

**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 Whitcomb 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."*

During the Nye-Riley combination on the road at Macon, Georgia, in the Lanier House, Riley polished up the Old Soldier Story. Riley, being tired, escaped the reception and entertainment committee appointed to receive the two authors. He left to Nye the burden of being entertained, seeing the sights of the town, meeting the prominent citizens and listening to stories badly told. The man who couldn't tell a funny story, but did, was frequently the bore in the committee. With this in mind, Riley made up his mind when Nye returned, to tell him another story. As they went in to dinner, Riley began telling him, with much seriousness, the oldest story he knew. He had first heard a clown tell it in Robinson & Lake's Circus when he was a boy. No one knew how old it was before the clown used it. Riley dragged the story out, told it in the forgetful fashion of an old man with confused memory, spoiling the point several times before he came to it. Nye declared it the best thing he had ever heard Riley do and begged him to put it in the program and he did. In outline, the story is like this:

"I heard an awful funny thing the other day. I don't know if I can get it off to you or not. It's a story about a soldier—a soldier in the war. He went to the war when the army broke out—the soldier did and he was in the army and one day he got into a big fight—a big battle, you know, and the soldier was in it—"

"Well, in the course of the battle the soldier got his leg shot off, but retained his presence of mind and called a comrade over to carry him off the field, explaining that he had gotten his leg shot off by a cannon ball. The comrade started to carry him across the field with the injured fellow's head

hanging over his shoulder. Just then a cannon ball came along and took the fellow's head off, sure 'nough, but didn't hit the comrade who was carrying him, and so he knew nothing of it until the captain came riding across the field and said, 'Say, what are you going to do with that thing?' The fellow thought it was a funny question, but answered his superior officer like a private will, respectful-like, and says, 'Why, this here fellow got his leg shot off by a cannon ball and I was taking him back to the rear.' And the captain says, 'Why, he says, 'that fellow's got his head shot off!' And upon that the soldier let the body slide down to the ground and he seen how it was and he says to the captain, 'Why, he says, 'he—told me it was his LEG!'"

On Sunday, July 23, 1916, the Hoosier world awoke to see the startling headline in black type across the morning newspaper, "James Whitcomb Riley is dead!" On Saturday morning he had had a severe stroke, but under the ministrations of his physician was thought to be in no danger. The family had retired for the night. At 10:50 Mr. Riley asked the nurse for a glass of water, then reclined upon his pillow and closed his eyes in final sleep.

Immediately words of sympathy began to pour in to Mr. Eitel. We quote, in closing, the words of his friend, Wilbur D. Nesbit:

*"Where is he gone? The lengthening miles  
Have lured him to the afterworlds,  
And there he fares down aisles of bloom,  
That thrill the air with their perfume,  
Yet still his song forever sings,  
This man, who sang of common things."*



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- New Evanston Theatre Co. 1

**HOLD HEALTH MEETING**

The regular health conference conducted by the Chicago Tuberculosis Institute will be held at the health center, City hall, Evanston, Davis street and Sherman avenue, August 13 and August 25, at 10 o'clock. This will be in charge of the public health nurse for this community.

Mr. and Mrs. Ernest S. Ballard announce the birth of a son, Ernest S. Ballard, Jr., July 27. Mr. and Mrs. Ballard and their family are at their summer home at Chebeague island, Maine.

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