

# The Character Of Tailholt

WILLIAM T. SHARP

All those who really knew John Taylor are dead and forgotten. His generation have by this time advanced a considerable way down the line of history. Not all has been forgotten, however; as the story was passed on to me by my grandfather's narrations, I feel as though I really knew old John myself.

John was known as the Character of Tailholt, the little town some fifteen miles southeast of Indianapolis, made famous by the poems of James Whitcomb Riley. He was the outcast of an aristocratic Scottish family, who had cast him from the family tree because of his failure to measure up to family specifications in success as a politician. This, along with several early business failures, had driven him far off the course normally set for the son of a Scottish baronet.

His discontent with life was constant and had led him many miles from his arrogant family. The only relief he seemed to get from his own misery was that which he derived visiting saloons. When life in the saloon became too much of a social contact for him, he would retreat to his skimpy attic room. The furnishings of his little room consisted of a bed, one broken-down chair, and a potbellied stove that sat in the corner. It did not appear as empty as one might assume from the description, as it was always well stocked with bottles that were scattered about. The length of time he would spend in his room at one time depended largely upon the supply of full bottles he had on hand.

Although he had displayed marked skills as a handy man in woodworking, his general reputation was such that he was not accepted in proud homes even to do

odd bits of carpentry. He was, however, accepted during some of his infrequent sober days to lend a hand in the blacksmith shop. He was especially welcome after someone had been the victim of a runaway horse and had a damaged buggy, because he was known to be one of the best wheelwrights in that section. No doubt he could have earned a nice living in the neighborhood as a jobbing carpenter if he only had not been so infested with the desire for alcoholic stimulation.

Old John would indeed shock society when he would emerge from his little den in the spring of the year. He was about 65, heavy set, grey-haired, with a glum, dark, unshaven face. It was his practice each spring with the coming of warm weather, to go down to the creek and attempt to wash off at least a part of the winter's accumulation of dirt. He then felt himself quite presentable, but to add the finishing touches, he would stop in at the barber shop and get a shave. Each spring as he would emerge from the barber shop, many of the townsmen would stand in awe as they actually saw his face for the first time.

There was always much speculation as to the fate of the old character. At these times in the spring when he seemed on the threshold of reformation, it would seem as though he had changed his outlook on life. These periods of reform, however, were always very short and it began to look as though he was going to decay in his old useless ways.

One day he stopped at the general store to get a plug of tobacco. The storekeeper gave him a letter that had come through the mail. To this day, no one

knows for sure what became of old John, but the last word that the residents of the little town of Tailholt had of him was that

he had inherited the family estate in Philadelphia and had gone to receive his heritage.

## First Impressions

ELSIE RUTH YOUNG

Many times something that happened years ago will stand out clearer in our minds than those things which happened last month or even last week. Thus it is with my first symphony concert. I was in the third grade when my teacher voted to take us to the matinee concert of the Cincinnati Orchestra each time it came to our city. At least a month beforehand she, being an able musician herself, endeavored to explain the program to us and thus gave us adequate preparation for listening.

We were all very excited on the day of the event. We were dismissed around noon so that we could run home and don our best clothes. The prospects of riding with our school-mates on the streetcar to the auditorium heightened our interests, even though the streets were slushy and our hands and feet were frostbitten by the cold January weather.

The Memorial Auditorium has never since looked quite so massive and important to me as on that day! Its marble pillars, high balconies, and carpeted floors had been inconceivable to my childish imagination.

At last the orchestra assembled on the stage! How grand they looked in their

white shirts and "tails!" As the first chords were struck, our whole class listened intently. But here I have to admit something very embarrassing to me which I have kept secret all my life. In my imagination I pictured actors and dancers along with the musicians who should act out the music. I was terrible agitated when no beautiful women with long tresses waltzed out in long, flowing gowns to the rhythm of the Blue Danube. I soon learned, however, that these characters must appear in our minds rather than on the huge platform in front of us. When a little elfin dance was played, I closed my eyes just a little and saw funny little elves running mischievously about in tiny pointed hats and shoes.

I was enthralled by the huge kettle drums and clanging cymbals, and I was amazed that all those strings could work so well together, their bows moving back and forth at the same time. It surprised me that all grown men did not work in offices or factories, but that some devoted all their time to the beautiful art of music.

That day will always live in my memory, perhaps because those first impressions have been lasting ones.