fer The Discouraged Farmer

The summer winds is sniffin' round the bloomin'
locus' trees;
And the clover in the pastur is a big day fer the bees,
And they been a-swiggin' honey, above board and on the
sly,
Tel they stutter in theyr buzzin' and stagger as they fly.
The flicker on the fence-rail 'pears to jest spit on his
wings
And roll up his feathers, by the sassy way he sings;
And the hoss-fly is a-whettin'-up his forelegs fer biz,
And the off-mare is a-switchin' all of her tale they is.

You can hear the blackbirds jawin' as they foller up the
plow--
Oh, theyr bound to git theyr brekfast, and theyr not
a-carin' how;
So they quarrel in the furries, and they quarrel on the
wing--
But theyr peaceabler in pot-pies than any other thing:
And it's when I git my shotgun drawed up in stiddy rest,
She's as full of tribbellation as a yeller-jacket's nest;
And a few shots before dinner, when the sun's a-shinin'
right,
Seems to kindo'-sorto' sharpen up a feller's appetite!

They's been a heap o' rain, but the sun's out to-day,
And the clouds of the wet spell is all cleared away,
And the woods is all the greener, and the grass is greener
still;
It may rain again to-morry, but I don't think it will.
Some says the crops is ruined, and the corn's drownded
out,
And propha-sy the wheat will be a failure, without doubt;
But the kind Providence that has never failed us yet,
Will be on hands onc't more at the 'leventh hour, I bet!

Does the medder-lark complane, as he swims high and
dry
Through the waves of the wind and the blue of the sky?

Does the quail set up and whissel in a disappointed way,
Er hang his head in silunce, and sorrow all the day?
Is the chipmuck's health a-failin'?--Does he walk, er does
he run?
Don't the buzzards ooze around up thare just like they've
allus done?
Is they anything the matter with the rooster's lungs er
voice?
Ort a mortul be complainin' when dumb animals rejoice?

Then let us, one and all, be contentud with our lot;
The June is here this morning, and the sun is shining hot.
Oh! let us fill our harts up with the glory of the day,
And banish ev'ry doubt and care and sorrow fur away!
Whatever be our station, with Providence fer guide,
Sich fine circumstances ort to make us satisfied;
Fer the world is full of roses, and the roses full of dew,
And the dew is full of heavenly love that drips fer me
and you.

James Whitcomb Riley

Three Dead Friends

Always suddenly they are gone--
The friends we trusted and held secure--
Suddenly we are gazing on,
Not a _smiling_ face, but the marble-pure
Dead mask of a face that nevermore
To a smile of ours will make reply--
The lips close-locked as the eyelids are--
Gone--swift as the flash of the molten ore
A meteor pours through a midnight sky,
Leaving it blind of a single star.

Tell us, O Death, Remorseless Might!
What is this old, unescapable ire
You wreak on us?--from the birth of light
Till the world be charred to a core of fire!
We do no evil thing to you--
We seek to evade you--that is all--
That is your will--you will not be known
Of men. What, then, would you have us do?--
Cringe, and wait till your vengeance fall,
And your graves be fed, and the trumpet blown?

You desire no friends; but _we_--O we
Need them so, as we falter here,
Fumbling through each new vacancy,
As each is stricken that we hold dear.
One you struck but a year ago;
And one not a month ago; and one--
(God's vast pity!)--and one lies now
Where the widow wails, in her nameless woe,
And the soldiers pace, with the sword and gun,
Where the comrade sleeps, with the laureled brow.

And what did the first?--that wayward soul,
Clothed of sorrow, yet nude of sin,
And with all hearts bowed in the strange control
Of the heavenly voice of his violin.
Why, it was music the way he _stood_,
So grand was the poise of the head and so

Full was the figure of majesty!--
One heard with the eyes, as a deaf man would,
And with all sense brimmed to the overflow
With tears of anguish and ecstasy.

And what did the girl, with the great warm light
Of genius sunning her eyes of blue,
With her heart so pure, and her soul so white--
What, O Death, did she do to you?
Through field and wood as a child she strayed,
As Nature, the dear sweet mother led;
While from her canvas, mirrored back,
Glimmered the stream through the everglade
Where the grapevine trailed from the trees to wed
Its likeness of emerald, blue and black.

And what did he, who, the last of these,
Faced you, with never a fear, O Death?
Did you hate _him_ that he loved the breeze,
And the morning dews, and the rose's breath?
Did you hate him that he answered not
Your hate again--but turned, instead,
His only hate on his country's wrongs?
Well--you possess him, dead!--but what
Of the good he wrought? With laureled head
He bides with us in his deeds and songs.

Laureled, first, that he bravely fought,
And forged a way to our flag's release;
Laureled, next--for the harp he taught
To wake glad songs in the days of peace--
Songs of the woodland haunts he held
As close in his love as they held their bloom
In their inmost bosoms of leaf and vine--
Songs that echoed, and pulsed and welled
Through the town's pent streets, and the sick child's room,
Pure as a shower in soft sunshine.

Claim them, Death; yet their fame endures,
What friend next will you rend from us
In that cold, pitiless way of yours,
And leave us a grief more dolorous?

Speak to us!--tell us, O Dreadful Power!--
Are we to have not a lone friend left?--
Since, frozen, sodden, or green the sod,--
In every second of every hour,
Some one, Death, you have left thus bereft,
Half inaudibly shrieks to God.

James Whitcomb Riley

Through Sleepy-Land

Where do you go when you go to sleep,
Little Boy! Little Boy! where?
'Way--'way in where's Little Bo-Peep,
And Little Boy Blue, and the Cows and Sheep
A-wandering 'way in there;--in there--
A-wandering 'way in there!

And what do you see when lost in dreams,
Little Boy, 'way in there?
Firefly-glimmers and glowworm-gleams,
And silvery, low, slow-sliding streams,
And mermaids, smiling out--'way in where
They're a-hiding--'way in there!

Where do you go when the Fairies call,
Little Boy! Little Boy! where?
Wade through the clews of the grasses tall,
Hearing the weir and the waterfall
And the Wee Folk--'way in there--in there--
And the Kelpies--'way in there!

And what do you do when you wake at dawn,
Little Boy! Little Boy! what?
Hug my Mommy and kiss her on
Her smiling eyelids, sweet and wan,
And tell her everything I've forgot
About, a-wandering 'way in there--
Through the blind-world 'way in there!

James Whitcomb Riley

Time

1

The ticking-- ticking-- ticking of the clock--!
That vexed me so last night--! 'For though Time keeps
Such drowsy watch,' I moaned, 'he never sleeps,
But only nods above the world to mock
Its restless occupant, then rudely rock
It as the cradle of a babe that weeps!
I seemed to see the seconds piled in heaps
Like sand about me; and at every shock
O' the bell, the piled sands were swirled away
As by a desert-storm that swept the earth
Stark as a granary floor, whereon the gray
And mist-bedrizzled moon amidst the dearth
Came crawling, like a sickly child, to lay
Its pale face next mine own and weep for day.

2

Wait for the morning! Ah! We wait indeed
For daylight, we who toss about through stress
Of vacant-armed desires and emptiness
Of all the warm, warm touches that we need,
And the warm kisses upon which we feed
Our famished lips in fancy! May God bless
The starved lips of us with but one caress
Warm as the yearning blood our poor hearts bleed...!
A wild prayer--! Bite thy pillow, praying so--
Toss this side, and whirl that, and moan for dawn;
Let the clock's seconds dribble out their woe,
And Time be drained of sorrow! Long ago
We heard the crowing cock, with answer drawn
As hoarsely sad at throat as sobs... Pray on!

James Whitcomb Riley

Time Of Clearer Twitterings

I.

Time of crisp and tawny leaves,
And of tarnished harvest sheaves,
And of dusty grasses--weeds--
Thistles, with their tufted seeds
Voyaging the Autumn breeze
Like as fairy argosies:
Time of quicker flash of wings,
And of clearer twitterings
In the grove, or deeper shade
Of the tangled everglade,--
Where the spotted water-snake
Coils him in the sunniest brake;
And the bittern, as in fright,
Darts, in sudden, slanting flight,
Southward, while the startled crane
Films his eyes in dreams again.

II

Down along the dwindled creek
We go loitering. We speak
Only with old questionings
Of the dear remembered things
Of the days of long ago,
When the stream seemed thus and so
In our boyish eyes:--The bank
Greener then, through rank on rank
Of the mottled sycamores,
Touching tops across the shores:
Here, the hazel thicket stood--
There, the almost pathless wood
Where the shellbark hickory tree
Rained its wealth on you and me.
Autumn! as you loved us then,
Take us to your heart again!

III

Season halest of the year!
How the zestful atmosphere
Nettles blood and brain, and smites
Into life the old delights
We have tasted in our youth,
And our graver years, forsooth!
How again the boyish heart
Leaps to see the chipmunk start
From the brush and sleek the sun
Very beauty, as he runs!
How again a subtle hint
Of crushed pennyroyal or mint,
Sends us on our knees, as when
We were truant boys of ten--
Brown marauders of the wood,
Merrier than Robin Hood!

IV

Ah! will any minstrel say,
In his sweetest roundelay,
What is sweeter, after all,
Than black haws, in early Fall--
Fruit so sweet the frost first sat,
Dainty-toothed, and nibbled at!
And will any poet sing
Of a lusher, richer thing
Than a ripe May-apple, rolled
Like a pulpy lump of gold
Under thumb and finger-tips,
And poured molten through the lips?
Go, ye bards of classic themes,
Pipe your songs by classic streams!
I would twang the redbird's wings
In the thicket while he sings!

James Whitcomb Riley

To A Boy Whistling

The smiling face of a happy boy
With its enchanted key
Is now unlocking in memory
My store of heartiest joy.

And my lost life again to-day,
In pleasant colors all aglow,
From rainbow tints, to pure white snow,
Is a panorama sliding away.

The whistled air of a simple tune
Eddies and whirls my thoughts around,
As fairy balloons of thistle-down
Sail through the air of June.

O happy boy with untaught grace!
What is there in the world to give
That can buy one hour of the life you live
Or the trivial cause of your smiling face!

James Whitcomb Riley

To An Importunate Ghost

Get gone, thou most uncomfortable ghost!
Thou really dost annoy me with thy thin
Impalpable transparency of grin;
And the vague, shadowy shape of thee almost
Hath vexed me beyond boundary and coast
Of my broad patience. Stay thy chattering chin,
And reel the tauntings of thy vain tongue in,
Nor tempt me further with thy vaporish boast
That I am helpless to combat thee! Well,
Have at thee, then! Yet if a doom most dire
Thou wouldst escape, flee whilst thou canst!--Revile
Me not, Miasmatic Mist!--Rank Air! retire!
One instant longer and thou hauntest me, I'll
Inhale thee, O thou wraith despicable!

James Whitcomb Riley

To Annie

When the lids of dusk are falling
O'er the dreamy eyes of day,
And the whippoorwills are calling,
And the lesson laid away,--
May Mem'ry soft and tender
As the prelude of the night,
Bend over you and render
As tranquil a delight.

James Whitcomb Riley

To Hear Her Sing

To hear her sing--to hear her sing--
It is to hear the birds of Spring
In dewy groves on blooming sprays
Pour out their blithest roundelays.

It is to hear the robin trill
At morning, or the whip-poor-will
At dusk, when stars are blossoming--
To hear her sing--to hear her sing!

To hear her sing--it is to hear
The laugh of childhood ringing clear
In woody path or grassy lane
Our feet may never fare again.

Faint, far away as Memory dwells,
It is to hear the village bells
At twilight, as the truant hears
Them, hastening home, with smiles and tears.

Such joy it is to hear her sing,
We fall in love with everything--
The simple things of every day
Grow lovelier than words can say.

The idle brooks that purl across
The gleaming pebbles and the moss,
We love no less than classic streams--
The Rhines and Arnos of our dreams.

To hear her sing--with folded eyes,
It is, beneath Venetian skies,
To hear the gondoliers' refrain,
Or troubadours of sunny Spain.--

To hear the bulbul's voice that shook
The throat that trilled for Lalla Rookh:
What wonder we in homage bring
Our hearts to her--to hear her sing!

James Whitcomb Riley

To My Good Master

In fancy, always, at thy desk, thrown wide,
Thy most betreasured books ranged neighborly--
The rarest rhymes of every land and sea
And curious tongue--thine old face glorified,--
Thou haltest thy glib quill, and, laughing-eyed,
Givest hale welcome even unto me,
Profaning thus thine attic's sanctity,
To briefly visit, yet to still abide
Enthralled there of thy sorcery of wit,
And thy songs' most exceeding dear conceits.
O lips, cleft to the ripe core of all sweets,
With poems, like nectar, issuing therefrom,
Thy gentle utterances do overcome
My listening heart and all the love of it!

James Whitcomb Riley

To My Old Friend, William Leachman

Fer forty year and better you have been a friend to me,
Through days of sore afflictions and dire adversity,
You allus had a kind word of counsul to impart,
Which was like a healin' 'intment to the sorrow of my hart.

When I burried my first womern, William Leachman, it was you
Had the only consolation that I could listen to--
Fer I knowed you had gone through it and had rallied from the blow,
And when you said I'd do the same, I knowed you'd ort to know.

But that time I'll long remember; how I wundered here and thare--
Through the settin'-room and kitchen, and out in the open air--
And the snowflakes whirlin', whirlin', and the fields a frozen glare,
And the neighbors' sleds and wagons congergatin' ev'rywhare.

I turned my eyes to'rds heaven, but the sun was hid away;
I turned my eyes to'rds earth again, but all was cold and gray;
And the clock, like ice a-crackin', clickt the icy hours in two--
And my eyes'd never thawed out ef it hadn't been fer you!

We set thare by the smoke-house--me and you out thare alone--
Me a-thinkin'--you a-talkin' in a soothin' undertone--
You a-talkin'--me a-thinkin' of the summers long ago,
And a-writin' 'Marthy--Marthy' with my finger in the snow!

William Leachman, I can see you jest as plane as I could then;
And your hand is on my shoulder, and you rouse me up again,
And I see the tears a-drippin' from your own eyes, as you say:
'Be rickonciled and bear it--we but linger fer a day!'

At the last Old Settlers' Meetin' we went j'intly, you and me--
Your hosses and my wagon, as you wanted it to be;
And sence I can remember, from the time we've neighbored here,
In all sich friendly actions you have double-done your sheer.

It was better than the meetin', too, that nine-mile talk we had
Of the times when we first settled here and travel was so bad;
When we had to go on hoss-back, and sometimes on 'Shanks's mare,'
And 'blaze' a road fer them behind that had to travel thare.

And now we was a-trottin' 'long a level gravel pike,
In a big two-hoss road-wagon, jest as easy as you like--
Two of us on the front seat, and our wimmern-folks behind,
A-settin' in theyr Winsor-cheers in perfect peace of mind!

And we pinte'd out old landmarks, nearly faded out of sight:--
Thare they ust to rob the stage-coach; thare Gash Morgan had the fight
With the old stag-deer that pronged him--how he battled fer his life,
And lived to prove the story by the handle of his knife.

Thare the first griss-mill was put up in the Settlement, and we
Had tuck our grindin' to it in the Fall of Forty-three--
When we tuck our rifles with us, techin' elbows all the way,
And a-stickin' right together ev'ry minute, night and day.

Thare ust to stand the tavern that they called the 'Travelers' Rest,'
And thare, beyent the covered bridge, 'The Counter-fitters' Nest'--
Whare they claimed the house was ha'nted--that a man was murdered thare,
And burried underneath the floor, er 'round the place somewhere.

And the old Plank-road they laid along in Fifty-one er two--
You know we talked about the times when that old road was new:
How 'Uncle Sam' put down that road and never taxed the State
Was a problem, don't you rickollect, we couldn't _dim_-onstrate?

Ways was devius, William Leachman, that me and you has past;
But as I found you true at first, I find you true at last;
And, now the time's a-comin' mighty nigh our jurney's end,
I want to throw wide open all my soul to you, my friend.

With the stren'th of all my bein', and the heat of hart and brane,
And ev'ry livin' drop of blood in artery and vane,
I love you and respect you, and I venerate your name,
Fer the name of William Leachman and True Manhood's jest the same!

James Whitcomb Riley

To Robert Burns

Sweet Singer that I loe the maist
O' ony, sin' wi' eager haste
I smacket bairn-lips ower the taste
O' hinnied sang,
I hail thee, though a blessed ghaist
In Heaven lang!

For weel I ken, nae cantie phrase,
Nor courtly airs, nor lairdly ways,
Could gar me freer blame, or praise,
Or proffer hand,
Where 'Rantin' Robbie' and his lays
Thegither stand.

And sae these hamely lines I send,
Wi' jinglin' words at ilka end,
In echo o' the sangs that wend
Frae thee to me
Like simmer-brooks, wi' mony a bend
O' wimplin' glee.

In fancy, as wi' dewy een,
I part the clouds aboon the scene
Where thou wast born, and peer atween,
I see nae spot
In a' the Hielands half sae green
And unforgot?

I see nae storied castle-hall,
Wi' banners flauntin' ower the wall
And serf and page in ready call,
Sae grand to me
As ane puir cotter's hut, wi' all
Its poverty.

There where the simple daisy grew
Sae bonnie sweet, and modest too,
Thy liltin' filled its wee head fu'
O' sic a grace,

It aye is weepin' tears o' dew
Wi' droopit face.

Frae where the heather bluebells fling
Their sangs o' fragrance to the Spring,
To where the lavrock soars to sing,
Still lives thy strain,
For' a' the birds are twittering
Sangs like thine ain.

And aye, by light o' sun or moon,
By banks o' Ayr, or Bonnie Doon,
The waters lilt nae tender tune
But sweeter seems
Because they poured their limpid rune
Through a' thy dreams.

Wi' brimmin' lip, and laughin' ee,
Thou shookest even Grief wi' glee,
Yet had nae niggart sympathy
Where Sorrow bowed,
But gavest a' thy tears as free
As a' thy gowd.

And sae it is we be thy name
To see bleeze up wi' sic a flame,
That a' pretentious stars o' fame
Maun blink asklent,
To see how simple worth may shame
Their brightest glent.

James Whitcomb Riley

To Santa Claus

Most tangible of all the gods that be,
O Santa Claus-- our own since Infancy!
As first we scampered to thee-- now, as then,
Take us as children to thy heart again.

Be wholly good to us, just as of old:
As a pleased father, let thine arms infold
Us, homed within the haven of thy love,
And all the cheer and wholesomeness thereof.

Thou lone reality, when O so long
Life's unrealities have wrought us wrong:
Ambition hath allured us--, fame likewise,
And all that promised honor in men's eyes.

Throughout the world's evasions, wiles, and shifts,
Thou only bidest stable as thy gifts--:
A grateful king re-ruleth from thy lap,
Crowned with a little tinsel soldier-cap:

A mighty general-- a nation's pride--
Thou givest again a rocking-horse to ride,
And wildly glad he groweth as the grim
Old jurist with the drum thou givest him:

The sculptor's chisel, at thy mirth's command,
Is as a whistle in his boyish hand;
The painters model fadeth utterly,
And there thou standest--, and he painteth thee--:

Most like a winter pippin, sound and fine
And tingling-red that ripe old face of thine,
Set in thy frosty beard of cheek and chin
As midst the snows the thaws of spring set in.

Ho! Santa Claus-- our own since Infancy--
Most tangible of all the gods that be--!
As first we scampered to thee-- now, as then,
Take us as children to thy heart again.

James Whitcomb Riley

To The Judge

A Voice From the Interior of Old Hoop-Pole Township

Friend of my earliest youth,
Can't you arrange to come down
And visit a fellow out here in the woods--
Out of the dust of the town?
Can't you forget you're a Judge
And put by your dolorous frown
And tan your wan face in the smile of a friend--
Can't you arrange to come down?

Can't you forget for a while
The arguments prosy and drear,--
To lean at full-length in indefinite rest
In the lap of the greenery here?
Can't you kick over 'the Bench,'
And 'husk' yourself out of your gown
To dangle your legs where the fishing is good--
Can't you arrange to come down?

Bah! for your office of State!
And bah! for its technical lore!
What does our President, high in his chair,
But wish himself low as before!
Pick between peasant and king,--
Poke your bald head through a crown
Or shadow it here with the laurels of Spring!--
Can't you arrange to come down?

'Judge it' out _here_, if you will,--
The birds are in session by dawn;
You can draw, not _complaints_, but a sketch of the hill
And a breath that your betters have drawn;
You can open your heart, like a case,
To a jury of kine, white and brown,
And their verdict of 'Moo' will just satisfy you!--
Can't you arrange to come down?

Can't you arrange it, old Pard?--
Pigeonhole Blackstone and Kent!--
Here we have 'Breitmann,' and Ward,
Twain, Burdette, Nye, and content!
Can't you forget you're a Judge
And put by your dolorous frown
And tan your wan face in the smile of a friend--
Can't you arrange to come down?

James Whitcomb Riley

To The Serenader

Tinkle on, O sweet guitar,
Let the dancing fingers
Loiter where the low notes are
Blended with the singer's:
Let the midnight pour the moon's
Mellow wine of glory
Down upon him through the tune's
Old romantic story!

I am listening, my love,
Through the cautious lattice,
Wondering why the stars above
All are blinking at us;
Wondering if his eyes from there
Catch the moonbeam's shimmer
As it lights the robe I wear
With a ghostly glimmer.

Lilt thy song, and lute away
In the wildest fashion:--
Pour thy rippling roundelay
O'er the heights of passion!--
Flash it down the fretted strings
Till thy mad lips, missing
All but smothered whisperings,
Press this rose I'm kissing.

James Whitcomb Riley

Told By

Coming, clean from the Maryland-end
Of this great National Road of ours,
Through your vast West; with the time to spend,
Stopping for days in the main towns, where
Every citizen seemed a friend,
And friends grew thick as the wayside flowers,--
I found no thing that I might narrate
More singularly strange or queer
Than a thing I found in your sister-state
Ohio,--at a river-town--down here
In my notebook: _Zanesville--situate
On the stream Muskingum--broad and clear,
And navigable, through half the year,
North, to Coshocton; south, as far
As Marietta._--But these facts are
Not of the _story_, but the _scene_
Of the simple little tale I mean
To tell _directly_--from this, straight through
To the _end_ that is best worth listening to:

Eastward of Zanesville, two or three
Miles from the town, as our stage drove in,
I on the driver's seat, and he
Pointing out this and that to me,--
On beyond us--among the rest--
A grove slope, and a fluttering throng
Of little children, which he 'guessed'
Was a picnic, as we caught their thin
High laughter, as we drove along,
Clearer and clearer. Then suddenly
He turned and asked, with a curious grin,
What were my views on _Slavery? 'Why?_'
I asked, in return, with a wary eye.
'Because,' he answered, pointing his whip
At a little, whitewashed house and shed
On the edge of the road by the grove ahead,--
'Because there are two slaves _there_,'
'Two Black slaves that I've passed each trip
For eighteen years.--Though they've been set free,

They have been slaves ever since!' said he.
And, as our horses slowly drew
Nearer the little house in view,
All briefly I heard the history
Of this little old Negro woman and
Her husband, house and scrap of land;
How they were slaves and had been made free
By their dying master, years ago
In old Virginia; and then had come
North here into a _free_ state--so,
Safe forever, to found a home--
For themselves alone?--for they left South there
Five strong sons, who had, alas!
All been sold ere it came to pass
This first old master with his last breath
Had freed the _parents_.--(He went to death
Agonized and in dire despair
That the poor slave _children_ might not share
Their parents' freedom. And wildly then
He moaned for pardon and died. Amen!)

Thus, with their freedom, and little sum
Of money left them, these two had come
North, full twenty long years ago;
And, settling there, they had hopefully
Gone to work, in their simple way,
Hauling--gardening--raising sweet
Corn, and popcorn.--Bird and bee
In the garden-blooms and the apple-tree
Singing with them throughout the slow
Summer's day, with its dust and heat--
The crops that thirst and the rains that fail;
Or in Autumn chill, when the clouds hung low,
And hand-made hominy might find sale
In the near town-market; or baking pies
And cakes, to range in alluring show
At the little window, where the eyes
Of the Movers' children, driving past,
Grew fixed, till the big white wagons drew
Into a halt that would sometimes last
Even the space of an hour or two--
As the dusty, thirsty travelers made

Their noonings there in the beeches' shade
By the old black Aunty's spring-house, where,
Along with its cooling draughts, were found
Jugs of her famous sweet spruce-beer,
Served with her gingerbread-horses there,
While Aunty's snow-white cap bobbed 'round
Till the children's rapture knew no bound,
As she sang and danced for them, quavering clear
And high the chant of her old slave-days--

'Oh, Lo'd, Jinny! my toes is so',
Dancin' on yo' sandy flo'!

Even so had they wrought all ways
To earn the pennies, and hoard them, too,--
And with what ultimate end in view?--
They were saving up money enough to be
Able, in time, to buy their own
Five children back.

Ah! the toil gone through!
And the long delays and the heartaches, too,
And self-denials that they had known!
But the pride and glory that was theirs
When they first hitched up their shackly cart
For the long, long journey South.--The start
In the first drear light of the chilly dawn,
With no friends gathered in grieving throng,--
With no farewells and favoring prayers;
But, as they creaked and jolted on,
Their chiming voices broke in song--

"Hail, all hail! don't you see the stars a-fallin'?
Hail, all hail! I'm on my way.
Gideon[1] am
A healin' ba'm--
I belong to the blood-washed army.
Gideon am
A healin' ba'm--
On my way!"

And their _return!_--with their oldest boy

Along with them! Why, their happiness
Spread abroad till it grew a joy
Universal --It even reached
And thrilled the town till the _Church_ was stirred
Into suspecting that wrong was wrong!--
And it stayed awake as the preacher preached
A _Real_ 'Love'-text that he had not long
To ransack for in the Holy Word.

And the son, restored, and welcomed so,
Found service readily in the town;
And, with the parents, sure and slow,
He went 'saltin' de cole cash down.'

So with the _next_ boy--and each one
In turn, till _four_ of the five at last
Had been bought back; and, in each case,
With steady work and good homes not
Far from the parents, _they_ chipped in
To the family fund, with an equal grace.
Thus they managed and planned and wrought,
And the old folks throve--Till the night before
They were to start for the lone last son
In the rainy dawn--their money fast
Hid away in the house,--two mean,
Murderous robbers burst the door.
...Then, in the dark, was a scuffle--a fall--
An old man's gasping cry--and then
A woman's fife-like shriek.

...Three men
Splashing by on horseback heard
The summons: And in an instant all
Sprung to their duty, with scarce a word.
And they were _in time_ --not only to save
The lives of the old folks, but to bag
Both the robbers, and buck-and-gag
And land them safe in the county-jail--
Or, as Aunty said, with a blended awe
And subtlety,--'Safe in de calaboose whah
De dawgs caint bite 'em!'

--So prevail
The faithful!--So had the Lord upheld
His servants of both deed and prayer,--
HIS the glory unparalleled--
Theirs the reward,--their every son
Free, at last, as the parents were!
And, as the driver ended there
In front of the little house, I said,
All fervently, 'Well done! well done!'
At which he smiled, and turned his head
And pulled on the leaders' lines and--'See!'
He said,--"you can read old Aunty's sign?"
And, peering down through these specs of mine
On a little, square board-sign, I read:

'Stop, traveler, if you think it fit,
And quench your thirst for a-fip-and-a-bit.
The rocky spring is very clear,
And soon converted into beer.'

And, though I read aloud, I could
Scarce hear myself for laugh and shout
Of children--a glad multitude
Of little people, swarming out
Of the picnic-grounds I spoke about.--
And in their rapturous midst, I see
Again--through mists of memory--
A black old Negress laughing up
At the driver, with her broad lips rolled
Back from her teeth, chalk-white, and gums
Redder than reddest red-ripe plums.
He took from her hand the lifted cup
Of clear spring-water, pure and cold,
And passed it to me: And I raised my hat
And drank to her with a reverence that
My conscience knew was justly due
The old black face, and the old eyes, too--
The old black head, with its mossy mat
Of hair, set under its cap and frills
White as the snows on Alpine hills;
Drank to the old _black_ smile, but yet
Bright as the sun on the violet,--

Drank to the gnarled and knuckled old
Black hands whose palms had ached and bled
And pitilessly been worn pale
And white almost as the palms that hold
Slavery's lash while the victim's wail
Fails as a crippled prayer might fail.--
Aye, with a reverence infinite,
I drank to the old black face and head--
The old black breast with its life of light--
The old black hide with its heart of gold.

James Whitcomb Riley

Tom Johnson's Quit

A passel o' the boys last night--
An' me amongst 'em--kindo got
To talkin' Temper'nce left an' right,
An' workin' up 'blue-ribbon,' _hot_;
An' while we was a-countin' jes'
How many bed gone into hit
An' signed the pledge, some feller says,--
'Tom Johnson's quit!'

We laughed, of course--'cause Tom, you know,
He's spiled more whisky, boy an' man,
And seed more trouble, high an' low,
Than any chap but Tom could stand:
And so, says I '_He's_' too nigh dead.
Far Temper'nce to benefit!
The feller sighed agin, and said--
'Tom Johnson's quit!'

We all _liked_ Tom, an' that was why
We sorto simmered down agin,
And ast the feller ser'ously
Ef he wa'n't tryin' to draw us in:
He shuck his head--tuck off his hat--
Helt up his hand an' opened hit,
An' says, says he, 'I'll _swear_ to that--
Tom Johnson's quit!'

Well, we was stumpt, an' tickled too,--
Because we knowed ef Tom _had_ signed
Ther wa'n't no man 'at wore the 'blue'
'At was more honeste inclined:
An' then and there we kindo riz,--
The hull dern gang of us 'at bit--
An' th'owed our hats and let 'er whizz,--
'_Tom Johnson's quit!_'

I've heerd 'em holler when the balls
Was buzzin' 'round us wus 'n bees,
An' when the ole flag on the walls

Was flappin' o'er the enemy's,
I've heerd a-many a wild 'hooray'
'At made my heart git up an' git--
But Lord!--to hear 'em shout that way!--
'_Tom Johnson's quit!_'

But when we saw the chap 'at fetched
The news wa'n't jinin' in the cheer,
But stood there solemn-like, an' reched
An' kindo wiped away a tear,
We someway sorto' stilled agin,
And listened--I kin hear him yit,
His voice a-wobblin' with his chin,--
'Tom Johnson's quit--

'I hain't a-givin' you no game--
I wisht I was!... An hour ago,
This operator--what's his name--
The one 'at works at night, you know?--
Went out to flag that Ten Express,
And sees a man in front of hit
Th'ow up his hands an' stagger--yes,--
'_Tom Johnson's quit_.'

James Whitcomb Riley

Tom Van Arden

Tom Van Arden, my old friend,
Our warm fellowship is one
Far too old to comprehend
Where its bond was first begun:
Mirage-like before my gaze
Gleams a land of other days,
Where two truant boys, astray,
Dream their lazy lives away.

There's a vision, in the guise
Of Midsummer, where the Past
Like a weary beggar lies
In the shadow Time has cast;
And as blends the bloom of trees
With the drowsy hum of bees,
Fragrant thoughts and murmurs blend,
Tom Van Arden, my old friend.

Tom Van Arden, my old friend,
All the pleasures we have known
Thrill me now as I extend
This old hand and grasp your own--
Feeling, in the rude caress,
All affection's tenderness;
Feeling, though the touch be rough,
Our old souls are soft enough.

So we'll make a mellow hour:
Fill your pipe, and taste the wine--
Warp your face, if it be sour,
I can spare a smile from mine;
If it sharpen up your wit,
Let me feel the edge of it--
I have eager ears to lend,
Tom Van Arden, my old friend.

Tom Van Arden, my old friend,
Are we 'lucky dogs,' indeed?
Are we all that we pretend

In the jolly life we lead?--
Bachelors, we must confess,
Boast of 'single blessedness'
To the world, but not alone--
Man's best sorrow is his own!

And the saddest truth is this,--
Life to us has never proved
What we tasted in the kiss
Of the women we have loved:
Vainly we congratulate
Our escape from such a fate
As their lying lips could send,
Tom Van Arden, my old friend!

Tom Van Arden, my old friend,
Hearts, like fruit upon the stem,
Ripen sweetest, I contend,
As the frost falls over them:
Your regard for me to-day
Makes November taste of May,
And through every vein of rhyme
Pours the blood of summer-time.

When our souls are cramped with youth
Happiness seems far away
In the future, while, in truth,

We look back on it to-day
Through our tears, nor dare to boast,--
'Better to have loved and lost!'
Broken hearts are hard to mend,
Tom Van Arden, my old friend.

Tom Van Arden, my old friend,
I grow prosy, and you tire;
Fill the glasses while I bend
To prod up the failing fire. . . .
You are restless:--I presume
There's a dampness in the room.--
Much of warmth our nature begs,
With rheumatics in our legs! . . .

Humph! the legs we used to fling
Limber-jointed in the dance,
When we heard the fiddle ring
Up the curtain of Romance,
And in crowded public halls
Played with hearts like jugglers' balls.--
FEATS OF MOUNTEBANKS, DEPEND!--
Tom Van Arden, my old friend.

Tom Van Arden, my old friend,
Pardon, then, this theme of mine:
While the firelight leaps to lend
Higher color to the wine,--
I propose a health to those
Who have HOMES, and home's repose,
Wife- and child-love without end!
. . . Tom Van Arden, my old friend.

James Whitcomb Riley

Tugg Martin

I.

Tugg Martin's tough.--No doubt o' that!
And down there at
The town he come from word's bin sent
Advisin' this-here Settle-ment
To kindo' _humor_ Tugg, and not
To git him hot--
Jest pass his imperfections by,
And he's as good as pie!

II.

They claim he's _wanted_ back there.--Yit
The officers they mostly quit
Insistin' when
They notice Tugg's so _back'ard_, and
Sorto' gives 'em to understand
He druther not!--A Deputy
(The slickest one you ever see!)
Tackled him _last_--'disguisin' then,'
As Tugg says, 'as a gentlemen!--
You 'd ort o' hear _Tugg_ tell it!--_My_!
I thought I'd _die_!

III.

The way it wuz;--Tugg and the rest
The boys wuz jest
A-kindo' gittin' thawed out, down
At 'Guss's Place,' fur-end o' town,
One night, when, first we knowed,
Some feller rode
Up in a buggy at the door,
And hollered fer some one to come
And fetch him some
Red-licker out--And whirped and swore
That colt he drove wuz '_Thompson's_' shore!

IV.

Guss went out, and come in agin
And filled a pint and tuck it out--
Stayed quite a spell--then peeked back in,
Half-hid-like where the light wuz dim,
And jieuiked his head
At Tugg and said,--
'Come out a minute--here's a gent
Wants you to take a drink with him.'

V.

Well--Tugg laid down his cards and went--
In fact, _we all_
Got up, you know,
Startin' to go--
When in reels Guss aginst the wall,
As white as snow,
Gaspin',--'_He's tuck Tugg!--wher's my gun_?'
And-sir, outside we heerd
The hoss snort and kick up his heels
Like he wuz skeerd,
And then the buggy-wheels
Scrape--and then Tugg's voice hollerun',--
'I'm bested!--Good-bye, fellers!' . . . 'Peared
S' all-fired suddent,
Nobody couldn't
Jest git it fixed,--tel hoss and man,
Buggy and Tugg, off through the dark
Went like the devil beatin' tan-
Bark!

VI.

What _could_ we do? . . . We filed back to
The bar: And Guss jest _looked_ at us,
And we looked back 'The same as you,'
Still sayin' nothin'--And the sap

It stood in every eye,
And every hat and cap
Went off, as we teched glasses solemnly,
And Guss says-he:
'Ef it's 'good-bye' with Tugg, fer _shore_,--I say
God bless him!--Er ef they
Aint raily no _need_ to pray,
I'm not reniggin!--board's the play,
And here's God bless him, anyway!'

VII.

It must a-bin an hour er so
We all set there,
Talkin o' pore
Old Tugg, you know,
'At never, wuz ketched up before--
When--all slow-like--the door-
Knob turned--and Tugg come shamblin' in,
Hand-cuffed'--'at's what he wuz, I swear!--
Yit smilin,' like he hadn't bin
Away at all! And when we ast him where
The _Deputy_ wuz at,--'I don't know where,' Tugg said,--
'All _I_ know is--he's dead.'

James Whitcomb Riley

Uncle Mart's Poem

THE OLD SNOW-MAN

Ho! the old Snow-Man
That Noey Bixler made!
He looked as fierce and sassy
As a soldier on parade!--
'Cause Noey, when he made him,
While we all wuz gone, you see,
He made him, jist a-purpose,
Jist as fierce as he could be!--
But when we all got _ust_ to him,
Nobody wuz afraid
Of the old Snow-Man
That Noey Bixler made!

'Cause Noey told us 'bout him
And what he made him fer:--
He'd come to feed, that morning
He found we wuzn't here;
And so the notion struck him,
When we all come taggin' home
'Tud _s'prise_ us ef a' old Snow-Man
'Ud meet us when we come!
So, when he'd fed the stock, and milked,
And ben back home, and chopped
His wood, and et his breakfast, he
Jist grabbed his mitts and hopped
Right in on that-air old Snow-Man
That he laid out he'd make
Er bust a trace _a-tryin_'--jist
Fer old-acquaintance sake!--
But work like that wuz lots more fun.
He said, than when he played!
Ho! the old Snow-Man
That Noey Bixler made!

He started with a big snow-ball,
And rolled it all around;
And as he rolled, more snow 'ud stick

And pull up off the ground.--
He rolled and rolled all round the yard--
'Cause we could see the _track_,
All wher' the snow come off, you know,
And left it wet and black.
He got the Snow-Man's _legs-part_ rolled--
In front the kitchen-door,--
And then he hat to turn in then
And roll and roll some more!--
He rolled the yard all round agin,
And round the house, at that--
Clean round the house and back to wher'
The blame legs-half wuz at!
He said he missed his dinner, too--
Jist clean fergot and stayed
There workin'. Ho! the old Snow-Man
That Noey Bixler made!

And Noey said he hat to _hump_
To git the _top-half_ on
The _legs-half!_--When he _did_, he said,
His wind wuz purt'-nigh gone.--
He said, I jucks! he jist drapped down
There on the old porch-floor
And panted like a dog!--And then
He up! and rolled some more!--
The _last_ batch--that wuz fer his head,--
And--time he'd got it right
And clumb and fixed it on, he said--
He hat to quit fer night!--
And _then_, he said, he'd kep' right on
Ef they'd ben any _moon_
To work by! So he crawled in bed--
And _could_ a-slep' tel _noon_,
He wuz so plum wore out! he said,--
But it wuz washin'-day,
And hat to cut a cord o' wood
'Fore he could git away!

But, last, he got to work agin,--
With spade, and gouge, and hoe,
And trowel, too--(All tools 'ud do

What _Noey_ said, you know!)
He cut his eyebrows out like cliffs--
And his cheekbones and chin
Stuck _further_ out--and his old _nose_
Stuck out as fur-agin!
He made his eyes o' walnuts,
And his whiskers out o' this
Here buggy-cushion stuffin'--_moss_,
The teacher says it is.
And then he made a' old wood'-gun,
Set keerless-like, you know,
Acrost one shoulder--kindo' like
Big Foot, er Adam Poe--
Er, mayby, Simon Girty,
The dinged old Renegade!
Wooh! the old Snow-Man
That Noey Bixler made!

And there he stood, all fierce and grim,
A stern, heroic form:
What was the winter blast to him,
And what the driving storm?--
What wonder that the children pressed
Their faces at the pane
And scratched away the frost, in pride
To look on him again?--
What wonder that, with yearning bold,
Their all of love and care
Went warmest through the keenest cold
To that Snow-Man out there!

But the old Snow-Man--
What a dubious delight
He grew at last when Spring came on
And days waxed warm and bright.--
Alone he stood--all kith and kin
Of snow and ice were gone;--
Alone, with constant teardrops in
His eyes and glittering on
His thin, pathetic beard of black--
Grief in a hopeless cause!--
Hope--hope is for the man that _dies_--

What for the man that _thaws!_
O Hero of a hero's make!--
Let _marble_ melt and fade,
But never _you_ --you old Snow-Man
That Noey Bixler made!

James Whitcomb Riley

Unless

Who has not wanted, does not guess
What plenty is.--Who has not groped
In depths of doubt and hopelessness,
Has never truly hoped.--

Unless, sometimes, a shadow falls
Upon his mirth, and veils his sight,
And from the darkness drifts the light
Of love at intervals.

And that most dear of everything,
I hold, is love; and who can sit
With lightest heart and laugh and sing,
Knows not the worth of it.--
Unless, in some strange throng, perchance,
He feels how thrilling sweet it is,
One yearning look that answers his --
The truth of glance and glance.

Who knows not pain, knows not, alas!
What pleasure is.--Who knows not of
The bitter cup that will not pass,
Knows not the taste of love.
O souls that thirst, and hearts that fast,
And natures faint with famishing,
God lift and lead and safely bring
You to your own at last!

James Whitcomb Riley

Up And Down Old Brandywine

Up and down old Brandywine,
In the days 'at's past and gone--
With a dad-burn hook-and line
And a saplin' pole--swawn!
I've had more fun, to the square
Inch, than ever ANYwhere!
Heaven to come can't discount MINE
Up and down old Brandywine!

Hain't no sense in WISHIN'--yit
Wisht to goodness I COULD jes
'Gee' the blame' world round and git
Back to that old happiness!--
Kindo' drive back in the shade
'The old Covered Bridge' there laid
'Crosst the crick, and sorto' soak
My soul over, hub and spoke!

Honest, now!--it hain't no DREAM
'At I'm wantin',--but THE FAC'S
As they wuz; the same old stream,
And the same old times, i jacks!--
Gim me back my bare feet--and
Stonebruise too!--And scratched and tanned!
And let hottest dog-days shine
Up and down old Brandywine!

In and on betwixt the trees
'Long the banks, pour down yer noon,
Kindo' curdled with the breeze
And the yallerhammer's tune;
And the smokin', chokin' dust
O' the turnpike at its wusst--
SATURD'YS, say, when it seems
Road's jes jammed with country teams!--

Whilse the old town, fur away
'Crosst the hazy pastur'-land,
Dozed-like in the heat o' day

Peaceful' as a hired hand.
Jolt the gravel th'ough the floor
O' the old bridge!--grind and roar
With yer blame percession-line--
Up and down old Brandywine!

Souse me and my new straw-hat
Off the foot-log!--what I care?--
Fist shoved in the crown o' that--
Like the old Clown ust to wear.
Wouldn't swop it fer a' old
Gin-u-wine raal crown o' gold!--
Keep yer KING ef you'll gim me
Jes the boy I ust to be!

Spill my fishin'-worms! er steal
My best 'goggle-eye!--but you
Can't lay hands on joys I feel
Nibblin' like they ust to do!
So, in memory, to-day
Same old ripple lips away
At my 'cork' and saggin' line,
Up and down old Bradywine!

There the logs is, round the hill,
Where 'Old Irvin' ust to lift
Out sunfish from daylight till
Dewfall--'fore he'd leave 'The Drift'
And give US a chance--and then
Kindo' fish back home again,
Ketchin' 'em jes left and right
Where WE hadn't got 'a bite!

Er, 'way windin' out and in,--
Old path th'ough the iurnweeds
And dog-fennel to yer chin--
Then come suddent, th'ough the reeds
And cat-tails, smack into where
Them--air woods--hogs ust to scare
Us clean 'crosst the County-line,
Up and down old Brandywine!

But the dim roar o' the dam
It 'ud coax us furder still
To'rds the old race, slow and ca'm,
Slidin' on to Huston's mill--
Where, I'spect, 'The Freeport crowd'
Never WARMED to us er 'lowed
We wuz quite so overly
Welcome as we aimed to be.

Still it 'peared like ever'thing--
Fur away from home as THERE--
Had more RELISH-like, i jing!--
Fish in stream, er bird in air!
O them rich old bottom-lands,
Past where Cowden's Schoolhouse stands!
Wortermelons--MASTER-MINE!
Up and down old Brandywine!

And sich pop-paws!--Lumps o' raw
Gold and green,--jes oozy th'ough
With ripe yaller--like you've saw
Custard-pie with no crust to:
And jes GORGES o' wild plums,
Till a feller'd suck his thumbs
Clean up to his elbows! MY!--
ME SOME MORE ER LEM ME DIE!

Up and down old Brandywine! ...
Stripe me with pokeberry-juice!--
Flick me with a pizenvine
And yell 'Yip!' and lem me loose!
--Old now as I then wuz young,
'F I could sing as I HAVE sung,
Song 'ud surely ring DEE-VINE
Up and down old Brandywine!

James Whitcomb Riley

Wait For The Morning

Wait for the morning:--It will come, indeed,
As surely as the night hath given need.
The yearning eyes, at last, will strain their sight
No more unanswered by the morning light;
No longer will they vainly strive, through tears,
To pierce the darkness of thy doubts and fears,
But, bathed in balmy dews and rays of dawn,
Will smile with rapture o'er the darkness drawn.

Wait for the morning, O thou smitten child,
Scorned, scourged and persecuted and reviled--
Athirst and famishing, none pitying thee,
Crowned with the twisted thorns of agony--
No faintest gleam of sunlight through the dense
Infinity of gloom to lead thee thence--
Wait for the morning:--It will come, indeed,
As surely as the night hath given need.

James Whitcomb Riley

Waitin' Fer The Cat To Die

Lawzy! don't I rickollect
That-'air old swing in the lane!
Right and proper, I expect,
Old times _can't_ come back again;
But I want to state, ef they
Could come back, and I could say
What _my_ pick 'ud be, i jing!
I'd say, Gimme the old swing
'Nunder the old locus'-trees
On the old place, ef you please!--
Danglin' there with half-shet eye,
Waitin' fer the cat to die!

I'd say, Gimme the old gang
Of barefooted, hungry, lean,
Ornry boys you want to hang
When you're growed up twic't as mean!
The old gyarden-patch, the old
Truants, and the stuff we stol'd!
The old stompin'-groun', where we
Wore the grass off, wild and free
As the swoop of the old swing,
Where we ust to climb and cling,
And twist roun', and fight, and lie--
Waitin' fer the cat to die!

'Pears like I 'most allus could
Swing the highest of the crowd--
Jes sail up there tel I stood
Downside-up, and screech out loud,--
Ketch my breath, and jes drap back
Fer to let the old swing slack,
Yit my tow-head dippin' still
In the green boughs, and the chill
Up my backbone taperin' down,
With my shadder on the ground'
Slow and slower trailin' by--
Waitin' fer the cat to die!

Now my daughter's little Jane's
Got a kind o' baby-swing
On the porch, so's when it rains
She kin play there--little thing!
And I'd limped out t'other day
With my old cheer this-a-way,
Swingin' _her_ and rockin' too,
Thinkin' how _I_ ust to do
At _her_ age, when suddently,
'Hey, Gran'pap!' she says to me,
'Why you rock so slow?' ... Says I,
'Waitin' fer the cat to die!'

James Whitcomb Riley

Want To Be Whur Mother Is

'Want to be whur mother is! Want to be whur mother is!
Jeemses Rivers! won't some one ever shet that howl o' his?
That-air yellin' drives me wild!
Cain't none of ye stop the child?
Want jer Daddy? 'Naw.' Gee whizz!
'Want to be whur mother is!'

'Want to be whur mother is! Want to be whur mother is!
Coax him, Sairy! Mary, sing somepin far him! Lift him, Liz--
Bang the clock-bell with the key--
Er the _meat-ax!_ Gee-mun-nee!
Listen to them lungs o' his!
'Want to be whur mother is!'

'Want to be whur mother is! Want to be whur mother is!
Preacher guess'll pound all night on that old pulpit o' his;
'Pears to me some wimmin jest
Shows religious interest
Mostly 'fore their fambly's riz!
'Want to be whur mother is!'

* * * * *

'Want to be whur mother is! Want to be whur mother is!
Nights like these and whipperwills allus brings that voice of his!
Sairy; Mary; 'Lizabeth;
Don't set there and ketch yer death
In the dew--er rheumatiz--
Want to be whur mother is?

James Whitcomb Riley

Wash Lowry's Reminiscence

And you're the poet of this concern?
I've seed your name in print
A dozen times, but I'll be dern
I'd 'a' never 'a' took the hint
O' the size you are--fer I'd pictured you
A kind of a tallish man--
Dark-complected and sallor too,
And on the consumpted plan.

'Stid o' that you're little and small,
With a milk-and-water face--
'Thout no snap in your eyes at all,
Er nothin' to suit the case!
Kind o'look like a--I don't know--
One o' these fair-ground chaps
That runs a thingamajig to blow,
Er a candy-stand perhaps.

'Li I've allus thought that poetry
Was a sort of a--some disease--
Fer I knowed a poet once, and he
Was techy and hard to please,
And moody-like, and kindo' sad
And didn't seem to mix
With other folks--like his health was bad,
Er his liver out o' fix.

Used to teach fer a livelihood--
There's folks in Pipe Crick yit
Remembers him--and he was good
At cipherin' I'll admit--
And posted up in G'ography
But when it comes to tact,
And gittin' along with the school, you see,
He fizzled, and that's a fact!

Boarded with us fer fourteen months
And in all that time I'll say
We never caughted him a-sleepin' once

Er idle a single day.
But shucks! It made him worse and worse
A-writin' rhymes and stuff,
And the school committee used to furse
'At the school warn't good enough.

He warn't as strict as he ought to been,
And never was known to whip,
Or even to keep a scholard in
At work at his penmanship;
'Stid o' that he'd learn 'em notes,
And have 'em every day,
Spilin' hymns and a-splittin' th'oats
With his 'Do-sol-fa-me-ra!'

Tel finally it was jest agreed
We'd have to let him go,
And we all felt bad--we did indeed,
When we come to tell him so;
Fer I remember, he turned so white,
And smiled so sad, somehow,
I someway felt it wasn't right,
And I'm shore it wasn't now!

He hadn't no complaints at all--
He bid the school adieu,
And all o' the scholards great and small
Was mighty sorry too!
And when he closed that afternoon
They sung some lines that he
Had writ a purpose, to some old tune
That suited the case, you see.

And then he lingered and delayed
And wouldn't go away--
And shet himself in his room and stayed
A-writin' from day to day;
And kep' a-gittin' stranger still,
And thinner all the time,
You know, as any feller will
On nothin' else but rhyme.

He didn't seem adzactly right,
Er like he was crossed in love,
He'd work away night after night,
And walk the floor above;
We'd hear him read and talk, and sing
So lonesome-like and low,
My woman's cried like ever'thing--
'Way in the night, you know.

And when at last he tuck to bed
He'd have his ink and pen;
'So's he could coat the muse' he said,
'He'd die contented then';
And jest before he past away
He read with dyin' gaze
The epitaph that stands to-day
To show you where he lays.

And ever sence then I've allus thought
That poetry's some disease,
And them like you that's got it ought
To watch their q's and p's ;
And leave the sweets of rhyme, to sup
On the wholesome draughts of toil,
And git your health recruited up
By plowin' in rougher soil.

James Whitcomb Riley

We Are Not Always Glad When We Smile

We are not always glad when we smile:
Though we wear a fair face and are gay,
And the world we deceive
May not ever believe
We could laugh in a happier way.--
Yet, down in the deeps of the soul,
Ofttimes, with our faces aglow,
There's an ache and a moan
That we know of alone,
And as only the hopeless may know.

We are not always glad when we smile,--
For the heart, in a tempest of pain,
May live in the guise
Of a smile in the eyes
As a rainbow may live in the rain;
And the stormiest night of our woe
May hang out a radiant star
Whose light in the sky
Of despair is a lie
As black as the thunder-clouds are.

We are not always glad when we smile!--
But the conscience is quick to record,
All the sorrow and sin
We are hiding within
Is plain in the sight of the Lord:
And ever, O ever, till pride
And evasion shall cease to defile
The sacred recess
Of the soul, we confess
We are not always glad when we smile.

James Whitcomb Riley

We Must Believe

'Lord, I believe: help Thou mine unbelief.'

We must believe--

Being from birth endowed with love and trust--
Born unto loving;--and how simply just
That love--that faith!--even in the blossom-face
The babe drops dreamward in its resting-place,
Intuitively conscious of the sure
Awakening to rapture ever pure
And sweet and saintly as the mother's own,
Or the awed father's, as his arms are thrown
O'er wife and child, to round about them weave
And wind and bind them as one harvest-sheaf
Of love--to cleave to, and _forever_ cleave....
Lord, I believe:
Help Thou mine unbelief.

We must believe--

Impelled since infancy to seek some clear
Fulfillment, still withheld all seekers here;--
For never have we seen perfection nor
The glory we are ever seeking for:
But we _have_ seen--all mortal souls as one--
Have seen its _promise_, in the morning sun--
Its blest assurance, in the stars of night;--
The ever-dawning of the dark to light;--
The tears down-falling from all eyes that grieve--
The eyes uplifting from all deeps of grief,
Yearning for what at last we shall receive....
Lord, I believe:
Help Thou mine unbelief.

We must believe--

For still all unappeased our hunger goes,
From life's first waking, to its last repose:
The briefest life of any babe, or man
Outwearing even the allotted span,
Is each a life unfinished--incomplete:

For these, then, of th' outworn, or unworn feet
Denied one toddling step--O there must be
Some fair, green, flowery pathway endlessly
Winding through lands Elysian! Lord, receive
And lead each as Thine Own Child--even the Chief
Of us who didst Immortal life achieve....

Lord, I believe:

Help Thou mine unbelief.

James Whitcomb Riley

We Must Get Home

We must get home! How could we stray like this?--
So far from home, we know not where it is,--
Only in some fair, apple-blossomy place
Of children's faces--and the mother's face--
We dimly dream it, till the vision clears
Even in the eyes of fancy, glad with tears.

We must get home--for we have been away
So long, it seems forever and a day!
And O so very homesick we have grown,
The laughter of the world is like a moan
In our tired hearing, and its song as vain,--
We must get home--we must get home again!

We must get home! With heart and soul we yearn
To find the long-lost pathway, and return!...
The child's shout lifted from the questing band
Of old folk, faring weary, hand in hand,
But faces brightening, as if clouds at last
Were showering sunshine on us as we passed.

We must get home: It hurts so staying here,
Where fond hearts must be wept out tear by tear,
And where to wear wet lashes means, at best,
When most our lack, the least our hope of rest--
When most our need of joy, the more our pain--
We must get home--we must get home again!

We must get home--home to the simple things--
The morning-glories twirling up the strings
And bugling color, as they blared in blue-
And-white o'er garden-gates we scampered through;
The long grape-arbor, with its under-shade
Blue as the green and purple overlaid.

We must get home: All is so quiet there:
The touch of loving hands on brow and hair--
Dim rooms, wherein the sunshine is made mild--
The lost love of the mother and the child

Restored in restful lullabies of rain,--
We must get home--we must get home again!

The rows of sweetcorn and the China beans
Beyond the lettuce-beds where, towering, leans
The giant sunflower in barbaric pride
Guarding the barn-door and the lane outside;
The honeysuckles, midst the hollyhocks,
That clamber almost to the martin-box.

We must get home, where, as we nod and drowse,
Time humors us and tiptoes through the house,
And loves us best when sleeping baby-wise,
With dreams--not tear-drops--brimming our clenched eyes,--
Pure dreams that know nor taint nor earthly stain--
We must get home--we must get home again!

We must get home! The willow-whistle's call
Trills crisp and liquid as the waterfall--
Mocking the trillers in the cherry-trees
And making discord of such rhymes as these,
That know nor lilt nor cadence but the birds
First warbled--then all poets afterwards.

We must get home; and, unremembering there
All gain of all ambition elsewhere,
Rest--from the feverish victory, and the crown
Of conquest whose waste glory weighs us down.--
Fame's fairest gifts we toss back with disdain--
We must get home--we must get home again!

We must get home again--we must--we must!--
(Our rainy faces pelted in the dust)
Creep back from the vain quest through endless strife
To find not anywhere in all of life
A happier happiness than blest us then ...
We must get home--we must get home again!

James Whitcomb Riley

We To Sigh Instead Of Sing

"Rain and Rain! and rain and rain!"
Yesterday we muttered
Grimly as the grim refrain
That the thunders uttered:
All the heavens under cloud --
All the sunshine sleeping;
All the grasses limply bowed
With their weight of weeping.

Sigh and sigh! and sigh and sigh!
Never end of sighing;
Rain and rain for our reply --
Hopes half-drowned and dying;
Peering through the window-pane,
Naught but endless raining --
Endless sighing, and, as vain,
Endlessly complaining.

Shine and shine! and shine and shine!
Ah! to-day the splendor!--
All this glory yours and mine --
God! but God is tender!
We to sigh instead of sing,
Yesterday in sorrow,
While the lord was fashioning
This for our To-morrow!

James Whitcomb Riley

Wet Weather Talk

It ain't no use to grumble and complain;
It's jest as cheap and easy to rejoice:
When God sorts out the weather and sends rain,
W'y, rain's my choice.

Men giner'ly, to all intents--
Although they're ap' to grumble some--
Puts most their trust in Providence,
And takes things as they come;--
That is, the commonality
Of men that's lived as long as me,
Has watched the world enough to learn
They're not the boss of the concern.

With some, of course, it's different--
I've seed young men that knowed it all,
And didn't like the way things went
On this terrestrial ball!
But, all the same, the rain some way
Rained jest as hard on picnic-day;
Er when they raily wanted it,
It maybe wouldn't rain a bit!

In this existence, dry and wet
Will overtake the best of men--
Some little skift o' clouds'll shet
The sun off now and then;
But maybe, while you're wondern' who
You've fool-like lent your umbrell' to,
And want it--out'll pop the sun,
And you'll be glad you ain't got none!

It aggervates the farmers, too--
They's too much wet, er too much sun,
Er work, er waiting round to do
Before the plowin''s done;
And maybe, like as not, the wheat,
Jest as it's lookin' hard to beat,
Will ketch the storm--and jest about

The time the corn 's a-jintin' out!

These here cy-clones a-foolin' round--
And back'ard crops--and wind and rain,
And yit the corn that's wallered down
May elbow up again!

They ain't no sense, as I kin see,
In mortals, sich as you and me,
A-faultin' Nature's wise intents,
And lockin' horns with Providence!

It ain't no use to grumble and complain;
It's jest as cheap and easy to rejoice:
When God sorts out the weather and sends rain,
W'y, rain's my choice.

James Whitcomb Riley

What Chris'Mas Fetched The Wigginses

Wintertime, er Summertime,
Of late years I notice I'm,
Kindo'-like, more subjec' to
What the _weather_ is. Now, you
Folks 'at lives in town, I s'pose,
Thinks its bully when it snows;
But the chap 'at chops and hauls
Yer wood fer ye, and then stalls,
And snapps tuggs and swingletrees,
And then has to walk er freeze,
Haint so much 'stuck on' the snow
As stuck _in_ it--Bless ye, no!--
When its packed, and sleighin's good,
And _church_ in the neighborhood,
Them 'at's _got_ their girls, I guess,
Takes 'em, likely, more er less,
Tell the plain facts o' the case,
No men-folks about our place
On'y me and Pap--and he
'Lows 'at young folks' company
Allus made him sick! So I
Jes don't want, and jes don't try!
Chinkypin, the dad-burn town,
'S too fur off to loaf aroun'
Either day er night--and no
Law compellin' me to go!--
'Less 'n some Old-Settlers' Day,
Er big-doin's thataway--
Then, to tell the p'inted fac',
I've went more so's to come back
By old Guthrie's 'still-house, where
Minors _has_ got licker there--
That's pervidin' we could show 'em
Old folks sent fer it from home!
Visit roun' the neighbors some,
When the boys wants me to come.--
Coon-hunt with 'em; er set traps
Fer mussrats; er jes, perhaps,
Lay in roun' the stove, you know,

And parch corn, and let her snow!
Mostly, nights like these, you'll be
(Ef you' got a writ fer _me_)
Ap' to skeer me up, I guess,
In about the Wigginses.
Nothin' roun' _our_ place to keep
Me at home--with Pap asleep
'Fore it's dark; and Mother in
Mango pickles to her chin;
And the girls, all still as death,
Piecin' quilts.--Sence I drawed breath
Twenty year' ago, and heerd
Some girls wisper'n' so's it 'peared
Like they had a row o' pins
In their mouth--right there begins
My first rickollections, built
On that-air blame old piece-quilt!

Summertime, it's jes the same--
'Cause I've noticed,--and I claim,
As I said afore, I'm more
Subjec' to the weather, _shore_,
'Proachin' my majority,
Than I ever ust to be!
Callin' back _last_ Summer, say,--
Don't seem hardly past away--
With night closin' in, and all
S' lonesome-like in the dew-fail:
Bats--ad-drat their ugly muggs!--
Flickern' by; and lightnin'-bugs
Huckstern' roun' the airly night
Little sickly gasps o' light;--
Whip-poor-wills, like all possessed,
Moanin' out their mournfullest;--
Frogs and katydids and things
Jes clubs in and sings and sings
Their _ding-dangdest_!--Stock's all fed,
And Pap's washed his feet fer bed;--
Mother and the girls all down
At the milk-shed, foolin' roun'--
No wunder 'at I git blue,
And lite out--and so would you!

I caint stay aroun' no place
Whur they haint no livin' face:--
'Crost the fields and thue the gaps
Of the hills they's friends, perhaps,
Waitin' somers, 'at kin be
Kindo' comfertin' to me!

Neighbors all 'is plenty good,
Scattered thue this neighborhood;
Yit, of all, I like to jes
Drap in on the Wigginses.--
Old man, and old lady too,
'Pear-like, makes so much o' you--,
Least, they've allus pampered me
Like one of the fambily.--
The boys, too, 's all thataway--
Want you jes to come and stay;--
Price, and Chape, and Mandaville,
Poke, Chasteen, and 'Catfish Bill'--
Poke's the runt of all the rest,
But he's jes the beatinest
Little schemer, fer fourteen,
Anybody ever seen!--
'Like his namesake,' old man claims,
'Jeems K. Poke, the first o' names!
Full o' tricks and jokes--and you
Never know what _Poke's_ go' do!'
Genius, too, that-air boy is,
With them awk'ard hands o' his:
Gits this blame pokeberry-juice,
Er some stuff, fer ink--and goose-
Quill pen-p'int: And then he'll draw
Dogdest pictures yevver saw!
Er make deers and eagles good
As a writin'-teacher could!
Then they's two twin boys they've riz
Of old Coonrod Wigginses
'At's deceast--and glad of it,
'Cause his widder's livin' yit!

Course _the boys_ is mostly jes'
Why I go to Wigginses.---

Though _Melviney_, sometimes, _she_
Gits her slate and algebray
And jes' sets there ciphern' thue
Sums old Ray hisse'f caint do!--
Jes' sets there, and tilts her chair
Forreds tel, 'pear-like, her hair
Jes' _spills_ in her lap--and then
She jes' dips it up again
With her hands, as white, I swan,
As the apern she's got on!

Talk o' hospitality!--
Go to Wigginses with me--
Overhet, or froze plum thue,
You'll find welcome waitin' you:--
Th'ow out yer tobacker 'fore
You set foot acrost that floor,--
'Got to eat whatever's set--
Got to drink whatever's wet!'
Old man's sentimuns--them's his---
And means jes the best they is!
Then he lights his pipe; and she,
The old lady, presen'ly
She lights her'n; and Chape and Poke.
I haint got none, ner don't smoke,--
(In the crick afore their door--
Sorto so's 'at I'd be shore--
Drownded mine one night and says
'I won't smoke at _Wigginses_!')Price he's mostly talkin' 'bout
Politics, and 'thieves turned out'--
What he's go' to be, ef he
Ever 'gits there'--and 'we'll see!--
Poke he 'lows they's blame few men
Go' to hold their breath tel then!
Then Melviney smiles, as she
Goes on with her algebray,
And the clouds clear, and the room's
Sweeter 'n crabapple-blooms!
(That Melviney, she' got some
Most surprisin' ways, I gum!--
Don't 'pear like she ever _says_

Nothin', yit you'll _listen_ jes
Like she was a-talkin', and
Half-way seem to understand,
But not quite,--_Poke_ does, I know,
'Cause he good as told me so,--
Poke's her favo-rite; and he--
That is, confidentially--
He's _my_ favo-rite--and I
Got my whurfore and my why!)

I haint never ben no hand
Much at talkin', understand,
But they's _thoughts_ o' mine 'at's jes
Jealous o' them Wigginses!--
Gift o' talkin 's what they got,
Whether they want to er not--
F'r instunce, start the old man on
Huntin'-scrapes, 'fore game was gone,
'Way back in the Forties, when
Bears stold pigs right out the pen,
Er went waltzin' 'crost the farm
With a bee-hive on their arm!--
And--sir, _ping_! the old man's gun
Has plumped-over many a one,
Firin' at him from afore
That-air very cabin-door!
Yes--and _painters_, prowlin' 'bout,
Allus darkest nights.--Lay out
Clost yer cattle.--Great, big red
Eyes a-blazin' in their head,
Glittern' 'long the timber-line--
Shine out some, and then _un_-shine,
And shine back--Then, stiddy! whizz!
'N there yer Mr. Painter is
With a hole bored spang between
Them-air eyes! Er start Chasteen,
Say, on blooded racin'-stock,
Ef you want to hear him talk;
Er tobacker--how to raise,
Store, and k-yore it, so's she pays:
The old lady--and she'll cote
Scriptur' tel she'll git yer vote!

Prove to you 'at wrong is right,
Jes as plain as black is white:
Prove when you're asleep in bed
You're a-standin' on yer head,
And yer train 'at's goin' West,
'S goin' East its level best;
And when bees dies, it's their wings
Wears out--and a thousand things!
And the boys is 'chips,' you know;
'Off the old block'--So I go
To the Wigginses, 'cause--jes
'Cause I like the Wigginses--
Even ef Melviney she
Hardly 'pears to notice me!

Rid to Chinkypin this week--
Yisterd'y.--No snow to speak
Of, and didn't have no sleigh
Anyhow; so, as I say,
I rid in--and froze one ear
And both heels--and I don't keer!--
'Mother and the girls kin jes
Bother 'bout their Chris'mases
Next time fer theirse'vs_, I jack!
Thinks-says-I, a-startin' back,--
Whole durn meal-bag full of things
Wrapped in paper-sacks, and strings
Liable to snap their holt
Jes at any little jolt!
That in front o' me, and wind
With nicks in it, 'at jes skinned
Me alive!--I'm here to say
Nine mile' hossback thataway
Would a-walked my log! But, as
Somepin' allus comes to pass,
As I topped old Guthrie's hill.
Saw a buggy, front the 'Still,
P'inted home'ards, and a thin
Little chap jes climbin' in.
Six more minutes I were there
On the groun's'--And course it were--

It were little Poke--and he
Nearly fainted to see me!--
'You ben in to Chinky, too?'
'Yes; and go' ride back with you,'
I-says-I. He he'pped me find
Room fer my things in behind--
Stript my hoss's reins down, and
Put his mitt' on the right hand
So's to lead--'Pile in!' says he,
'But you 've struck pore company!'
Noticed he was pale--looked sick,
Kindo-like, and had a quick
Way o' flickin' them-air eyes
O' his roun' 'at didn't size
Up right with his usual style--
s' I, 'You well?' He tried to smile,
But his chin shuck and tears come.--
'_I've run 'Viney 'way from home_!'

Don't know jes what all occurred
Next ten seconds--Nary word,
But my heart jes drapt, stobbed thue,
And whirlt over and come to.--
Wrenched a big quart bottle from
That fool-boy!--and cut my thumb
On his little fiste-teeth--helt
Him snug in one arm, and felt
That-air little heart o' his
Churn the blood o' Wigginses
Into that old bead 'at spun
Roun' her, spilt at Lexington!
His k'nptions, like enough,
He'pped us both,--though it was rough--
Rough on him, and rougher on
Me when last his nerve was gone,
And he laid there still, his face
Fishin' fer some hidin'-place
Jes a leetle lower down
In my breast than he 'd yit foun'!

Last I kindo' soothed him, so's
He could talk.--And what you s'pose

Them-air revelations of
Poke's was? . . . He'd ben writin' love-
Letters to Melviney, and
Givin her to understand
They was from 'a young man who
Loved her,' and--'the violet's blue
'N sugar's sweet'--and Lord knows what!
Tel, 'peared-like, Melviney got
S' interested in 'the young
Man,' Poke _he_ says, 'at she brung
A' answer onc't fer him to take,
Statin' 'she'd die fer his sake,'
And writ fifty xs 'fer
Love-kisses fer him from her!'
I was standin' in the road
By the buggy, all I knowed
When Poke got that fer.--'That's why,'
Poke says, 'I 'fessed up the lie--
Had to--'cause I see,' says he,
"Viney was in airnest--she
Cried, too, when I told her.--Then
She swore me, and smiled again,
And got Pap and Mother to
Let me hitch and drive her thue
Into Chinkypin, to be
At Aunt 'Rindy's Chris'mas-tree--
That's to-night.' Says I, 'Poke--durn
Your lyin' soul!--'s that beau o' hern--
That--_she_--loves--Does _he_ live in
That hellhole o' Chinkypin?'
'No,' says Poke, 'er 'Viney would
Went some _other_ neighborhood.'
'Who _is_ the blame whelp?' says I.
'Promised 'Viney, hope I'd die
Ef I ever told!' says Poke,
Pittiful and jes heart-broke--
"Sides that's why she left the place,--
'She caint look him in the face
Now no more on earth!' she says.--'
And the child broke down and jes
Sobbed! Says I, 'Poke, I p'tend
T' be _your_ friend, and your _Pap's_ friend,

And your _Mother's_ friend, and all
The _boys_' friend, little, large and small--
The _whole family's_ friend--and you
Know that means _Melviney_, too.--
Now--you hush yer troublin!--I'm
Go' to he'p friends ever' time--
On'y in _this_ case, _you_ got
To he'p _me_--and, like as not
I kin he'p Melviney then,
And we'll have her home again.
And now, Poke, with your consent,
I'm go' go to that-air gent
She's in love with, and confer
With _him_ on his views o' _her_.--
Blast him! give the man _some_ show.--
Who is he?--_I'm go' to know_!
Somepin' struck the little chap
Funny, 'peared-like.--Give a slap
On his leg--laughed thue the dew
In his eyes, and says: 'It's you!'

Yes, and--'cordin' to the last
Love-letters of ours 'at passed
Thue his hands--we was to be
Married Chris'mas.--'Gee-mun-_nee_!
Poke,' says I, 'it's _suddent_--yit
We _kin_ make it! You're to git
Up tomorry, say, 'bout _three_--
Tell your folks you're go' with me:--
We'll hitch up, and jes drive in
'N take the town o' Chinky-pin!'

James Whitcomb Riley

What Smith Knew About Farming

There wasn't two purtier farms in the state
Than the couple of which I'm about to relate;--
Jinin' each other--belongin' to Brown,
And jest at the edge of a flourishin' town.
Brown was a man, as I understand,
That allus had handled a good 'eal o' land,
And was sharp as a tack in drivin' a trade--
For that's the way most of his money was made.
And all the grounds and the orchards about
His two pet farms was all tricked out
With poppies and posies
And sweet-smellin' rosies;
And hundreds o' kinds
Of all sorts o' vines,
To tickle the most horticultural minds
And little dwarf trees not as thick as your wrist
With ripe apples on 'em as big as your fist:
And peaches,--Siberian crabs and pears,
And quinces--Well! ANY fruit ANY tree bears;
And th purtiest stream--jest a-swimmin' with fish,
And--JEST O'MOST EVERYTHING HEART COULD WISH!
The purtiest orch'rds--I wish you could see
How purty they was, fer I know it 'ud be
A regular treat!--but I'll go ahead with
My story! A man by the name o' Smith--
(A bad name to rhyme,
But I reckon that I'm
Not goin' back on a Smith! nary time!)
'At hadn't a soul of kin nor kith,
And more money than he knowed what to do with,--
So he comes a-ridin' along one day,
And HE says to Brown, in his offhand way--
Who was trainin' some newfangled vines round a bay-
Winder--'Howdy-do--look-a-here--say:
What'll you take fer this property here?--
I'm talkin' o' leavin' the city this year,
And I want to be
Where the air is free,
And I'll BUY this place, if it ain't too dear!'--

Well--they grumbled and jawed aroun'--
'I don't like to part with the place,' says Brown;
'Well,' says Smith, a-jerkin' his head,
'That house yonder--bricks painted red--
Jest like this'n--a PURTIER VIEW--
Who is it owns it?' 'That's mine too,'
Says Brown, as he winked at a hole in his shoe,
'But I'll tell you right here jest what I KIN do:--
If you'll pay the figgers I'll sell IT to you.,'
Smith went over and looked at the place--
Badgered with Brown, and argied the case--
Thought that Brown's figgers was rather too tall,
But, findin' that Brown wasn't goin' to fall,
In final agreed,
So they drawed up the deed
Fer the farm and the fixtures--the live stock an' all.
And so Smith moved from the city as soon
As he possibly could--But 'the man in the moon'
Knowed more'n Smith o' farmin' pursuits,
And jest to convince you, and have no disputes,
How little he knowed,
I'll tell you his 'mode,'
As he called it, o' raisin' 'the best that growed,'
In the way o' potatoes--
Cucumbers--tomatoes,
And squashes as lengthy as young alligators.
'Twas allus a curious thing to me
How big a fool a feller kin be
When he gits on a farm after leavin' a town!--
Expectin' to raise himself up to renown,
And reap fer himself agricultural fame,
By growin' of squashes--WITHOUT ANY SHAME--
As useless and long as a technical name.
To make the soil pure,
And certainly sure,
He plastered the ground with patent manure.
He had cultivators, and double-hoss plows,
And patent machines fer milkin' his cows;
And patent hay-forks--patent measures and weights,
And new patent back-action hinges fer gates,
And barn locks and latches, and such little dribs,
And patents to keep the rats out o' the cribs--

Reapers and mowers,
And patent grain sowers;
And drillers
And tillers
And cucumber hillers,
And horries;--and had patent rollers and scrapers,
And took about ten agricultural papers.
So you can imagine how matters turned out:
But BROWN didn't have not a shadder o' doubt
That Smith didn't know what he was about
When he said that 'the OLD way to farm was played out.'
But Smith worked ahead,
And when any one said
That the OLD way o' workin' was better instead
O' his 'modern idees,' he allus turned red,
And wanted to know
What made people so
INFERNALLY anxious to hear theirselves crow?
And guessed that he'd manage to hoe his own row.
Brown he come onc't and leant over the fence,
And told Smith that he couldn't see any sense
In goin' to such a tremendous expense
Fer the sake o' such no-account experiments
'That'll never make corn!
As shore's you're born
It'll come out the leetlest end of the horn!'
Says Brown, as he pulled off a big roastin'-ear
From a stalk of his own
That had tribble outgrown
Smith's poor yaller shoots, and says he, 'Looky here!
THIS corn was raised in the old-fashioned way,
And I rather imagine that THIS corn'll pay
Expenses fer RAISIN' it!--What do you say?'
Brown got him then to look over his crop.--
HIS luck that season had been tip-top!
And you may surmise
Smith opened his eyes
And let out a look o' the wildest surprise
When Brown showed him punkins as big as the lies
He was stuffin' him with--about offers he's had
Fer his farm: 'I don't want to sell very bad,'
He says, but says he,

'Mr. Smith, you kin see
Fer yourself how matters is standin' with me,
I UNDERSTAND FARMIN' and I'd better stay,
You know, on my farm;--I'm a-makin' it pay--
I oughtn't to grumble!--I reckon I'll clear
Away over four thousand dollars this year.'
And that was the reason, he made it appear,
Why he didn't care about sellin' his farm,
And hinted at his havin' done himself harm
In sellin' the other, and wanted to know
If Smith wouldn't sell back ag'in to him.--So
Smith took the bait, and says he, 'Mr. Brown,
I wouldn't SELL out but we might swap aroun'--
How'll you trade your place fer mine?'
(Purty sharp way o' comin' the shine
Over Smith! Wasn't it?) Well, sir, this Brown
Played out his hand and brought Smithy down--
Traded with him an', workin' it cute,
Raked in two thousand dollars to boot
As slick as a whistle, an' that wasn't all,--
He managed to trade back ag'in the next fall,--
And the next--and the next--as long as Smith stayed
He reaped with his harvests an annual trade.--
Why, I reckon that Brown must 'a' easily made--
On an AVERAGE--nearly two thousand a year--
Together he made over seven thousand--clear.--
Till Mr. Smith found he was losin' his health
In as big a proportion, almost, as his wealth;
So at last he concluded to move back to town,
And sold back his farm to this same Mr. Brown
At very low figgers, by gittin' it down.
Further'n this I have nothin' to say
Than merely advisin' the Smiths fer to stay
In their grocery stores in flourishin' towns
And leave agriculture alone--and the Browns.

James Whitcomb Riley

What The Wind Said

'I muse to-day, in a listless way,
In the gleam of a summer land;
I close my eyes as a lover may
At the touch of his sweetheart's hand,
And I hear these things in the whisperings
Of the zephyrs round me fanned':--

I am the Wind, and I rule mankind,
And I hold a sovereign reign
Over the lands, as God designed,
And the waters they contain:
Lo! the bound of the wide world round
Falleth in my domain!

I was born on a stormy morn
In a kingdom walled with snow,
Whose crystal cities laugh to scorn
The proudest the world can show;
And the daylight's glare is frozen there
In the breath of the blasts that blow.

Life to me was a jubilee
From the first of my youthful days:
Clinking my icy toys with glee--
Playing my childish plays;
Filling my hands with the silver sands
To scatter a thousand ways:

Chasing the flakes that the Polar shakes
From his shaggy coat of white,
Or hunting the trace of the track he makes
And sweeping it from sight,
As he turned to glare from the slippery stair
Of the iceberg's farthest height.

Till I grew so strong that I strayed ere long
From my home of ice and chill;
With an eager heart and a merry song
I traveled the snows until

I heard the thaws in the ice-crag's jaws
Crunched with a hungry will;

And the angry crash of the waves that dash
Themselves on the jagged shore
Where the splintered masts of the ice-wrecks flash,
And the frightened breakers roar
In wild unrest on the ocean's breast
For a thousand leagues or more.

And the grand old sea invited me
With a million beckoning hands,
And I spread my wings for a flight as free
As ever a sailor plans
When his thoughts are wild and his heart beguiled
With the dreams of foreign lands.

I passed a ship on its homeward trip,
With a weary and toil-worn crew;
And I kissed their flag with a welcome lip,
And so glad a gale I blew
That the sailors quaffed their grog and laughed
At the work I made them do.

I drifted by where sea-groves lie
Like brides in the fond caress
Of the warm sunshine and the tender sky--
Where the ocean, passionless
And tranquil, lies like a child whose eyes
Are blurred with drowsiness.

I drank the air and the perfume there,
And bathed in a fountain's spray;
And I smoothed the wings and the plumage rare
Of a bird for his roundelay,
And fluttered a rag from a signal-crag
For a wretched castaway.

With a sea-gull resting on my breast,
I launched on a madder flight:
And I lashed the waves to a wild unrest,
And howled with a fierce delight

Till the daylight slept; and I wailed and wept
Like a fretful babe all night.

For I heard the boom of a gun strike doom;
And the gleam of a blood-red star
Glared at me through the mirk and gloom
From the lighthouse tower afar;
And I held my breath at the shriek of death
That came from the harbor bar.

For I am the Wind, and I rule mankind,
And I hold a sovereign reign
Over the lands, as God designed,
And the waters they contain:
Lo! the bound of the wide world round
Falleth in my domain!

I journeyed on, when the night was gone,
O'er a coast of oak and pine;
And I followed a path that a stream had drawn
Through a land of vale and vine,
And here and there was a village fair
In a nest of shade and shine.

I passed o'er lakes where the sunshine shakes
And shivers his golden lance
On the glittering shield of the wave that breaks
Where the fish-boats dip and dance,
And the trader sails where the mist unveils
The glory of old romance.

I joyed to stand where the jeweled hand
Of the maiden-morning lies
On the tawny brow of the mountain-land.
Where the eagle shrieks and cries,
And holds his throne to himself alone
From the light of human eyes.

Adown deep glades where the forest shades
Are dim as the dusk of day--
Where only the foot of the wild beast wades,
Or the Indian dares to stray,

As the blacksnakes glide through the reeds and hide
In the swamp-depths grim and gray.

And I turned and fled from the place of dread
To the far-off haunts of men.
'In the city's heart is rest,' I said,--
But I found it not, and when
I saw but care and vice reign there
I was filled with wrath again:

And I blew a spark in the midnight dark
Till it flashed to an angry flame
And scarred the sky with a lurid mark
As red as the blush of shame:
And a hint of hell was the dying yell
That up from the ruins came.

The bells went wild, and the black smoke piled
Its pillars against the night,
Till I gathered them, like flocks defiled,
And scattered them left and right,
While the holocaust's red tresses tossed
As a maddened Fury's might.

'Ye overthrown!' did I jeer and groan--
'Ho! who is your master?--say!--
Ye shapes that writhe in the slag and moan
Your slow-charred souls away--
Ye worse than worst of things accurst--
Ye dead leaves of a day!'

I am the Wind, and I rule mankind,
And I hold a sovereign reign
Over the lands, as God designed,
And the waters they contain:
Lo! the bound of the wide world round
Falleth in my domain!

.

'I wake, as one from a dream half done,
And gaze with a dazzled eye

On an autumn leaf like a scrap of sun
That the wind goes whirling by,
While afar I hear, with a chill of fear,
The winter storm-king sigh.'

James Whitcomb Riley

When Age Comes On

When Age comes on!--
'The deepening dusk is where the dawn
Once glittered splendid, and the dew
In honey-drips, from red rose-lips
Was kissed away by me and you.--
And now across the frosty lawn
Black foot-prints trail, and Age comes on--
And Age comes on!
And biting wild-winds whistle through
Our tattered hopes--and Age comes on!

When Age comes on!--
O tide of raptures, long withdrawn,
Flow back in summer-floods, and fling
Here at our feet our childhood sweet,
And all the songs we used to sing! . . .
Old loves, old friends--all dead and gone--
Our old faith lost--and Age comes on--
And Age comes on!
Poor hearts! have we not anything
But longings left when Age comes on?

ENVOY.

Just as of old! The world rolls on and on;
The day dies into night--night into dawn--
Dawn into dusk--through centuries untold.--
Just as of old.

Time loiters not. The river ever flows,
Its brink or white with blossoms or with snows;
Its tide or warm with Spring or Winter cold:
Just as of old.

Lo! where is the beginning, where the end
Of living, loving, longing? Listen, friend!--
God answers with a silence of pure gold--
Just as of old.

When Bessie Died

If from your own the dimpled hands had slipped,
And ne'er would nestle in your palm again;
If the white feet into the grave had tripped--'

When Bessie died--
We braided the brown hair, and tied
It just as her own little hands
Had fastened back the silken strands
A thousand times-- the crimson bit
Of ribbon woven into it
That she had worn with childish pride--
Smoothed down the dainty bow-- and cried
When Bessie died.

When Bessie died--
We drew the nursery blinds aside,
And as the morning in the room
Burst like a primrose into bloom,
Her pet canary's cage we hung
Where she might hear him when he sung--
And yet not any note he tried,
Though she lay listening folded-eyed.

When Bessie died--
We writhed in prayer unsatisfied:
We begged of God, and He did smile
In silence on us all the while;
And we did see Him, through our tears,
Enfolding that fair form of hers,
She laughing back against His love
The kisses had nothing of--
And death to us He still denied,
When Bessie died--
When Bessie died.

James Whitcomb Riley

When De Folks Is Gone

What dat scratchin' at de kitchin do'?
Done heah'n dat foh an hour er mo'!
Tell you Mr. Niggah, das sho's yo' bo'n,
Hit's mighty lonesome waitin' when de folks is gone!

Blame my trap! How de wind do blow!
An' dis is das de night foh de witches, sho'!
Dey's trouble gon' to waste when de old slut whine,
An' you heah de cat a-spittin' when de moon don't shine!

Chune my fiddle, an' de bridge go 'bang!'
An' I lef' 'er right back whah she allus hang,
An' de tribble snap short an' de apern split
When dey no mortal man wah a-tetchin' hit!

Dah! Now, what? How de ole j'ice cracks!
'Spec' dis house, ef hit tell plain fac's,
'Ud talk about de ha'nts wid dey long tails on
What das'n't on'y come when de folks is gone!

What I tuk an' done ef a sho'-nuff ghos'
Pop right up by de ole bed-pos'?
What dat shinin' fru de front do' crack...?
God bress de Lo'd! Hit's de folks got back!

James Whitcomb Riley

When Early March Seems Middle May

When country roads begin to thaw
In mottled spots of damp and dust,
And fences by the margin draw
Along the frosty crust
Their graphic silhouettes, I say,
The Spring is coming round this way.

When morning-time is bright with sun
And keen with wind, and both confuse
The dancing, glancing eyes of one
With tears that ooze and ooze--
And nose-tips weep as well as they,
The Spring is coming round this way.

When suddenly some shadow-bird
Goes wavering beneath the gaze,
And through the hedge the moan is heard
Of kine that fain would graze
In grasses new, I smile and say,
The Spring is coming round this way.

When knotted horse-tails are untied,
And teamsters whistle here and there.
And clumsy mitts are laid aside
And choppers' hands are bare,
And chips are thick where children play,
The Spring is coming round this way.

When through the twigs the farmer tramps,
And troughs are chunked beneath the trees,
And fragrant hints of sugar-camps
Astray in every breeze,--
When early March seems middle May,
The Spring is coming round this way.

When coughs are changed to laughs, and when
Our frowns melt into smiles of glee,
And all our blood thaws out again
In streams of ecstasy,

And poets wreak their roundelay,
The Spring is coming round this way.

James Whitcomb Riley

When Evening Shadows Fall

When evening shadows fall,
She hangs her cares away
Like empty garments on the wall
That hides her from the day;
And while old memories throng,
And vanished voices call,
She lifts her grateful heart in song
When evening shadows fall.

Her weary hands forget
The burdens of the day.
The weight of sorrow and regret
In music rolls away;
And from the day's dull tomb,
That holds her in its thrall,
Her soul springs up in lily bloom
When evening shadows fall.

O weary heart and hand,
Go bravely to the strife--
No victory is half so grand
As that which conquers life!
One day shall yet be thine--
The day that waits for all
Whose prayerful eyes are things divine
When evening shadows fall.

James Whitcomb Riley

When June Is Here

When June is here--what art have we to sing
The whiteness of the lilies midst the green
Of noon-tranced lawns? Or flash of roses seen
Like redbirds' wings? Or earliest ripening
Prince-Harvest apples, where the cloyed bees cling
Round winey juices oozing down between
The peckings of the robin, while we lean
In under-grasses, lost in marveling.
Or the cool term of morning, and the stir
Of odorous breaths from wood and meadow walks,
The bobwhite's liquid yodel, and the whir
Of sudden flight; and, where the milkmaid talks
Across the bars, on tilted barley-stalks
The dewdrops' glint in webs of gossamer.

James Whitcomb Riley

When Lide Married _Him_

When Lide married _him_--w'y, she had to jes dee-fy
The whole poppilation!--But she never bat' an eye!
Her parents begged, and _threatened_--she must give him up--that _he_
Wuz jes 'a common drunkard!--And he _wuz_, appearantly.--
Swore they'd chase him off the place
Ef he ever showed his face--
Long after she'd _eloped_ with him and _married_ him fer shore!--
When Lide married _him_, it wuz '_Katy, bar the door!_'

When Lide married _him_--Well! she had to go and be
A _hired girl_ in town somewheres--while he tromped round to see
What _he_ could git that _he_ could do,--you might say, jes sawed wood
From door to door!--that's what he done--'cause that wuz best he could!
And the strangest thing, i jing!
Wuz, he didn't _drink_ a thing,--
But jes got down to bizness, like he someway _wanted_ to,
When Lide married him, like they warned her _not_ to do!

When Lide married _him_--er, ruther, _had_ ben married
A little up'ards of a year--some feller come and carried
That _hired girl_ away with him--a ruther _stylish_ feller
In a bran-new green spring-wagon, with the wheels striped red and yellor:
And he whispered, as they driv
Tords the country, '_Now we'll live!_'--
And _somepin' else_ she _laughed_ to hear, though both her eyes wuz dim,
'Bout '_trustin' Love and Heav'n above_, sence Lide married _him_!'

James Whitcomb Riley

When Mother Combed My Hair

When Memory, with gentle hand,
Has led me to that foreign land
Of childhood days, I long to be
Again the boy on bended knee,
With head a-bow, and drowsy smile
Hid in a mother's lap the while,
With tender touch and kindly care,
She bends above and combs my hair.

Ere threats of Time, or ghosts of cares
Had paled it to the hue it wears,
Its tangled threads of amber light
Fell o'er a forehead, fair and white,
That only knew the light caress
Of loving hands, or sudden press
Of kisses that were sifted there
The times when mother combed my hair.

But its last gleams of gold have slipped
Away; and Sorrow's manuscript
Is fashioned of the snowy brow--
So lined and underscored now
That you, to see it, scarce would guess
It e'er had felt the fond caress
Of loving lips, or known the care
Of those dear hands that combed my hair.

.....

I am so tired! Let me be
A moment at my mother's knee;
One moment--that I may forget
The trials waiting for me yet:
One moment free from every pain--
O! Mother! Comb my hair again!
And I will, oh, so humbly bow,
For I've a wife that combs it now.

When My Dreams Come True

I.

When my dreams come true--when my dreams come true--
Shall I lean from out my casement, in the starlight and the dew,
To listen--smile and listen to the tinkle of the strings
Of the sweet guitar my lover's fingers fondle, as he sings?
And as the nude moon slowly, slowly shoulders into view,
Shall I vanish from his vision--when my dreams come true?

When my dreams come true--shall the simple gown I wear
Be changed to softest satin, and my maiden-braided hair
Be raveled into flossy mists of rarest, fairest gold,
To be minted into kisses, more than any heart can hold?--
Or 'the summer of my tresses' shall my lover liken to
'The fervor of his passion'--when my dreams come true?

II.

When my dreams come true--I shall bide among the sheaves
Of happy harvest meadows; and the grasses and the leaves
Shall lift and lean between me and the splendor of the sun,
Till the noon swoons into twilight, and the gleaners' work is done--
Save that yet an arm shall bind me, even as the reapers do
The meanest sheaf of harvest--when my dreams come true.

When my dreams come true! when my dreams come true!
True love in all simplicity is fresh and pure as dew;--
The blossom in the blackest mold is kindlier to the eye
Than any lily born of pride that looms against the sky:
And so it is I know my heart will gladly welcome you,
My lowliest of lovers, when my dreams come true.

James Whitcomb Riley

When Old Jack Died

I.

When old Jack died, we staid from school (they said,
At home, we needn't go that day), and none
Of us ate any breakfast--only one,
And that was Papa--and his eyes were red
When he came round where we were, by the shed
Where Jack was lying, half way in the sun
And half way in the shade. When we begun
To cry out loud, Pa turned and dropped his head
And went away; and Mamma, she went back
Into the kitchen. Then, for a long while,
All to ourselves, like, we stood there and cried.
We thought so many good things of Old Jack,
And funny things--although we didn't smile--We
couldn't only cry when Old Jack died.

II.

When Old Jack died, it seemed a human friend
Had suddenly gone from us; that some face
That we had loved to fondle and embrace
From babyhood, no more would condescend
To smile on us forever. We might bend
With tearful eyes above him, interlace
Our chubby fingers o'er him, romp and race,
Plead with him, call and coax--aye, we might send
The old halloo up for him, whistle, hist,
(If sobs had let us) or, as wildly vain,
Snapped thumbs, called 'speak,' and he had not replied;
We might have gone down on our knees and kissed
The tousled ears, and yet they must remain
Deaf, motionless, we knew--when Old Jack died.

III.

When Old Jack died, it seemed to us, some way,
That all the other dogs in town were pained
With our bereavement, and some that were chained,

Even, unslipped their collars on that day
To visit Jack in state, as though to pay
A last, sad tribute there, while neighbors craned
Their heads above the high board fence, and deigned
To sigh 'Poor dog!' remembering how they
Had cuffed him, when alive, perchance, because,
For love of them he leaped to lick their hands--
Now, that he could not, were they satisfied?
We children thought that, as we crossed his paws,
And o'er his grave, 'way down the bottom-lands,
Wrote 'Our First Love Lies Here,' when Old Jack died.

James Whitcomb Riley

When She Comes Home

When she comes home again! A thousand ways
I fashion, to myself, the tenderness
Of my glad welcome: I shall tremble--yes;
And touch her, as when first in the old days
I touched her girlish hand, nor dared upraise
Mine eyes, such was my faint heart's sweet distress.
Then silence: And the perfume of her dress:
The room will sway a little, and a haze
Cloy eyesight--soulsight, even--for a space:
And tears--yes; and the ache here in the throat,
To know that I so ill deserve the place
Her arms make for me; and the sobbing note
I stay with kisses, ere the tearful face
Again is hidden in the old embrace.

James Whitcomb Riley

When The Frost Is On The Punkin

When the frost is on the punkin and the fodder's in the shock
And you hear the kyouck and gobble of the struttin' turkey cock
And the clackin' of the guineys, and the cluckin' of the hens
And the rooster's hallylooyer as he tiptoes on the fence
O, it's then's the times a feller is a-feelin' at his best
With the risin' sun to greet him from a night of peaceful rest
As he leaves the house, bareheaded, and goes out to feed the stock
When the frost is on the punkin and the fodder's in the shock

They's something kindo' harty-like about the atmusfere
When the heat of summer's over and the coolin' fall is here
Of course we miss the flowers, and the blossums on the trees
And the mumble of the hummin'-birds and buzzin' of the bees
But the air's so appetizin'; and the landscape through the haze
Of a crisp and sunny morning of the airy autumn days
Is a pictur' that no painter has the colorin' to mock
When the frost is on the punkin and the fodder's in the shock.

The husky, rusty russel of the tossels of the corn,
And the raspin' of the tangled leaves, as golden as the morn;
The stubble in the furries kindo' lonesome-like, but still
A-preachin' sermons to us of the barns they growed to fill;
The strawstack in the medder, and the reaper in the shed;
The hosses in theyr stalls below the clover over-head!
O, it sets my hart a-clickin' like the tickin' of a clock,
When the frost is on the punkin and the fodder's in the shock!

Then your apples all is gethered, and the ones a feller keeps
Is poured around the celler-floor in red and yeller heaps;
And your cider-makin' 's over, and your wimmern-folks is through
With their mince and apple butter, and theyr souse and sausage, too!
I don't know how to tell it but ef sich a thing could be
As the Angels wantin' boardin', and they'd call around on me
I'd want to 'commodate 'em all the whole-indurin' flock
When the frost is on the punkin and the fodder's in the shock!

James Whitcomb Riley

When The Green Gits Back In The Trees

In spring, when the green gits back in the trees,
And the sun comes out and stays,
And yer boots pulls on with a good tight squeeze,
And you think of yer barefoot days;
When you ort to work and you want to not,
And you and yer wife agrees
It's time to spade up the garden lot,
When the green gits back in the trees--
Well! work is the least o' _my_ idees
When the green, you know, gits back in the trees!

When the green gits back in the trees, and bees
Is a-buzzin' aroun' agin,
In that kind of a lazy go-as-you-please
Old gait they bum roun' in;
When the groun's all bald where the hay-rick stood,
And the crick 's riz, and the breeze
Coaxes the bloom in the old dogwood,
And the green gits back in the trees,--
I like, as I say, in sich scenes as these,
The time when the green gits back in the trees!

When the whole tail-feathers o' wintertime
Is all pulled out and gone!
And the sap it thaws and begins to climb,
And the sweat it starts out on
A feller's forred, a-gittin' down
At the old spring on his knees--
I kind o' like jes' a-loaferin' roun'
When the green gits back in the trees--
Jes' a-potterin' roun' as I--durn--please--
When the green, you know, gits back in the trees!

James Whitcomb Riley

When The Hearse Comes Back

A thing 'at's 'bout as tryin' as a healthy man kin meet
Is some poor feller's funeral a-joggin' 'long the street:
The slow hearse and the hosses-- slow enough, to say at least,
Fer to even tax the patience of gentleman deceased!
The low scrunch of the gravel-- and the slow grind of the wheels--,
The slow, slow go of ev'ry woe 'at ev'rybody feels!
So I ruther like the contrast when I hear the whip-lash crack
A quickstep fer the hosses,
When the
Hearse
Comes
Back!

Meet it goin' to'rds the cimet'ry, you'll want to drap yer eyes--
But ef the plumes don't fetch you, it'll ketch you otherwise--
You'll haf to see the caskit, though you'd ort to look away
And 'conomize and save yer sighs fer any other day!
Yer sympathizin' won't wake up the sleeper from his rest--
Yer tears won't thaw them hands o' his 'at's froze acrost his breast!
And this is why-- when airth and sky's a gittin blurred and black--
I like the flash and hurry
When the
Hearse
Comes
Back!

It's not 'cause I don't 'preciate it ain't no time fer jokes,
Ner 'cause I' got no common human feelin' fer the folks--;
I've went to funerals myse'f, and tuk on some, perhaps--
Fer my hearth's 'bout as mal'able as any other chap's--,
I've buried father, mother-- But I'll haf to jes' git you
To 'excuse me,' as the feller says--. The p'int I'm drivin' to
Is simply when we're plum broke down and all knocked out o' whack,
It he'ps to shape us up like,
When the
Hearse
Comes
Back!

The idy! Wadin round here over shoe-mouth deep in woe,
When they's a graded 'pike o' joy and sunshine don't you know!
When evening strikes the pastur', cows'll pull out fer the bars,
And skittish-like from out the night'll prance the happy stars.
And so when my time comes to die, and I've got ary friend
'At wants expressed my last request-- I'll mebby, rickommend
To drive slow, ef they haf to, goin' 'long the out'ard track,
But I'll smile and say, 'You speed 'em
When the
Hearse
Comes
Back!'

James Whitcomb Riley

Where Shall We Land

'_Where shall we land you, sweet_'--Swinburne.

All listlessly we float
Out seaward in the boat
That beareth Love.
Our sails of purest snow
Bend to the blue below
And to the blue above.
Where shall we land?

We drift upon a tide
Shoreless on every side,
Save where the eye
Of Fancy sweeps far lands
Shelved slopingly with sands
Of gold and porphyry.
Where shall we land?

The fairy isles we see,
Loom up so mistily--
So vaguely fair,
We do not care to break
Fresh bubbles in our wake
To bend our course for there.
Where shall we land?

The warm winds of the deep
Have lulled our sails to sleep,
And so we glide
Careless of wave or wind,
Or change of any kind,
Or turn of any tide.
Where shall we land?

We droop our dreamy eyes
Where our reflection lies
Steeped in the sea,
And, in an endless fit
Of languor, smile on it

And its sweet mimicry.
Where shall we land?

'Where shall we land?' God's grace!
I know not any place
So fair as this--
Swung here between the blue
Of sea and sky, with you
To ask me, with a kiss,
'Where shall we land?'

James Whitcomb Riley

Where The Children Used To Play

The old farm-home is Mother's yet and mine,
And filled it is with plenty and to spare--,
But we are lonely here in life's decline,
Though fortune smiles around us everywhere:
We look across the gold
Of the harvests, as of old--
The corn, the fragrant clover, and the hay;
But most we turn our gaze,
As with eyes of other days,
To the orchard where the children used to play.

O from our life's full measure
And rich hoard of worldly treasure
We often turn our weary eyes away,
And hand in hand we wander
Down the old path winding yonder
To the orchard where the children used to play.

Our sloping pasture-lands are filled with herds;
The barn and granary-bins are bulging o'ver;
The grove's a paradise of singing birds--
The woodland brook leaps laughing by the door;
Yet lonely, lonely still,
Let us prosper as we will,
Our old hearts seem so empty everyway--
We can only through a mist
See the faces we have kissed
In the orchard where the children used to play.

O from our life's full measure
And rich hoard of worldly treasure
We often turn our weary eyes away,
And hand in hand we wander
Down the old path winding yonder
To the orchard where the children used to play.

James Whitcomb Riley

Where-Away

O the Lands of Where-Away!
Tell us--tell us--where are they?
Through the darkness and the dawn
We have journeyed on and on--
From the cradle to the cross--
From possession unto loss,--
Seeking still, from day to day,
For the lands of Where-Away.

When our baby-feet were first
Planted where the daisies burst,
And the greenest grasses grew
In the fields we wandered through,
On, with childish discontent,
Ever on and on we went,
Hoping still to pass, some day,
O'er the verge of Where-Away.

Roses laid their velvet lips
On our own, with fragrant sips;
But their kisses held us not,
All their sweetness we forgot;--
Though the brambles in our track
Plucked at us to hold us back--
'Just ahead,' we used to say,
'Lie the Lands of Where-Away.'

Children at the pasture-bars,
Through the dusk, like glimmering stars,
Waved their hands that we should bide
With them over eventide:
Down the dark their voices failed
Falteringly, as they hailed,
And died into yesterday--
Night ahead and--Where-Away?

Twining arms about us thrown--
Warm caresses, all our own,
Can but stay us for a spell--

Love hath little new to tell
To the soul in need supreme,
Aching ever with the dream
Of the endless bliss it may
Find in Lands of Where-Away!

James Whitcomb Riley

While The Musician Played

O it was but a dream I had
While the musician played!--
And here the sky, and here the glad
Old ocean kissed the glade--
And here the laughing ripples ran,
And here the roses grew
That threw a kiss to every man
That voyaged with the crew.

Our silken sails in lazy folds
Drooped in the breathless breeze:
As o'er a field of marigolds
Our eyes swam o'er the seas;
While here the eddies lisped and purled
Around the island's rim,
And up from out the underworld
We saw the mermen swim.

And it was dawn and middle-day
And midnight--for the moon
On silver rounds across the bay
Had climbed the skies of June--
And there the glowing, glorious king
Of day ruled o'er his realm,
With stars of midnight glittering
About his diadem.

The seagull reeled on languid wing
In circles round the mast,
We heard the songs the sirens sing
As we went sailing past;
And up and down the golden sands
A thousand fairy throngs
Flung at us from their flashing hands
The echoes of their songs.

O it was but a dream I had
While the musician played--
For here the sky, and here the glad

Old ocean kissed the glade;
And here the laughing ripples ran,
And here the roses grew
That threw a kiss to every man
That voyaged with the crew.

James Whitcomb Riley

Who Bides His Time

Who bides his time, and day by day
Faces defeat full patiently,
And lifts a mirthful roundelay,
However poor his fortunes be,--
He will not fail in any qualm
Of poverty -- the paltry dime
It will grow golden in his palm,
Who bides his time.

Who bides his time -- he tastes the sweet
Of honey in the saltiest tear;
And though he fares with slowest feet,
Joy runs to meet him, drawing near;
The birds are heralds of his cause;
And, like an ever-ending rhyme,
The roadsides bloom in his applause,
Who bides his time.

Who bides his time, and fevers not
In the hot race that none achieves,
Shall wear cool-wreathen laurel, wrought
With crimson berries in the leaves;
And he shall reign a goodly king,
And sway his hand o'er every clime
With peace writ on his signet-ring,
Who bides his time.

James Whitcomb Riley

Who Santy-Claus Wuz

Jes' a little bit o' feller--I remember still--
Ust to almost cry fer Christmas, like a youngster will.
Fourth o' July's nothin' to it!--New Year's ain't a smell!
Easter-Sunday--Circus-day--jes' all dead in the shell!
Lawzy, though! at night, you know, to set around an' hear
The old folks work the story off about the sledge an' deer,
An' 'Santy' skootin' round the roof, all wrapt in fur an' fuzz--
Long afore
I knowed who
'Santy-Claus' wuz!

Ust to wait, an' set up late, a week er two ahead;
Couldn't hardly keep awake, ner wouldn't go to bed;
Kittle stewin' on the fire, an' Mother settin' here
Darnin' socks, an' rockin' in the skreeky rockin'-cheer;
Pap gap', an' wonder where it wuz the money went,
An' quar'l with his frosted heels, an' spill his liniment;
An' me a-dreamin' sleigh-bells when the clock 'ud whir an' buzz,
Long afore
I knowed who
'Santy-Claus' wuz!

Size the fire-place up an' figger how 'Ole Santy' could
Manage to come down the chimbly, like they said he would;
Wisht 'at I could hide an' see him--wunderd what he'd say
Ef he ketched a feller layin' fer him thataway!
But I bet on him, an' liked him, same as ef he had
Turned to pat me on the back an' say, 'Look here, my lad,
Here's my pack,--jes' he'p yourse'f, like all good boys does!'
Long afore
I knowed who
'Santy-Claus' wuz!

Wisht that yarn was true about him, as it 'peared to be--
Truth made out o' lies like that-un's good enough fer me!--
Wisht I still wuz so confidin' I could jes' go wild
Over hangin' up my stockin's, like the little child
Climbin' in my lap to-night, an' beggin' me to tell
'Bout them reindeers, and 'Old Santy' that she loves so well

I'm half sorry fer this little-girl-sweetheart of his--
Long afore
She knows who
'Santy-Claus' is!

James Whitcomb Riley

Winter Fancies

I

Winter without
And warmth within;
The winds may shout
And the storm begin;
The snows may pack
At the window pane,
And the skies grow black,
And the sun remain
Hidden away
The livelong day--
But here--in here is the warmth of May!

II

Swoop your spitefulest
Up the flue,
Wild Winds--do!
What in the world do I care for you?
O delightfulest
Weather of all,
Howl and squall,
And shake the trees till the last leaves fall!

III

The joy one feels,
In an easy chair,
Cocking his heels
In the dancing air
That wreathes the rim of a roaring stove
Whose heat loves better than hearts can love,
Will not permit
The coldest day
To drive away
The fire in his blood, and the bliss of it!

IV

Then blow, Winds, blow!
And rave and shriek,
And snarl and snow
Till your breath grows weak--
While here in my room
I'm as snugly shut
As a glad little worm
In the heart of a nut!

James Whitcomb Riley

With Hale Affection And Abiding Faith These Rhymes And Pictures Are Inscribed To The Children Everywhere

_He owns the bird-songs of the hills--
The laughter of the April rills;
And his are all the diamonds set
In Morning's dewy coronet,--
And his the Dusk's first minted stars
That twinkle through the pasture-bars
And litter all the skies at night
With glittering scraps of silver light;--
The rainbow's bar, from rim to rim,
In beaten gold, belongs to him._

James Whitcomb Riley

Wortermelon Time

Old wortermelon time is a-comin' round again,
And they ain't no man a-livin' any tickleder'n me,
Fer the way I hanker after wortermelons is a sin--
Which is the why and wharefore, as you can plainly see.

Oh! it's in the sandy soil wortermelons does the best,
And it's thare they'll lay and waller in the sunshine and
the dew
Tel they wear all the green streaks clean off of theyr
breast;
And you bet I ain't a-findin' any fault with them; ain't
you?

They ain't no better thing in the vegetable line;
And they don't need much 'tendin', as ev'ry farmer
knows;
And when theyr ripe and ready fer to pluck from the vine,
I want to say to you theyr the best fruit that grows.

It's some likes the yeller-core, and some likes the red.
And it's some says 'The Little Californy' is the best;
But the sweetest slice of all I ever wedged in my head,
Is the old 'Edingburg Mounting-sprout,' of the west

You don't want no punkins nigh your wortermelon
vines--
'Cause, some-way-another, they'll spile your melons,
shore;--
I've seed 'em taste like punkins, from the core to the rines,
Which may be a fact you have heerd of before

But your melons that's raised right and 'tended to with
care,
You can walk around amongst 'em with a parent's
pride and joy,
And thump 'em on the heads with as fatherly a air
As ef each one of them was your little girl er boy.

I joy in my hart jest to hear that rippin' sound

When you split one down the back and jolt the halves
in two,
And the friends you love the best is gethered all around--
And you says unto your sweethart, 'Oh, here's the
core fer you!'

And I like to slice 'em up in big pieces fer 'em all,
Espeshally the childern, and watch theyr high delight
As one by one the rines with theyr pink notches falls,
And they holler fer some more, with unquenched
appetite.

Boys takes to it natchurl, and I like to see 'em eat--
A slice of wortermelon's like a frenchharp in theyr
hands,
And when they 'saw' it through theyr mouth sich music
can't be beat--
'Cause it's music both the sperit and the stummick
understands.

Oh, they's more in wortermelons than the purty-colored
meat,
And the overflowin' sweetness of the worter squshed
betwixt

The up'ard and the down'ard motions of a feller's teeth,
And it's the taste of ripe old age and juicy childhood
mixed.

Fer I never taste a melon but my thoughts flies away
To the summertime of youth; and again I see the dawn,
And the fadin' afternoon of the long summer day,
And the dusk and dew a-fallin', and the night a-comin'
on.

And thare's the corn around us, and the lispin' leaves and
trees,
And the stars a-peekin' down on us as still as silver
mice,
And us boys in the wortermelons on our hands and knees,
And the new-moon hangin' ore us like a yellor-cored
slice.

Oh! it's wortermelon time is a-comin' round again,
And they ain't no man a-livin' any tickleder'n me,
Fer the way I hanker after wortermelons is a sin--
Which is the why and wharefore, as you can plainly see.

James Whitcomb Riley

Writin' Back To The Home-Folks

My dear old friends--It jes beats all,
The way you write a letter
So's ever' _last_ line beats the _first_,
And ever' _next_-un's better!--
W'y, ever' fool-thing you putt down
You make so inte_rest_in',
A feller, readin' of 'em all,
Can't tell which is the _best_-un.

It's all so comfortin' and good,
'Pears-like I almost _hear_ ye
And git more sociabler, you know,
And hitch my cheer up near ye
And jes smile on ye like the sun
Acrosst the whole per-rairies
In Aprile when the thaw's begun
And country couples marries.

It's all so good-old-fashioned like
To _talk_ jes like we're _thinkin'_,
Without no hidin' back o' fans
And giggle-un and winkin',
Ner sizin' how each-other's dressed--
Like some is allus doin',--
'_Is_ Marthy Ellen's basque ben _turned_
Er shore-enough a new-un!--

Er 'ef Steve's city-friend haint jes
'A _lee_tle kindo'-sorto"--
Er 'wears them-air blame eye-glasses
Jes 'cause he hadn't ort to?'
And so straight on, _dad-libitum_,
Tel all of us feels, _some_way,
Jes like our 'comp'ny' wuz the best
When we git up to come 'way!

That's why I like _old_ friends like you,--
Jes 'cause you're so _abidin'_.--
Ef I was built to live '_fer keeps_',

My principul residin'
Would be amongst the folks 'at kep'
Me allus _thinkin'_ of 'em,
And sorto' eechin' all the time
To tell 'em how I love 'em.--

Sich folks, you know, I jes love so
I wouldn't live without 'em,
Er couldn't even drap asleep
But what I _dreamp'_ about 'em,--
And ef we minded God, I guess
We'd _all_ love one-another
Jes like one fam'bly,--me and Pap
And Madaline and Mother.

James Whitcomb Riley

Ylladmar

Her hair was, oh, so dense a blur
Of darkness, midnight envied her;
And stars grew dimmer in the skies
To see the glory of her eyes;
And all the summer rain of light
That showered from the moon at night
Fell o'er her features as the gloom
Of twilight o'er a lily-bloom.

The crimson fruitage of her lips
Was ripe and lush with sweeter wine
Than burgundy or muscadine
Or vintage that the burgher sips
In some old garden on the Rhine:
And I to taste of it could well
Believe my heart a crucible
Of molten love--and I could feel
The drunken soul within me reel
And rock and stagger till it fell.

And do you wonder that I bowed
Before her splendor as a cloud
Of storm the golden-sandaled sun
Had set his conquering foot upon?
And did she will it, I could lie
In writhing rapture down and die
A death so full of precious pain
I'd waken up to die again.

James Whitcomb Riley