

**MRS. MILLER**

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Mrs. Miller by James Whitcomb Riley

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**JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY**

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*By*

JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

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**J**OHAN B. MCKINNEY, Attorney and Counselor at Law, as his sign read, was, for many reasons, a fortunate man. For many other reasons he was not. He was chiefly fortunate in being, as certain opponents often strove witheringly to designate him, "the son of his father," since that sound old gentleman was the wealthiest farmer in that section, with but one son and heir to supplant him in time in the rôle of "county god," and haply perpetuate the prouder title of "the biggest tax-payer on the assessment list." And this fact, too, fortunate as it would seem, was doubtless the indirect occasion of a liberal percentage of all John's misfortunes. From his earliest school-days in the little town, up to his tardy graduation

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from a distant college, the influence of his father's wealth invited his procrastination, humored its results, encouraged the laxity of his ambition, "and even now," as John used, in bitter irony, to put it, "it is aiding and abetting me in the ostensible practice of my chosen profession, a listless, aimless undetermined man of forty, and a confirmed bachelor at that!" At the utterance of this self-depreciating statement, John generally jerked his legs down from the top of his desk; and, rising and kicking his chair back to the wall, he would stomp around his littered office till the manilla carpet steamed with dust. Then he would wildly break away, seeking refuge either in the open street, or in his room at the old-time tavern, The Eagle House, "where," he would say, "I have lodged and boarded, I do solemnly asseverate, for a long, unbroken, middle-aged eternity of ten years, and can yet assert, in the words of the more fortunately-dying Webster, that 'I still live!'"

Extravagantly satirical as he was at

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times, John had always an indefinable drolery about him that made him agreeable company to his friends, at least; and such an admiring friend he had constantly at hand in the person of Bert Haines. Both were Bohemians in natural tendency, and, though John was far in Bert's advance in point of age, he found the young man "just the kind of a fellow to have around"; while Bert, in turn, held his senior in profound esteem—looked up to him, in fact, and in even his eccentricities strove to pattern after him. And so it was, when summer days were dull and tedious, these two could muse and doze the hours away together; and when the nights were long, and dark, and deep, and beautiful, they could drift out in the moonlight of the stars, and with "the soft complaining flute" and "warbling lute," "lay the pipes," as John would say, for their enduring popularity with the girls! And it was immediately subsequent to one of these romantic excursions, when the belated pair, at two o'clock in the morning, had skulked