

"Green Fields and Running Brooks"

By James Whitcomb Riley. \$1.25. Indianapolis: The Bowen-Merrill Co.

HEREIN ARE to be found verses in the various styles practised by Mr. Riley—verses of nature, love, friendship, art, death; grave verses, gay verses, and verses in the dialect of the Hoosier. Mr. Riley has won his audience—and a large one it is; all that he has to do now is to keep his hold. We were among the first to come under the witchery of his singing; that was when he published "The Old Swimmin' Hole." We have kept a pretty careful run of all that he has written since then, and from time to time, as occasion offered, have expressed our opinion of his work. In the present volume the author simply adds to the amount he has written without improving the quality. There are things here just as good as anything he has done before, but there is nothing to suggest the likelihood of Mr. Riley's becoming a poet of another sort. It seems to us that this is as it should be—and that it shows Mr. Riley's correct appreciation of his gifts. He has gifts entirely unique. His verse is individual; his lines are full of homely beauty; he knows the most direct road to the common people's heart; and his humor is genuine and healthy.

In matters of technique it is surprising to see how fastidious he is. His rhymes are almost always perfect; his handling of metres is dexterous; his lines rarely show an inversion, and his choice of words lies among the simplest and commonest in the English language. He is happy in making phrases that are new, yet there is no indication in his work of any striving to say things in an unusual way. The poem in this collection which comes nearest to exhibiting all these characteristics is the most charming one in the book. It is called "Home at Night":—

"When chirping crickets fainter cry,
And pale stars blossom in the sky,
And twilight's gloom has dimmed the bloom
And blurred the butterfly:

"When locust-blossoms fleck the walk,
And up the tiger-lily stalk
The glow-worm crawls and clings and falls
And glimmers down the garden walls:

"When buzzing things, with double wings
Of crisp and raspish flutterings,
Go whizzing by so very nigh
One thinks of fangs and stings:—

"O then, within, is stilled the din
Of crib she rocks the baby in,
And heart and gate and latch's weight
Are lifted—and the lips of Kate."