

Riley James Whitcomb

Rubáiyát of Doc Sifers



James Riley

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We found him in that far-away that yet to us seems near —
We vagrants of but yesterday when idlest youth was here, —
When lightest song and laziest mirth possessed us through and through,
And all the dreamy summer-earth seemed drugged with morning dew:

When our ambition scarce had shot a stalk or blade indeed:
Yours, – choked as in the garden-spot you still deferred to "weed":
Mine, – but a pipe half-cleared of pith – as now it flats and whines
In sympathetic cadence with a hiccough in the lines.

Aye, even then – o timely hour! – the high gods did confer
In our behalf: – and, clothed in power, lo, came their courier —
Not winged with flame nor shod with wind, – but ambling down the
pike,
Horseback, with saddlebags behind, and guise all human-like.

And it was given us to see, beneath his rustic rind,
A native force and mastery of such inspiring kind,
That half unconsciously we made obeisance. – smiling, thus
His soul shone from his eyes and laid its glory over us.

.....

Though, faring still that far-away that yet to us seems near,
His form, through mists of yesterday, fades from the vision here,
Forever as he rides, it is in retinue divine, —
The hearts of all his time are his, with your hale heart and mine.

I

Ef you don't know Doc Sifers I'll jes argy, here and now,
You've bin a mighty little while about here, anyhow!
'Cause Doc he's rid these roads and woods – er *swum* 'em, now and
then —
And practised in this neighborhood sence hain't no tellin' when!

II

In radius o' fifteen mile'd, all p'int's o' compass round,
No man er woman, chick er child, er team, on top o' ground,
But knows *him*– yes, and got respects and likin' fer him, too,
Fer all his so-to-speak dee-fects o' genius showin' through!

III

Some claims he's absent-minded; some has said they wuz afeard
To take his powders when he come and dosed 'em out, and 'peared
To have his mind on somepin' else – like County Ditch, er some
New way o' tannin' muskrat-pelts, er makin' butter come.

IV

He's cur'ous – they hain't no mistake about it! – but he's got
Enough o' extry brains to make a *jury*– like as not.
They's no *describin'* Sifers, – fer, when all is said and done,
He's jes *hisse'f Doc Sifers*– ner they hain't no other one!

V

Doc's allus sociable, polite, and 'greeable, you'll find —
Pervidin' ef you strike him right and nothin' on his mind, —
Like in some *hurry*, when they've sent fer Sifers *quick*, you see,
To 'tend some sawmill-accident, er picnic jamboree;

VI

Er when the lightnin' 's struck some hare-brained harvest-hand; er in
Some 'tempt o' suicidin' – where they'd ort to try ag'in!
I've *knowed* Doc haul up from a trot and talk a' hour er two
When raily he'd a-ort o' not a-stopped fer "*Howdy-do!*"

VII

And then, I've met him 'long the road, *a-lopin'*, – starin' straight
Ahead, – and yit he never knowed me when I hollered "*Yate,*
Old Saddlebags!" all hearty-like, er "*Who you goin' to kill?*"
And he'd say nothin' – only hike on faster, starin' still!

VIII

I'd bin insulted, many a time, ef I jes wuzn't shore
Doc didn't mean a thing. And I'm not tetchy any more
Sence that-air day, ef he'd a-jes a-stopped to jaw with *me*,
They'd bin a little dorter less in my own fambily!

IX

Times *now*, at home, when Sifers' name comes up, I jes *let on*,
You know, 'at I think Doc's to *blame*, the way he's bin and gone
And disapp'inted folks – 'Ll-*jee-mun-nee!* you'd ort to then
Jes hear my wife light into me – "*ongratefulest o' men!*"

X

'Mongst *all* the women – mild er rough, splendifferous er plain,
Er them *with* sense, er not enough to come in out the rain, —
Jes ever' shape and build and style o' women, fat er slim —
They all like Doc, and got a smile and pleasant word fer *him!*

XI

Ner hain't no horse I've ever saw but what'll neigh and try
To sidle up to him, and paw, and sense him, ear-and-eye:
Then jes a tetch o' Doc's old pa'm, to pat 'em, er to shove
Along their nose – and they're as ca'm as any cooin' dove!

XII

And same with *dogs*, – take any breed, er strain, er pedigree,
Er racial caste 'at can't concede no use fer you er me, —
They'll putt all predju-dice aside in *Doc's* case and go in
Kahoots with him, as satisfied as he wuz kith-and-kin!

XIII

And Doc's a wonder, trainin' pets! – He's got a chicken-hawk,
In kind o' half-cage, where he sets out in the gyarden-walk,
And got that wild bird trained so tame, he'll loose him, and he'll fly
Clean to the woods! – Doc calls his name – and he'll come, by-and-by!

XIV

Some says no money down ud buy that bird o' Doc. – Ner no
Inducement to the *bird*, says I, 'at *he'd* let *Sifers* go!
And Doc *he* say 'at *he's* content – long as a bird o' prey
Kin 'bide *him*, it's a *compliment*, and takes it thataway.

XV

But, gittin' back to *docterin'*— all the sick and in distress,
And old and pore, and weak and small, and lone and motherless, —
I jes tell *you* I 'preciate the man 'at 's got the love
To "go ye forth and ministrate!" as Scriptur' tells us of.

XVI

Dull times, Doc jes *mianders* round, in that old rig o' his:
And hain't no tellin' where he's bound ner guessin' where he is;
He'll drive, they tell, jes thataway fer maybe six er eight
Days at a stretch; and neighbors say he's bin clean round the State.

XVII

He picked a' old tramp up, one trip, 'bout eighty mile'd from here,
And fetched him home and k-yored his hip, and kep' him 'bout a year;
And feller said – in all *his* ja'nts round this terreschul ball
'At no man wuz a *circumstance* to *Doc*! – he topped 'em all! —

XVIII

Said, bark o' trees 's a' open book to Doc, and vines and moss
He read like writin' – with a look knowed ever' dot and cross:
Said, stars at night wuz jes as good 's a compass: said, he s'pose
You couldn't lose Doc in the woods the darkest night that blows!

XIX

Said, Doc'll tell you, purty clos't, by underbresh and plants,
How fur off *warter* is, – and 'most perdict the sort o' chance
You'll have o' findin' *fish*; and how they're liable to *bite*,
And whether they're a-bitin' now, er only after night.

XX

And, whilse we're talkin' *fish*, – I mind they formed a fishin'-crowd
(When folks *could* fish 'thout gittin' *fined*, and seinin' wuz allowed!)
O' leadin' citizens, you know, to go and seine "Old Blue" —
But hadn't no big seine, and so – w'y, what wuz they to do?..

XXI

And Doc he say he thought 'at *he* could *knit* a stitch er two —
"Bring the *materials* to me – 'at's all I'm astin' you!"
And down he sets – six weeks, i jing! and knits that seine plum done —
Made corks too, brails and ever'thing – good as a boughten one!

XXII

Doc's *public* sperit – when the sick 's not takin' *all* his time
And he's got *some* fer politics – is simple yit sublime: —
He'll *talk* his *principles*– and they air *honest*; – but the sly
Friend strikes him first, election-day, he'd 'commodate, er die!

XXIII

And yit, though Doc, as all men knows, is square straight up and down,
That vote o' his is – well, I s'pose – the cheapest one in town; —
A fact 'at's sad to verify, as could be done on oath —
I've voted Doc myse'f —*And I was criminal fer both!*

XXIV

You kin corrupt the *ballot-box*– corrupt *yourse'f*, as well —
Corrupt *some* neighbors, – but old Doc's as oncorruptible
As Holy Writ. So putt a pin right there! – Let *Sifers* be,
I jucks! he wouldn't vote agin his own worst inimy!

XXV

When Cynthy Eubanks laid so low with fever, and Doc Glenn

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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