



Songs of Friendship: "Think of him still as the same, I say. He is not dead-he is just away."

James Whitcomb Riley

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Poet and author James Whitcomb Riley was born on October 7th 1849 in Greenfield, Indiana. Better known as the "Hoosier Poet" for his work with regional dialects, and also as the "Children's Poet" Riley was born into an influential and well off family. However his education was spotty but he was surrounded by creativity which was to stand him in good stead later in life. His early career was a series of low paid temporary jobs. After stints as a journalist and billboard proprietor he had the resources to dedicate more of his efforts to writing. Riley was prone to drink which was to affect his health and later his career but after a slow start and a lot of submissions he began to gain traction first in newspapers and then with the publication of his dialect poems 'Boone County Poems' he came to national recognition. This propelled him to long term contracts to perform on speaking circuits. These were very successful but over the years his star waned. In 1888 he was too drunk to perform and the ensuing publicity made everything seem very bleak for a while. However he overcame that and managed to re-negotiate his contracts so that he received his rightful share of the income and his wealth thereafter increased very quickly. A bachelor, Riley seems to have his writings as his only outlet, and although in his public performances he was well received, his publications were becoming seen as banal and repetitive and sales of these later works began to fall away. Eventually after his last tour in 1895 he retired to spend his final years in Indianapolis writing patriotic poetry. Now in poor health, weakened by years of heavy drinking, Riley, the Hoosier Poet died on July 23, 1916 of a stroke. In a final, unusual tribute, Riley lay in state for a day in the Indiana Statehouse, where thousands came to pay their respects. Not since Lincoln had a public personage received such a send-off. He is buried at Crown Hill Cemetery in Indianapolis. Here we present Songs of Friendship.

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