

Complete Works of James Whitcomb Riley

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"[...]cavalry in the Civil War, was a lawyer of ability and an orator of more than local distinction. His mother was a woman of rare strength of character combined with deep sympathy and a clear understanding. Together, they made home a place to remember with thankful heart. When James was twenty years old, the death of his mother made a profound impression on him, an impression that has influenced much of his verse and has remained with him always. At an early age he was sent to school and, "then sent back again," to use his own words. He was restive under what he called the "iron discipline." A number of years ago, he spoke of these early educational beginnings in phrases so picturesque and so characteristic that they are quoted in full: "My first teacher was a little old woman, rosy and roly-poly, who looked as though she might have just come tumbling out of a fairy story, so lovable was she and so jolly and so amiable. She kept school in her little Dame-Trot kind of dwelling of three rooms, with a porch in the rear, like a bracket on the wall, which was part of the play-ground of her 'scholars,'—for in those days pupils were called 'scholars' by their affectionate teachers. Among the twelve or fifteen boys and girls who were there I remember particularly a little lame boy, who always got the first[...]".

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