

Book Reviews

A Bibliography of James Whitcomb Riley. By Anthony J. and Dorothy R. Russo. (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1944, pp. xxi, 372.)

“But anyone knows ef you got the clothes,
You can go in the crowd wher’ the best of ’em goes!”

James Whitcomb Riley wrote these somewhat prophetic lines when, literally speaking, he appeared in country homespun of Hoosierdom. In this bibliography he acquires the dress, let us say, of the aristocracy of letters. Some measurements had been taken for this new attire by Edmund H. Eitel in the biographical edition of the poet’s works in 1913, where more than fifty pages of bibliographical notes appeared, and in *Letters* edited by William Lyon Phelps and published in 1930. But years of cutting and fitting and stitching were still to be done, and it has been done. One regrettable feature is that Mr. Russo did not live to see the work completed.

This “formal” is beautifully and carefully tailored. The designers say that it follows in many respects a conventional pattern. But what they do not say and what is distinctly observable is that, formal though the dress may be, it has, through the understanding and devotion of those preparing it, been made to accentuate the personality of the wearer. The pertinent question now arises, Does the poet seem at home in the new outfit and in the aristocratic company to which it admits him?

The bibliography of a literary man is a challenge to scholars, who either silently neglect the subject of the work as unworthy of the effort that accompanies research or begin under the stimulus of the work to look with interested and appraising eyes. I speak perhaps from a personal bias, having cut my teeth on Riley books; but I sincerely believe that James Whitcomb Riley deserves that study for which the bibliography prepares. Questions suggest themselves at once concerning the poet’s reading, his reception in foreign lands, his literary friendships, his reflection of the literary taste of more than one generation of readers, his part in America’s cultural development. For he was part of a now well-recognized literary growth which, in the 60’s, 70’s, and 80’s, provided the West and South a voice. Abraham Lincoln, John Hay, Joaquin Miller, Edward Eggleston, Mark Twain,

Mary Murfree, Joel Chandler Harris, and the humorists who made themselves heard above the din of war and the confusion of reconstruction were part of that growth and voice. He shared with some of these an interest in presenting a region with the color that dialect gives and perhaps justified the praise of the scholar George Philip Krapp, "Probably the best known and best loved of all dialect writers in America. . . ." Though part of a growth or movement, he yet had something distinctive to present: He understood the yearning of men and women in a rapidly industrializing society—a yearning that at times amounted to nostalgia—for the simplicity of country places and country ways. And Riley has literary significance, not only through his relationship to the West that was becoming vocal, but also through his ties with the literary East, with both its elderly and its youthful spokesmen. His "Raggedy Man," his "Hired Girl," his "Uncle Sidney," and other character creations have contributed more than is generally realized to the silent inculcation of true democratic faith through a certain inherent dignity and loveliness that are not dependent on social position. *A Bibliography of James Whitcomb Riley* will be an invaluable aid in the resolution of complexities that attend the study of a period of cultural growth.

Mr. and Mrs. Russo, with the aid of the Lilly Endowment, Mr. J. K. Lilly, Jr., and the Indiana Historical Society have met the requirements for the best bibliographer: accuracy, lucidity, and honesty. They have shown painstaking care in tracing the stories and poems of Riley to the places of their first appearance in print, in ferreting out ephemeral productions, in finding and identifying all his books in which his prose and verse appeared for the first time, and in describing those books. They have organized the materials with the collector, the librarian, the student, and the general reader in mind: there are clearly defined divisions, arranged with a "well-proportioned picture of Riley's published works" the goal; explanatory introductions to these divisions; cross references; references to outside works that afford necessary enlightenment on many items; an alphabetized list of the journals in which individual stories and poems were first printed; an index of first lines of those writings not so indexed in the biographical edition; an alphabetized list of poems that have appeared as sheet music; a selected

group of books and articles containing biographical and critical comment; and, finally, a general index for the entire volume. And promises are kept. The authors pretend not beyond what they have been able to do. They have been careful to distinguish items that they have known of indirectly from those that have actually passed under their eyes. According to a recent statement of Mrs. Russo, she kept in mind while at the five-year labor the distinction once made by her uncle, Charles A. Beard, between *a* bibliography and *the* bibliography, with the latter the desired end.

As I indicated earlier, the authors have made a bibliography that accentuates the personality of the man studied. The book is attractively bound in brownish-gray cloth. In addition to title and publisher the backstrip of green bears stamped in gilt four illustrations reminiscent of the poet and his work: a child with a halo; one of the nine goblins of the back fence; a corn shock and pumpkins; and a boy of "Noon-time, June-time," with fishing pole and bait can. Opposite the title page of the book is a reproduction in color of a portrait of Riley by the Hoosier artist T. C. Steele. And shedding suggestions of the life of Riley's day over lists of titles and minutiae of collations are diverting hints of the Bowen-Merrill fire, the misdating of books by some publishers to lessen postage cost, the "War of the Poets" in Indianapolis in the late 70's, the prosecution of a Chicago firm for pirating Riley's work, the Indianapolis Flower Mission, the collaboration of Riley and Nye, the hoax of "Leonainie," and the work of such illustrators as Gruelle, Booth, Vawter, Relyea, and others. All of these approaches are, like the poet, inviting and friendly.

Riley will wear this new garment and appear among the aristocrats with ease and grace.

Frank Davidson

An Economic History of the Indiana Oolitic Limestone Industry. By Joseph A. Batchelor. Indiana Business Studies, No. 27. (Bloomington: The School of Business, Indiana University, 1944, pp. xii, 382. \$3.50.)

Professor Batchelor's study "is the product of the cooperation of two century-old neighbors—Indiana University and the Indiana limestone industry." It presents an over-all delineation of the interaction of the diversity of problems