

**NEIGHBORLY
POEMS AND
DIALECT SKETCHES**

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Neighborly Poems and Dialect Sketches by James Whitcomb Riley

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**TO MY BROTHER
HUMBOLDT RILEY**

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PREFACE

As far back into boyhood as the writer's memory may intelligently go, the "country poet" is most pleasantly recalled. He was, and is, as common as the "country fiddler," and as full of good old-fashioned music. Not a master of melody, indeed, but a poet, certainly--

"Who, through long days of labor,
And nights devoid of ease,
Still heard in his soul the music
Of wonderful melodies."

And it is simply the purpose of this series of dialectic studies to reflect the real worth of this homely child of nature, and to echo faithfully, if possible, the faltering music of his song.

In adding to this series, as the writer has, for many years, been urged to do, and answering as steadfast a demand of Benj. F. Johnson's first and oldest friends, it has been decided that this further work of his be introduced to the reader of the volume as was the old man's

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lovable for the unquestionable evidence it bears of having been written "from the hart out." The only thing we find to—but hold! Let us first lay the poem before the reader:

Here followed the poem, "The Old Swimmin'-Hole," entire—the editorial comment ending as follows:

The only thing now, Mr. Johnson—as we were about to observe—the only thing we find to criticise, at all relative to the poem, is your closing statement to the effect that "It was wrote to go to the tune of 'The Captin with his Whiskers!'" You should not have told us that, O Rare Ben. Johnson!

A week later, in the "Journal" of date June 24th, followed this additional mention of "Benj. F. Johnson, of Boone":

It is a pleasure for us to note that the publication of the poem of "The Old Swimmin'-Hole," to which the Journal, with just pride, referred last week, has proved almost as great a pleasure to its author as to the hosts of delighted readers who have written in its praise, or called to personally indorse our high opinion of its poetic value. We have just received a letter from Mr. Johnson, the author, inclosing us another lyrical performance, which in many features even surpasses the originality and spirit of the former effort. Certainly the least that can be said

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first work to the reader of the newspaper of nearly ten years ago.

Directly, then, referring to the Indianapolis "Daily Journal,"—under whose management the writer had for some time been employed,—from issue of date June 17, 1882, under editorial caption of "A Boone County Pastoral," this article is herewith quoted:

Benj. F. Johnson, of Boone county, who considers the Journal a "very valubul" newspaper, writes to inclose us an original poem, desiring that we kindly accept it for publication, as "many neighbors and friends is astin' him to have the same struck off."

Mr. Johnson thoughtfully informs us that he is "no edjucated man," but that he has, "from childhood up tel old enough to vote, allus wrote more er less poetry, as many of an alburn in the neighborhood can testify." Again, he says that he writes "from the hart out"; and there is a touch of genuine pathos in the frank avowal, "Thare is times when I write the tears rolls down my cheeks."

In all sincerity, Mr. Johnson, we are glad to publish the poem you send, and just as you have written it. That is its greatest charm. Its very defects compose its excellence. You need no better education than the one from which emanates "The Old Swimmin'-Hole." It is real poetry, and all the more tender and

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of it is that it stands a thorough proof of our first assertion, that the author, though by no means a man of learning and profound literary attainments, is none the less a true poet and an artist. The letter, accompanying this later amaranth of blooming wild-wood verse, we publish in its entirety, assured that Mr. Johnson's many admirers will be charmed, as we have been, at the delicious glimpse he gives us of his inspiration, modes of study, home-life, and surroundings:

"To the Editor of the Indanoplus Jurnal:

"Respected Sir—The paper is here, markin' the old swimmin'-hole, my poetry which you seem to like so well. I joy to see it in print, and I thank you, hart and voice, fer speakin' of its merrits in the way in which you do. I am glad you thought it was real poetry, as you said in your artikle. But I make bold to ast you what was your ldy in sayin' I had ortent of told you it went to the tune I spoke of in my last. I felt highly flattered tel I got that fur. Was it because you don't know the tune refered to in the letter? Er wasent some words spelt right er not? Still ef you hadent of said somepin' aginst it I de of thought you was makin' fun. As I said before I well know my own unedjucation, but I don't think that is any reason the feelin's of the soul is stunted in theyr growth however. 'Juge not less ye be juged,' says The Good Book, and so say I, ef I thought you was makin' fun of the lines that I wrote and which you done me the onner to have printed off in sich fine style that