

STOCKTON, MARY J.

EMMETT STARR.

5438

398

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STORY OF EMMETT STARR.

Emmett Starr, author of the "History of the Cherokee Nation," "Early History of the Cherokees" and other historical works relating to the Cherokee Nation of Indians, spent his boyhood and early manhood on a farm at "Old Claremore," some four miles northeast of the present city--Claremore.

Dr. Starr, I use this title because he ^{was} entitled to its use, although he elected to leave it off during the later years of his life. was a Cherokee by blood, having inherited it, in a small degree, from both his father

and his mother. His father, Walter A. Starr, served

several years as District Judge of Cooweescoowee District--

First when the courthouse was located on Dog Creek, near the head of what is now "Lake Claremore" and again after

it was moved to Claremore in 1887, or 1888 (the exact time being in question). His mother was a Miss Ruth

Thornton--both parents being descendants of Cherokees

who came to the great West from Georgia before 1832--

commonly called "Old Settler" Cherokees.

The son, who was christened "Emmett McDonald" Starr, was born in what is now Adair County, Oklahoma,-- then called Goingsnake District, Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory, December 12, 1870. A year or two later his parents moved to a farm near Claremore where they lived until their deaths and where Emmett and his younger brothers and sisters resided for several years after.

His special and most intimate friends at Claremore, especially during his last years were: Dr. J. C. Bushyhead, Robert Nipper, Dave Faulkner, W. C. Kates and W. R. Harper and it is through interviews with these men that the data for this article was obtained. Dr. Starr never married but had a "welcome entree" into many homes in and about Claremore. He was a close student, especially of historical matters pertaining to the Cherokees and regaled his friends with interesting stories gathered from old-timers in various parts of the Cherokee Nation. As part of the preface to one of his books--"Early History of the Cherokees," appears this personal sketch: "My father, who had been a soldier in the Confederate Cherokee service, was after that I can remember successively deputy sheriff,

STOCKTON, MARY JANE.

EMMETT STARR.

#5438.

3

deputy clerk and judge of Cooweescoowee District Court.

My father's home was three and one-half miles from the District Courthouse and with true hospitality was open to his friends. In this way I was afforded at an early age the opportunity of listening to conversations and reminiscences of many of the most brilliant minds of my own people (the Cherokees). I listened as a boy to the Adams, Bells, Rosses, Mayes and many others who were born raconteurs and savants."

While he served for a time as a member of the Cherokee Legislature and later studied and practiced medicine, the fact that he made a compilation of the history, traditions and folk-lore of his people a life-work is easily accounted for. His one hobby was absolute accuracy and it is said that he suppressed an entire edition of one of his books on account of an error, all of which could have been corrected by correcting ONE PARAGRAPH. So far as is known only one copy of that ~~edition--the copy retained~~ for himself, is available for inspection, but not for sale. That one copy was by him presented to his friend, Will Harper, who prizes it highly. On the fly-leaf of that book appears

the following inscription, written in Dr. Starr's own hand and bearing his artistic signature:

"Presented this December 5, 1910, to William R. Harper, as a mark of my esteem for him as a man, and as a friend, such as it is a pleasure to have, by the author.

Emmett Starr."

Dr. Starr was a charter member of the Pocahontas club, one of the oldest Indian clubs in existence, and he was at one time its president. This club was organized by pupils of the Cherokee Seminaries at Tablequah, then spending their vacation at their homes in and adjacent to Claremore. Youngsters of the Lipe, Lane, Musgrove, Collins and McClellan families were included in the membership. This club was at first rather exclusive, being limited to the students as named; its scope was later enlarged so as to admit all Cherokee students, and still later extended to "all persons whose names appear on the approved rolls of the Cherokee Nation, and their descendants." ~~Indians of other tribes, as well as white husbands and wives, are eligible as "Social members."~~

Dr. Starr was never married and lived a typical "Edgar Allan Poe" existence, minus the booze, said one of

STOCKTON, MARY JANE.

EMMETT STARR.

#5438

5

his friends on hearing of his death, which occurred at St. Louis, Mo., March 31, 1930--a published account appeared in the Claremore Daily Progress, edited by W. C. Kates, on February 3, 1930. A day later the following impressive obituary appeared in the same paper:

TRIBUTE TO EMMETT STARR.

(By J. R. Harper)

Editor Progress:

Know ye not that a Prince and a great man has this day fallen in Israel. 2 Samuel, 3:38.

Your issue of last Saturday brought to me a piece of very sad news, announcement of the death of Dr. Emmett McDonald Starr, a man who, ~~as I take it, after a rather~~ and very pleasant acquaintance of thirty five years was "forward and strange" in his way, but for the pure his work was right.

~~By some he was considered eccentric,~~ but great men are often that. Only those who know them best can understand. To this quiet, studious and pains-taking fellow there was more satisfaction in knowing than in

STOCKTON, MARY JANE.

EMMETT STARR.

#5438

401

6

doing things. Poring over 'quaint and curious volumes of forgotten lore' was the joy in his life and absolute accuracy was his motto.

Emmett Starr died as he had lived--misunderstood and, therefore, disappointed. A bright boy, the son of an illustrious father and scion of two of the Cherokee Nation's oldest and best families, he was given an excellent education and what many would have considered a golden opportunity; but there psychology comes in and psychology is hard to understand and almost impossible to explain. His ambition was to become the Herodotus of his race as Sequoyah was the Cadmus, and that ambition would have been realized had he not been quite so conscientious.

His life work: "Genealogy of the Cherokees"--had it been published at an opportune time, when a final roll of the Cherokees was in progress of completion, would have made his place in history secure, along with Sequoyah, and John Ross, their Moses; but he would not permit its publication and distribution until some controverted points, upon which the world was ready to accept his conclusions, could be verified. By the time

7

this could be done the opportunity had passed, yet so important were his manuscripts to the Dawes Commission and the Attorney General for the Cherokee Nation that they would pay him real money--the first he had ever had, for their use. But finding that the parental fortune had disappeared and the education of his younger (then orphaned) brothers and sisters about to be neglected he magnanimously forsook his own plans and ambitions and took up this task. By the time this work was done the ~~old order of things had passed away and the new had been~~ ushered in.

Transformation from tribal government to statehood eliminated his opportunity--there was no more demand for the services which he was so able and so anxious to ~~render,~~ so like the "Last of the Mohicans," he folded his tent and passed on.

Finding his occupation gone he wandered "off the reservation," only to be swallowed up in the maelstrom of modern "efficiency"--and greed.

But he was "A man for a' that" and news of his untimely death cast a shadow of gloom into the hearts of

STOCKTON, MARY JANE.

EMMETT STARR. #5438

406

8

those who knew him--and, of course, loved him--for his
worth and in spite of his peculiarities.

May his sleep be sweet and peaceful in the land of
his fathers.