



James Whitcomb Riley

A BACKWARD LOOK

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As I sat smoking, alone, yesterday,
And lazily leaning back in my chair,
Enjoying myself in a general way--
Allowing my thoughts a holiday
From weariness, toil and care,--
My fancies--doubtless, for ventilation--
Left ajar the gates of my mind,--
And Memory, seeing the situation,
Slipped out in the street of "Auld Lang Syne."--

Wandering ever with tireless feet
Through scenes of silence, and jubilee
Of long-hushed voices; and faces sweet
Were thronging the shadowy side of the street
As far as the eye could see;
Dreaming again, in anticipation,
The same old dreams of our boyhood's days
That never come true, from the vague sensation
Of walking asleep in the world's strange ways.

Away to the house where I was born!
And there was the selfsame clock that ticked
From the close of dusk to the burst of morn,
When life-warm hands plucked the golden corn
And helped when the apples were picked.
And the "chany dog" on the mantel-shelf,
With the gilded collar and yellow eyes,
Looked just as at first, when I hugged myself
Sound asleep with the dear surprise.

And down to the swing in the locust-tree,
Where the grass was worn from the trampled ground,
And where "Eck" Skinner, "Old" Carr, and three
Or four such other boys used to be
"Doin' sky-scrapers," or "whirlin' round":
And again Bob climbed for the bluebird's nest,
And again "had shows" in the buggy-shed
Of Guymon's barn, where still, unguessed,
The old ghosts romp through the best days dead!

And again I gazed from the old schoolroom
With a wistful look, of a long June day,
When on my cheek was the hectic bloom
Caught of Mischief, as I presume--
He had such a "partial" way,
It seemed, toward me.--And again I thought
Of a probable likelihood to be
Kept in after school--for a girl was caught
Catching a note from me.

And down through the woods to the swimming-hole--
Where the big, white, hollow old sycamore grows,--
And we never cared when the water was cold,
And always "ducked" the boy that told
On the fellow that tied the clothes.--
When life went so like a dreamy rhyme,
That it seems to me now that then
The world was having a jollier time
Than it ever will have again.

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