

HOME MAGAZINE

LIFE · LITERATURE & EDUCATION



King Ferdinand of Roumania.
International Film Service.

In a Friendly Sort of Way.

When a man ain't got a cent, an' he's
feeling kind of blue,
An' the clouds hang dark an' heavy, an'
won't let the sunshine through,
It's a great thing, oh, my brother, for a
feller just to lay
His hand upon your shoulder in a friendly
sort of way!
It makes a man feel curious, it makes the
teardrops start,
An' you sort of feel a flutter in the region
of your heart.
You can't stand up an' meet his eyes;
you don't know what to say,
When his hand is on your shoulder in a
friendly sort of way.

—JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY.

James Whitcomb Riley, the Hoosier Poet.

MINA A. HUME.

"Riley, our arms are reaching for another
book from you,
Like a sweetheart's soft beseeching for
a favor overdue.
... Your thoughts are throbbing ca-
cendances and fragrant as a flower,
The words with which you weave them,
and refreshing as a shower.
... When we hear your gentle preach-
ing, heaven grows upon our view,
So our eager arms are reaching for
another book from you."

The gentle Hoosier poet sings no more
for us in tender, humorous strains of
inimitable dialect, but at least the laurels
of appreciation were not wholly kept to
scatter o'er his grave. Possibly no poet
of modern times during his lifetime has
been held in such marked and affectionate
regard in the hearts of the masses as
James Whitcomb Riley. A singular honor
was bestowed upon him only last year,
when his birthday was declared a "Riley
Day" throughout the State of Indiana.
He had previously obtained the rank of
National Poet.

Born in Greenfield, Indiana, 1853,
Riley's father, a leading attorney of that
place, chose the profession of law for his
son; but the boy's non-studious tempera-
ment soon revealed the fallacy of the
choice. "Whenever I picked up 'Black-
stone' or 'Greenleaf,'" he tells us, "my
wits went to wool-gathering, and my
father was soon convinced that his hopes
of my achieving greatness at the bar
were doomed to disappointment." Con-
cerning his education, he says further:
"I never had much schooling. I never
could master mathematics, and history

was a dull and juiceless thing to me; but
I was always fond of reading in a random
way, and took naturally to the theatrical.
I cannot remember when I was not a
declaimer, and I began to rhyme almost
as soon as I could talk." The poet-elect
was endowed with other gifts, however,
and curiously enough these found ex-
pression in his very first occupation of
sign painter for a patent medicine man.
He was musical also, and later organized
a company of sign painters, with whom
he travelled all over the country. "All
the members of the company were good
musicians as well as painters," Riley tells
us when referring to these experiences,
"and we used to drum up trade with our
music. We kept at it for three or four
years, made plenty of money, had lots of
fun, and did no harm to ourselves or any-
one else."

It develops that during his sign-painting
period Riley continually wrote verses.
His efforts at first to have them published
were not signally successful. Later, he
won warm appreciation from the poet
Longfellow on the merit of his verse, and,
almost immediately afterward, general
recognition from the public. When the
full flood of popularity caught him up, it
found him not writing verse to order—
this, he said, he could do—but leisurely,
as the mood or muse moved him, on the
road or street, jotting down on paper the
poem as he had thought it out.

Country folk might claim Riley as
peculiarly their own poet. Though not
raised on the farm, he interprets rural life
with great sweetness and sympathy. No
gulf of years is so wide that he cannot
bridge it back across to boyhood with
recollections such as are suggested in
'The Old Swimmin' Hole,' 'Airly Days,'
'Out to Old Aunt Mary's,' or when
the Frost is on the Punkin'.

As heart and hand to Riley was his
love for humanity and nature.

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

One pauses to re-read in Songs of
Friendship those character sketches eman-
ating a great spirit of kindness lit
withal with flashes of gentle humor.
For instance, we smile into the face of
an old friend here in 'Old John Henry'
whose

"Doctern's jes' o' the plainest brand—
Old John Henry—
A smilin' face and a hearty hand
'S religen 'at all folks understand,
Says old John Henry.
He's stove up some with the rhumaty,
And they hain't no shine on them shoes
o' his,
And his hair hain't cut—but, his eye-
teeth is;
Old John Henry!"

Or again, turn a page and we are
gripped with the pathos achieved in
that simply told tale of 'The Old Man
and Jim' when off to the war went—

"Jim the wildest boy he had,
And the old man jes wrapped up in him!
And all 'at I heerd the old man say
Was, jes' as we turned to start away—
'Well, good-by, Jim,
Take keer of yoursef!'"

A hail and farewell in its gamut of
emotion finds expression in true Riley
fashion in those lines 'Good-By er
Howdy-Do'—

"Say good-by er howdy-do—
What's the odds betwixt the two?
Comin'—goin', ev'ry day—
Best friends first to go away—
Grasp of hands you'd ruther hold
Than their weight in solid gold
Slips their grip while greetin' you—
Say good-by er howdy-do!"

In defence of his use of dialect while

admitting that he preferred the recog-
nized poetic form Riley says:

"Dialectic verse is natural and gains
added charm from its very common-
placeness. If truth and depiction of
nature are wanted, and dialect is a touch
of nature, then it should not be dis-
regarded. I follow nature as closely as
I can and try to make my people think
and speak as they do in real life, and
such success I have achieved is due
to this."

An ardent lover of little children,
it is not surprising that the poet's
interpretation of child life is particularly
faithful and pleasing. Favorites among
this class of poems are, 'Little Orphant
Annie' and 'The Raggedy Man.'

It is passing strange—beautifully so
—that Riley's lines "Away" may be
so aptly applied to himself. One
wonders vaguely if that is not as he
would wish us to remember him as
one of whom—

"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.

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

Autumn Fires.

A rustling trail through the red, red wood,
And smoke from the sweet brush fires;
A whistled note
From a partridge throat,
And wind in the tall fir spires.

We that were young in the summer days
Are old as the oldest trees,
With a knowledge as deep as the wood-
land ways,
And sweet as the autumn breeze.

A gusty sea, and a smoking line
Where the surf and brown sands meet;
Gulls a-wing,
And sprays that sting,
And the black sea-drift at our feet.

We that the summer found so free
Know a sudden need, an ancient cry,
And love is flung up to us out of the sea
And down from the racing sky.
—CLAIRE WALLACE FLYNN.

Travel Notes.

From Helen's Diary.

Chateau-d'Oex, Switz.

Aug. 12, 1916.

This is where the English prisoners of
war are interned. It is a most picturesque
spot—a narrow, undulating valley walled
in by precipitous mountains, partly
wooded and partly bare crag. The
altitude is 3,300 feet, and the air pure
and invigorating. To the invalid soldiers.
Chateau-d'Oex (pronounced by the natives
Chateau Day) seems like a Garden of
Eden.

This is my first sight of Tommy Atkins.
and I must say that if he had more
teeth and less dialect he would be
pleasanter to look at and easier to
understand. All the British soldiers are
in khaki including even the Scotch officers
in kilts. Coming from Vevey where I
was accustomed to seeing the French
officers in the most gorgeous uniforms,
the colorless uniforms of the English
soldiers seem very sober.

Many of the internes look so robust
and healthy, and stride along the street
at such a pace, it is hard to believe
they have been languishing in Germany
for nearly two years. But a great
many of them look very ill, although



Crown Prince George of Greece.
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they have improved immensely during
their two months sojourn in this ideal
out-door hospital. Crutches are numer-
ous and canes almost universal. It
seems terrible to see so many cripples,
but I was told that, as a rule, they suffer
far less than the men with bullet wounds
in the lungs.

I was very anxious to see a Canadian
soldier and as it happened, the first one
I met was a Montenegrin from British
Columbia. When I first caught sight
of him I was perched on the top rung
of a step-ladder at the station, craning
this way and that to see what was going
on. There was a big crowd on the
platform and a number of English
officers were being photographed. They
had just arrived from Germany, having
been sent on ahead of the convoy which
is to arrive to-morrow.

A few feet away from my step-ladder
stood a fine-looking man in khaki,
with "Canada" in gold letters on his
epaulets, and a Maple Leaf on his cap.

"A Canadian soldier" said I to
myself. I wanted to rush right over
and shake his hand and say I am a
Canadian too," but fear of losing
my observation perch on the step-ladder
made me hesitate. But, in the end,
patriotism overcame curiosity. I de-
scended, walked boldly over and ad-
dressed the bronzed hero in khaki
and we had quite an interesting chat.
From his accent I thought he was of
Scotch descent, but when I questioned
him he said he was a Montenegrin.

Then you must have a "vitch" on the
end of your name" said I.

"Yes, I have," said he, smiling and
displaying a fine set of teeth, "my
name is Nikiovitch." (I can't swear to
the spelling being correct.)

He was a well-built fellow, with hand-
some dark eyes, thick dark hair, and a
most captivating smile.

"You don't look a bit sick" said I
to him, "you are not crippled, you have
both legs and both arms. What happened
to you?"

"Two bullet wounds in the head."
He pulled off his cap, and showed up
his hair to show me the scars. "After
the second bullet I didn't know anything
till I woke up in a German hospital.

"What about the German food?" I
asked him. "Was it really as bad as
they say?"

"Never touched the stuff—not after
the first few weeks. We had plenty
to eat all right, but it all came from
England. But the poor Russians! they
had the worst of it. No one to send them
anything. They would have starved
if it hadn't been for us. And the English