

Some of the most pretentious buildings in the business district that were destroyed by the fire were from four to six stories in height. Most of them were less.

In this fire that lasted for several days and nights, approximately eighteen thousand buildings were destroyed, among them being the Grand Pacific Hotel, six stories in height, then being completed. When rebuilt it was described as the largest hotel in the world.

After the fire came the search for fire-resisting building materials and then came the revolutionary system of skeleton construction where the weight of the walls is carried to the foundations by a framework of steel. This new system of building was one in which Chicago engineers and architects were the pioneers.

Along with the new structural engineering that made possible the erection of skyscrapers, came the development of elevators that provided access to the top floors of the tallest buildings.

The author describes the studies that were made to provide more secure footings and foundations for the greater weight of the tall new buildings and tells of the methods that were devised, such as the use of wooden piles and concrete caissons.

Included in the volume are biographies of the leaders in building design and construction from the time of John M. Van Osdel, Chicago's first architect, who arrived in the town in 1837, down to those who had part in the creation of the marvelously beautiful Columbian Exposition.

The book is profusely illustrated with full-page pictures that cover the period from before the fire on down to the present time. To the architects and engineers who are engaged in the planning of buildings in the Chicago area, this will be a valuable reference book. For the average reader, the illustrations alone, giving as they do a continuous pictorial record that covers the period of three-quarters of a century, will be a source of enjoyment.

Indianapolis, Indiana

Lee Burns

James Whitcomb Riley as I Knew Him: Real Incidents in the Early Life of America's Beloved Poet. By Minnie Belle Mitchell. (Greenfield, Indiana, The Old Swimmin' Hole Press, 1949, pp. 224. Illustrations. \$3.50.)

This is Greenfield articulate, expressing its devotion to a poet whose memory is regarded as a sacred trust by the author. She links the "motherly little town, to whose apron strings I am still tied," as Riley later described it, so closely with his lifetime labors that all his writing seems to begin and end there. There is some basis for her contention, judging by the subjects of his best-known poems and accepting the story of their origin, herein told in some detail. If she brushes aside his own statement that "The Old Sweetheart" and "Aunt Mary" were composites, she presents an interesting case for her candidates for their prototypes. Riley made no secret of the fact that he drew on the people of Greenfield for the characters in his verse. She tells us that he did it "with so kindly a humor that none were offended." Certainly he had a deep affection for the people as well as the scenes of his childhood.

The book emphasizes Riley's gift of mimicry, which, given words, makes the people of whom he wrote ring true. It shows his gift of sensitiveness and imagination being developed by his mother, the focus of his love throughout his life. Mrs. Mitchell pays tribute to his father, his brothers and sisters, other relatives, teachers, neighbors, companions of his childhood and youth, who had their place in his affections. To the pranks and enterprises in which "Bud" Riley played an instigating or ingenious role (he was apparently one of those rare persons able to quicken the imagination of his associates, thereby intensifying his own), she devotes a large proportion of the chapters in her biography, in the belief that "he lived his happy youth to the brim and then spent the remainder of his life telling about it." When, as a grown man and successful poet and recitationist, he began the writing of *A Child-World*, he is quoted as declaring it one of the happiest tasks of his life because it "was like living his life over."

Mrs. Mitchell tells of the prodigal's later return to visit his people. The idleness of his youth, with his wanderings as a sign painter, musician and entertainer, she explains: "He was temperamentally unfit for anything but fun making and dreaming." When, after he had achieved fame and honor and riches, his home town tried to draw him back for a public entertainment, he was reluctant, finally admitting that he was afraid of becoming a target for those still living

there who had scolded him for his escapades. His relief was great when, at length persuaded, he found a community united in its desire to give him a royal welcome and display their love "for the village idler and scamp who had made a world of friends and had sent his 'joyous children' singing down the years."

The author of these reminiscences had family and town tradition to add to her own acquaintance with the poet. Her *Hoosier Boy: James Whitcomb Riley* (1942) was one in *The Childhood of Famous Americans Series*, written for children, weaving together his life and poetry, as she interlaces them in this later book for adults. Only a few incidents strike one as newly presented; to those who have read previous biographies of Riley most of the episodes are familiar. She adds some data to the known list of Riley's published writings, mentioning an early contribution to the *Greenfield Commercial*, "Babe McDowell," and quoting some poems from the same periodical, in the 70's: "An Ode" [to Columbus Jackson] and "An Unexpected Result." Here also appears a poem, written in that period, to be set to music by Ike Davis, the chorus beginning, "Give back the dream that I have known," as well as a jingle, "The Phonograph," published in the *Hancock Democrat*. His opinion of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, (p. 210), may have had earlier printing in his collected letters but is not identified. Mrs. Mitchell not only quotes an annotation by him in Drusilla Cravens' copy of the Book of Job, but provides a clue to its publication at some time in the *Indianapolis Star*.

Those who have a nostalgic longing for life without the complexities of today (usually they expect some of modern comforts!), particularly those who have grown up in the little towns of the Mid West, who do not mind a little sentiment which stops far short of being wearisome, will enjoy this picture of laughing, romping youngsters for its revival of old memories. It is the story of Greenfield and Riley's love for each other, a romance with the flavor of a past generation, produced for his centennial year.

Indiana Historical Society

Dorothy R. Russo

The Churches and the Social Conscience. By O. T. Binkley
(Indianapolis, National Foundation Press, 1948, pp. vii,