

**JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY**

*In Character Sketches*

Editor's Note—Hoyt King of Wilmette, one of the best known men in New Trier township by virtue of his many years' service as Township Collector, is the author of *Character Sketches of James Whiacomb Riley* which will appear frequently in issues of WINNETKA TALK.

Mr. King comes by his enthusiasm for Riley quite naturally since he is a native of Indiana and the son of one of the poet's most intimate friends. Mr. King's father was associated with the *Indianapolis Journal*—where Riley was a familiar figure for many years—and purchased the first volume of the first edition of Riley's poems, a work now in possession of Mr. King. "As a boy I often saw Mr. Riley," says Mr. King, "though I did not know him intimately. I have always prized his works and have made quite an exhaustive study of his career. I hope these brief character sketches may be of interest to other Riley lovers on the north shore."

When speaking, Riley would observe closely the effect of his readings on his auditors. Once a man and his wife made an exit while he was giving the "Happy Little Cripple." He was much concerned and asked a friend to find out why they left. He learned that they had a little crippled child of their own. It is said he never used the recitation after this. He may have abandoned it for a while, but I know he did give the lines later. The "Happy Little Cripple" views his afflictions lightly, as this verse shows:

**"HAPPY LITTLE CRIPPLE"**  
 "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 for my size—I'm purt' nigh littler an'  
 "Some babies is!—an' neighbors all calls me 'their little man!'  
 "An' Doc, one time he laughed an' said, 'I spec, 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' Auntie was a-cryin'—"

"Sometimes she acts like that, 'cause I got 'sur'ture of the spine'."

Riley's natural bent trained him to see poetry in incidents, poetry in the scenery about him, poetry in dreams of the dead and gone. Jerry Martin, Riley's next door neighbor in Greenfield, tells this one: "Once," he says, "Old Bill Bussell, as he was called, a farmer who lived at Bussell's Corner, came into the courthouse one morning. All of us boys were standing around and Riley was with us. Somebody greeted Bussell with, 'How's farmin', Bill,' and I remember the old farmer replied, 'I'm not raisin' anything this year. The corn's all wallered down, the potatoes are all wallered down, everything is all wallered down.' And it wasn't very long after that, that Riley wrote some verses in which these lines appear:

"These here cy-clones foolin' round,  
 And back'ard crops and wind and rain,  
 And yit the corn that's wallered down,  
 May elbow up agin.'"

On another occasion, Freeman Crawford, who used to own a drug store in Greenfield and later traveled to Kansas in a wagon, came back for a visit. In his Greenfield days the Adelphian band used to give street concerts at night. A bunch of boys, Riley among them, met Crawford on the street and he said he was going to leave, but he wanted to hear the old band play once more before he did. The remark escaped the rest, but there was in it such a tone of regret and longing that it was inspirational to Riley and we have his verses:

**"THE OLD BAND"**  
 "What's come of old Bill Lindsay and the saxhorn fellers—say?  
 I want to hear the old band play."

"What's come of Eastman and Nat Snow? And where's War Barnett at?  
 "And Nate and Bony Meek; Bill Hart, Tom Richa'son and that  
 "Air brother of his played the drum a twict as big as Jim;  
 "And old Hi Kerns, the carpenter—say, what's become of him?  
 "I make no doubt yer new band now's a competenter band,  
 "And plays their music more by note than what they play by hand  
 "And stylisher and grander tunes; but somehow—any-way.  
 "I want to hear the old band play."

**1926 LICENSE PLATES TO BE BLUE AND WHITE**

Blue license plates lettered in white have been selected for automobiles for the year 1926.

Contract for the manufacture of the plates has been let by Secretary of State, Louis L. Emmerson at 13.4 cents per pair and this is believed to be about the lowest price for plates in the United States.

The contract for these plates, which will number 1,165,000, was awarded to the C. H. Hanson company of Chicago.

The plates enclosed in patented envelopes will be delivered to the State House in Springfield free of charge to the state and will be ready for distribution on January 1, 1926.

In addition to the plates, contracts have also been let to the Brady company of Peoria for 100,000 badges for chauffeurs.

Secretary Emmerson believes this estimate will be insufficient to care for

the demands in 1926, and the contracts specify that if more plates are needed they will be furnished at the same figure.

Statistics compiled from the records of the Automobile department show that during the year 1925, to date 1,015,190 pleasure cars have been licensed.

In addition 4,332 dealers, 5,449 motorcycles, and 146,114 truck licenses have been issued making a total registration of 1,171,085.

The total revenue from license fees turned into the state treasury for this period has been \$12,110,777.03.

**PERCY, BIG FISHERMAN**

Percy Hilburn, who photographed for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, the Victor Seastrom production of "Confessions of a Queen," is ranked as one of the greatest fishermen on the Pacific coast.



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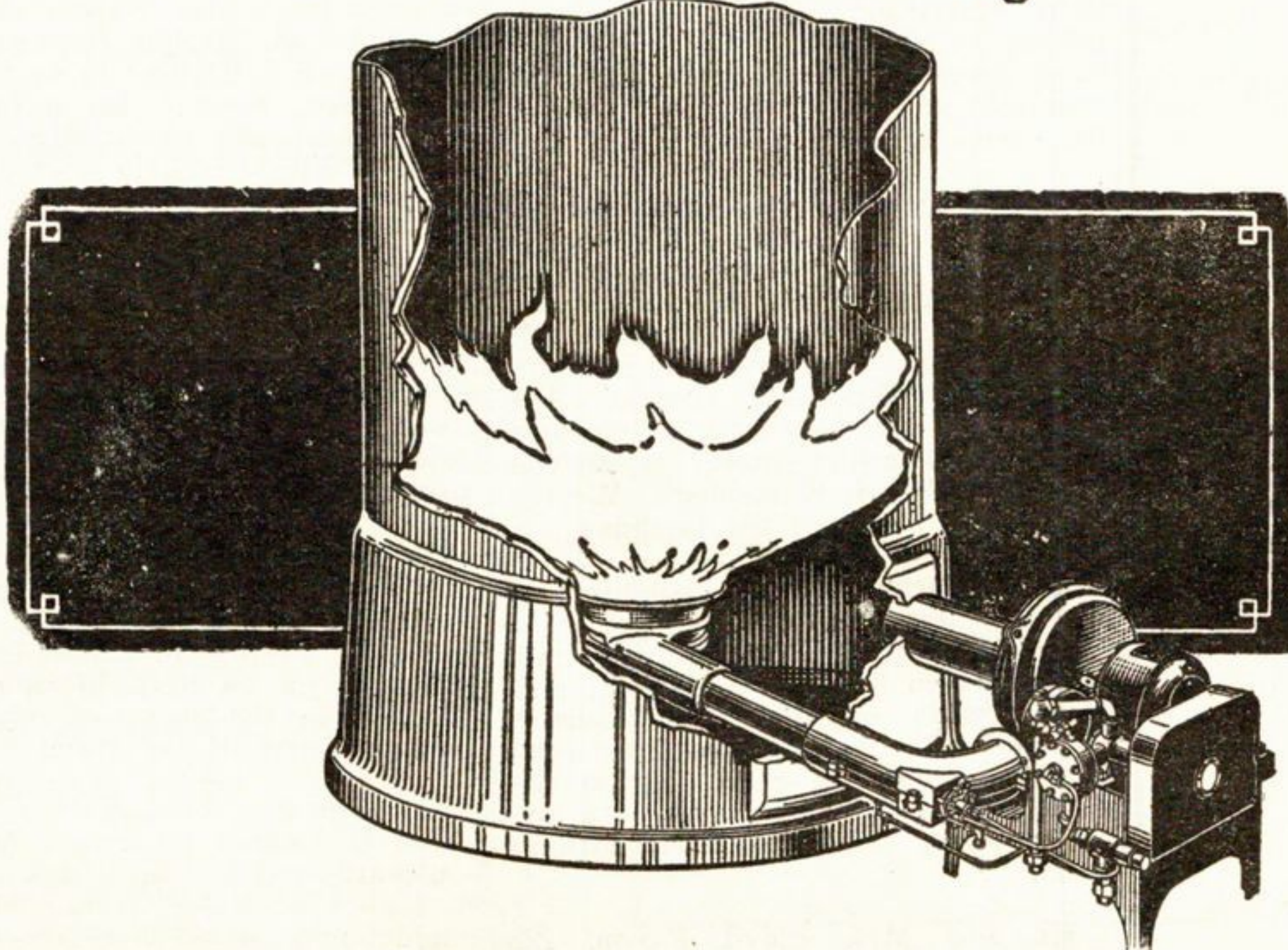
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