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## EC568 Poems and Short Stories of Country Life

J. W. Searson

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POEMS AND SHORT STORIES OF COUNTRY LIFE  
J. W. Searson

"God made the country, but man made the town".

Much of our greatest literature has sprung from country life. The city is man-made. It has its romance and charm like the country. It has its trials, its sorrows, its joys, its achievements. In these days of newspapers, telephones, rural free delivery, automobiles, and radio, the country has many of the advantages of the city without the evils that come from crowded conditions.

It is estimated that America spends over ten billions of dollars a year just to be out of doors - God's out-of doors, as it is called. Most of this money is spent by residents of cities who long for rest in the mountains and forests, along beautiful lakes, or by the seashore. Doubtless some city resident explained this universal feeling well in the following poem:

The little cares that fretted me,  
I lost them yesterday  
Among the fields above the sea,  
Among the winds at play;  
Among the lowing of the herds;  
The rustling of the trees;  
Among the singing of the birds,  
The humming of the bees.

The foolish fears of what might happen -  
I cast them all away  
Among the clover-scented grass,  
Among the new-mown hay;  
Among the husking of the corn,  
Where drowsy poppies nod,  
Where ill thoughts die and good are born  
Out in the fields with God.  
-Elizebeth Barrett Browning.

Best in Bible Literature Rural

Ancient myths, legends, stories, songs, and poems abound in delightful interpretations of out-door-life. The nature religion of the Greeks and Romans, Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, and many of the finest passages from the Latin poets, Horace and Vergil, are all inspired by contact with nature and by man's attempt to understand his relations to nature and to Nature's God. Much of the choicest literature of the Bible is rural. The Book of Ruth is one of the most perfect examples of the short story, and it is easily one of our choicest descriptions of rural life among favorite. The stories of the wanderings of the tribes of Israel, of the Prodigal Son, the Son of Solomon, the Four Gospels, and many other Bible passages spring fresh and clear from the richest of country life experiences.



## Early American Life

Since literature expresses and interprets life, early American literature was naturally the literature of country life. The early colonists lived in small villages, hunted, tilled the soil, and made almost all of the simple articles of clothing they needed. The stories of early discoveries, exploration and settlements are extremely fascinating. But before the white man came, the Indians had already developed their songs, their dances, and their ceremonials interpreting their free out-door life. In myth and story, they had already interpreted the mysteries of their strange life with its daily fears and nightly terrors.

### Some Great Country Life Stories

Favorites from Irving. Perhaps the two most often read stories of Washington Irving, "Father of American Literature", are Rip Van Winkle and The Legend of Sleepy Hollow. These stories are now household tales describing the scenes and depicting the life along the picturesque Hudson river above the city of New York. Every one should read and enjoy these tales with their quaint humor, their fineness of charm, and their fascinating interpretations of family types that dwelt in and around picturesque Sleepy Hollow and the Catskill mountains.

The Great Stone Face. One of the greatest of American short stories is Nathaniel Hawthorne's story of The Great Stone Face. The background of the story is distinctively rural. Little Ernst at his mother's knee had heard the oft-repeated legend of how there should one day come to the valley a great and good man whose features should resemble the Great Stone Face on the mountain-side. And you just have to read the story to discover and appreciate its beauty, its charm, and its everlasting truth. So popular is it that it has been translated into the language of every civilized nation, and its popularity increases with each passing year. Read the story and you will understand why it is such a favorite. Hawthorne's Twice Told Tales offer still further entertainment of the very best.

The Leatherstocking Tales. "I could write as well as that myself"! These were the words of James Fenimore Cooper as he lay down a stupid English novel which he had been reading to his wife. Now Cooper was a native of New Jersey who had attended Yale College and served six years in the navy. As a child, he had fed upon tales of the Revolution, of battle, of adventure, and of rare endurance, told around the fireside of his father's pioneer home at Cooperstown in "the primeval forest, hard by the broad Lake Otsego and the wide-flowing river". "Trees, mountains, wild animals, and wild men nursed the child, and implanted in him seeds of poetry and wrought into the sturdy fibres of his mind golden threads of creative imagination." As a young man, he took charge of a large farm in Westchester county. With the exception of seven years spent abroad, he lived there or at his boyhood home at Cooperstown. Above every other American writer, he was fitted by surroundings, by temperament, and by surprising native ability to interpret the ideally heroic side of pioneer life. Chief among his enduring contributions are The Leatherstocking Tales, a series of five tales of pioneer adventure, taking their name from old Leatherstocking, a much-worshiped hero fancifully idealized by the swift-working imagination of Cooper. These tales are placed in the neighborhood of the lake and river where the author had spent his childhood, and they set forth "the whole mode of life of a frontier settlement from season to season" and the typical characters on a background of romance and local color.



The Pioneers first appeared in 1823 when the author was 34 years old, and introduced the hero Leatherstocking. The Last of the Mohicans was written in 1826, and followed a year later by The Prairie. Perhaps the best of the series, The Pathfinder, was written when the author had just passed the age of 51. William Cullen Bryant calls this story "a glorious work", and commends its "moral beauty, the vividness and force of its delineations, and the unspoiled love of nature and fresh warm emotions which give life to the narrative and dialogue". In 1841, a year later, the last of the series, The Deerslayer, appeared. Altho each of these tales requires a bit of the reader's patience during the opening chapters, they are fascinating tales cleverly written, and entirely worth while if Americans are to appreciate the full value of their priceless inheritance.

The Tales of Edgar Allan Poe. The writings of Poe baffle all attempts at classification. Poe himself was neither of the city nor of the country. He is the pure artist in American literature. If he had a message, it was the sublime message of religion and art - "Man shall not live by bread alone". But country scenes stimulated his play of imagination, and he created exquisite tales which are alike the cherished possessions of city and country. Poe's tales minister to homebuilders, tillers of the soil, and civilization makers who come to crave completeness of life. They are symbols of enduring truth and beauty best understood by the toiler who seeks rest and renewal of spirit. A few of them are outstanding contributions to the literature of the larger rural life. Fanciful, fantastic, weird, even gruesome, they appear at times, but beneath them all is a note of pure American idealism for "a nation at work with grimed hands".

Written on a background of five years' experience in the Manor House school in the suburbs of London, "The Fall of the House of Usher" contains artistic descriptions and interpretations of English landscape and architecture. "The Doman of Arpheim" is another tale cleverly combining mystery and the art of architecture and landscape gardening. Perhaps Poe's most widely read and enjoyed tale is "The Gold Bug", whose fantastic secrets and deep mysteries are revealed bit by bit thru the keenness of an adventurer at the lowly hut of William Legrand on Sullivan's Island, near Charleston, the sire of old Fort Moultrie. Then there are the gruesome, hair-raising tales such as "The Tell-tale Heart", and "The Black Cat", powerful interpretations of the truth that "murder will out", or the guilty person's guilt in some way reveals itself. While the tales of Poe are not strictly rural life literature, they are distinctively American artistic creations which should be read and enjoyed by all.

Some Southern Stories. Some of the rarest of country life literature has come from the Southland. Who has not loved the charming "Uncle Remus Stories" of that wonderful story-teller, Joel Chandler Harris? These humorous fold-tales are told night after night to a little boy by an old negro slave. Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, Brer Possum, and other animals show their cunning in clever conversations and fascinate the ears of grown-ups and children. One of the choicest of the Harris stories is "A French Tar Baby", a tale which, in some form, exists in the literature of many nations. Then there is "Marse Chau" and "Meh Lady", by Thomas Nelson Page, well-told tales of southern rural life contained in "In Ole Virginia"; and George W. Cable, "In Creole Days", which pictures life in Louisiana before the Civil War.

Western Tales. Mark Twain (Samuel L. Clemens) and Bret Harte have created typical stories of early mid-west and western life. California, with the romance of its gold fever of '49, is interpreted by Bret Harte. His "Tennessee's Partner" is a rare character presentation of early California days, and "The Outcasts



Poker Flat" is another story typical of the rough mining camp life of the gold-seekers. Mark Twain, first among American humorists, was born in Hannibal, Missouri, in 1835. His early life was identified with every phase of pioneer life in the Middle West and West. One of his first and best short stories is his "The Jumping Frog of Calaveras," a humorous extravaganza which at once won him recognition. Among his stories best interpreting pioneer life are "Tom Sawyer," "Huckleberry Finn," "Roughing It," and "Old Times on the Mississippi", all humorous and profitably entertaining. For satisfying longer stories of midwest pioneer and rural life, Hamlin Garland's "Son of the Middle Border," and "Daughter of the Middle Border" are unsurpassed.

Three All-American Stories. Three stories too good to be overlooked by any American are Edward Everett Hale's "The Man Without a Country", Mary Shipman Andrews' "The Perfect Tribute," and Elbert Hubbard's "A Message to Garcia". The first is the most popular patriotic story in our literature. The second interprets impressively a striking incident in the life of Abraham Lincoln. The third is a popular preachment based on the incident of Lieutenant Rowan's carrying a message to the Cuban general thru hostile lines far into the fastnesses of the island.

#### Some Great Country Life Poems

Of the vast number of poems that have given country life inspiration and help, only a few can be mentioned here. All of them are within easy reach and should be read and re-read for newer and bigger meanings.

Early American Poems. The three earliest real contributions to American folk literature are Longfellow's "Evangeline," "The Courtship of Miles Standish", and "Hiawatha". The first is a tale of a Canadian life followed by a strangely pathetic story revealing the backgrounds of American life. The second is a picture of colonial New England. "Hiawatha" is an entertaining collection of well-told Indian stories and legends. Whittier's "Snowbound," "The Barefoot Boy," "The Corn Song," and "Maund Muller"; T. P. Ryder's "The Huskin' Bee"; and Trowbridge's "Farmer John", and "The Farmyard Song", are popular interpretations of early rural life.

Later Favorites. Charming Southern favorites are Paul Hamilton Hayne's "The Farmer's Wife," and Samuel Minturn Peck's "The Grapevine Swing". William Cullen Bryant's "The Planting of the Apple Tree," Phoebe Cary's "Our Homestead", Oliver Wendell Holmes' "The Plowman," Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The Snow Storm", Hamlin Garland's "A Dakota Wheat-Field", Will Carleton's "The Clang of the Yankee Reaper," Walt Whitman's "A Farm Picture", James Whitcomb Riley's "Griggsby Station", Sam Walter Foss's "The Milking of the Cow", and John Greenleaf Whittier's "In School Days" are among many other poems that have won secure places in the hearts of rural America.

Humorous Poems. Strange as it may seem, country life has inspired the best in American humor. Among poems which have caused the country folk to laugh hardest at their own experiences are such poems as the following:

Eugene J. Hall's "The Highway Cow", an old-time favorite.

Joel Chandler Harris' "The Plow-Hand's Song", an old negro folk melody.

William P. Palmer's "A Smack in School", long a favorite humorous school 'piece.'

James Russell Lowell's "The Courtin'", a picture that touched every experience.

Sam Walter Foss's "The Agricultural Editors' Poem," a pure humoresque, very popular.



Then there is the one popular poem combining rare humor with rarer prophecy - John T. Trowbridge's "Darius Green and His Flying Machine", a poem whose wildest dreams have more than come true.

A Quartet of Favorites. Four distinctive country life poems stand out as among the most popular today. These poems may not be classic in form, but their messages go straight to the heart.

Little Brown Hands

(This poem was based on the actual experience of the writer who as a child wrote the verses that have endeared her to the heart of rural America).

They drive home the cows from the pasture,  
Up thru the long shady lane,  
Where the quail whistles loud in the wheat fields,  
That are yellow with ripening grain.  
They find in the thick waving grasses  
Where the scarlet-lipped strawberry grows,  
They gather the earliest snowdrops,  
And the first crimson buds of the rose.

*October*  
They toss the new hay in the meadow;  
They gather the elder-bloom white;  
They find where the dusky grapes purple  
In the soft-tinted October light.  
They know where the apples hang ripest,  
And are sweeter than Italy's wines,  
They know where the fruit hangs the thickest,  
On the long, thorny blackberry vines.

They gather the delicate seaweeds,  
And build tiny castles of sand;  
They pick up the beautiful seashells, -  
Fairy barks that have drifted to land.  
They wave from the tall, rocking tree tops  
Where the oriole's hammock nest swings;  
And at night time are folded in slumber  
By a song that a fond mother sings.

Those who toil bravely are strongest;  
The humble and poor become great;  
And so from these brown-handed children  
Shall grow mighty rulers of state.  
The pen of the author and statesman -  
The noble and wise of the land, -  
The sword and the chisel and palette,  
Shall be held in the little brown hand.

--Mary H. Krout

Dr. John Goodfellow - Office Upstairs

(The author of this poem is a practising physician in Malta, Ohio, who, as a traveller in the mountains of east Tennessee, knew the doctor in the poem. The poem is based on an incident from a life of sacrifice and service.)



Robbed over by the blue of the near-bending sky,  
And walled in by the gray of dim mountain peaks high,  
Bryson, a mountaineer's village stands stiff  
With its front to the highway, its back to the cliff.  
A smithy it has, a post-office, a store  
A few humble dwellings - so much, and no more;  
And lo, its inhabitants, simple and shy,  
Live close to the soil and live close to the sky!

Many long years ago, fully a score,  
A stairway outside of the quaint village store  
Led straight to the bare dusky room just above,  
Like a highroad of hope to a haven of love.  
Down at the foot of that stairway there swung  
A battered old sign, and this message it flung  
To all who were burdened with ills or with cares.  
"Dr. John Goodfellow - Office upstairs".

"Dr. John Goodfellow", lowly was he,  
Out at the elbows and out at the knee;  
But, tho he was tousled and tattered and old,  
His sinews were steel and his heart was pure gold.  
Seldom a storm roistered by in its might  
But it found him abroad on the road, day or night;  
Never a tortuous trail, but it led  
To some sick woman's side or some little child's bed.

"Office upstairs!" Ah! that small dusty den  
Was the home of the saddest and gladdest of men;  
His thoughts were his children, his wife was the Wild,  
And his heart overflowed when in summer she smiled;  
No gold had he gathered, no gear had he won -  
His wealth was the memory of noble deeds done;  
But he bottled up gladness and sold it in shares  
Signed: "Dr. John Goodfellow - Office upstairs."

He died - as the best and the worst of us must -  
And his friends bore him out of the dusk and the dust  
Of his squalid surroundings, and laid him to rest  
In the lap of the wild he had always loved best.  
Then they sold at vendue, as a matter of course,  
His meager effects - his poor bony old horse,  
His black saddle-bags, his few books - to defray  
The expenses incurred when they laid him away.

Gone, gone and forgotten! Ah, no, no! Instead  
As they loved him when living, they loved him when dead;  
And his grave must be marked, tho no tablet or stone  
Marked a single new mound of the blood of their own.  
But, untutored and crude, they were quite at a loss  
How to letter his name on the rude, rugged cross  
At the head of his grave - how to carve a scant line -  
Till the thought came to them of his battered old sign.



That battered old sign - Ah, they took it and nailed  
It high on that cross, but they stupidly failed  
To note that it served as a signboard of love;  
On the road leading straight up to heaven above.  
Inspired were they, but they knew it not then -  
Inspired of God, those poor primitive men,  
For that old sign announseed - as the Scripture declares, -  
"Dr. John Goodfellow - Office upstairs".

So there in the heat of the midsummer noon,  
And there in the chill of the midwinter moon,  
Marking the foot of the Ladder of Light  
That ends in the land of Omnipotent Right,  
Swings that old sign, as in seasons of yore  
It swung at the side of Jim Milliken's store;  
Still offering solace and answering prayers:  
"Dr. John Goodfellow - Office upstairs".

--James Ball Naylor

#### Four-Leaf Clover

(The author of this poem is now an elderly lady living not far from Portland, Oregon. As a young girl, she had many discouraging experiences in trying to make her living by writing. Many of her articles and poems were rejected. In a time of greatest discouragement, she chanced to find a four-leaf clover, and she interpreted the experience in this charming poem which has been set to music and sung by the world's greatest singers. It has often been called "the best short poem in America".)

I know a place where the sun is like gold,  
And the cherry blooms burst with snow;  
And down underneath is the loveliest nook,  
Where the four-leaf clovers grow.

One leaf is for hope, and one is for faith,  
And one is for love, you know,  
But God put another in for luck -  
If you search, you will find where they grow.

But you must have hope, and you must have faith,  
You must love and be strong, and so,  
If you work, if you wait, you will find the place  
Where the four-leaf clovers grow.

-Ella Higginson

#### The Greatness of Dan'l Gregg

(This poem was written by a young reporter on the Atlanta, Ga., Constitution after he had had ample chances to know the many different ways by which men tried to be great. He saw thru all the shallowness and sham and discovered the secrets of true greatness. This poem has had a wide circulation as one of the best to interpret the meaning of sincere rural life).

You never heard of Dan'l Gregg, I don't suppose; but say  
I want to tell you there are few as great as him today;  
He never held no offices, but just 'twixt me and you,  
Ain't this here holding' office something great men seldom do?



No, Dan'l he just farmed it - licked along thru thick and thin -  
Quittin' late and startin' early, meetin' trouble with a grin;  
He didn't leave no millions, but again I wish to state  
That, in my opinion, Dan'l should be numbered with the great.

He never done no fightin' on the land nor on the sea;  
He wasn't no Napoleon, nor a Grant, nor yet a Lee;  
No doubt this Pierpont Morgan could have skinned him in a trade,  
And as far as eddycation is concerned, why, I'm afraid

That Dan'l wasn't hardly what you'd call A Number one,  
For he got his schoolin' mostly out beneath the shinin' sun;  
The papers never bothered over Dan'l Gregg's affairs,  
But a great man had departed when he clum the golden stairs.

He never wrote no poems, nor got up inventions, so  
The world would move on swifter than the good Lord made it go;  
He couldn't preach a sermon nor ekspound the law to you,  
But he raised two boys, by golly, that were decent thru and thru.

He taught 'em to be honest, and he taught 'em to be true;  
He taught 'em to be manly, and that there's a lot to do.  
He raised his boys to honor him, and so I wish to state  
That, in my opinion, Dan'l should be numbered with the great.

-Anonymous

In addition to the list of poems and stories here given, each will want to add his own favorites. Naturally, each will want to read the favorite poems and stories he has not read. Best of all, he will want to read and re-read those he has already read. Good stories and poems are like good music. The oftener you hear good music the more you appreciate it, the more you want to hear it over and over again. Literature is the same. It becomes a part of one only by frequent reading and re-readings. In coming into a full appreciation of the best poems and stories, therefore, one comes into an ever-increasing appreciation of life.

To interpret life so that all may have it more abundantly is the sublime purpose of good literature.