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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ALEX POSEY

Eufaula, Oklahoma

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The most gifted native writer of Oklahoma was a Creek Indian, Alexander Posey, for a number of years the editor of a newspaper, the Journal, at Eufaula. Posey's verse had lyric strain beyond the touch of most amateurs in literature, and he possessed unusual wit in the writing of prose in the vernacular of the Creek Indian struggling to speak the English language. The prose that gave him most reputation was his "Fus Fixico" letters, in which he recorded the sayings of certain oldtime acquaintances in their discussion of the work of the commission named by the federal government to bring to an end the tribal governments of the Five Civilized tribes. Incidentally, these old men, sitting in the shade beside their log cabins in

the Indian Territory hills, discussed with much humor the peculiarities of their white neighbors, and methods of the white man in politics. "Hot-gun," and "Wolf Warrior," and other worthies that spoke through Posey's pen were living men, but relics of far-off days when the Creeks lived in the utmost simplicity, holding all their tribal lands in common. Posey's pen-name to his verse was Chinnubbie Harjo.

Posey bore a striking resemblance to the better known portraits of the poet Shelley, and like Shelley met his death by drowning, just at the time when he had resolved to retire to his home in the hills and prove to himself whether it was worth while for him to try to give literary form to his poetic visions; to learn by serious effort whether the promise of his fugitive verse could be fulfilled, or if his lack of literary education was so great as to forbid perfection to the songs that filled his heart. He was drowned in July, 1908, while crossing the North Canadian river, his boat being overturned in the flooding waters of that stream -- the Oktahutchee -- which in Creek means oktaha, sand, and hutches, river. His body was lost for

more than a week.

Mrs. Posey, at the solicitation of friends of her husband, is preparing to print his fugitive verse in book form. Posey left many finished, as well as fragmentary poems. He was keenly conscious of their technical literary defects, and always spoke apologetically for having written them. They were so superior, however, to average newspaper verse, and portrayed with such grace and feeling the impressions that came from his contemplations of his native hills and rivers and the idyllic beauty of their remote places, that he was encouraged by those who admired his talent to give it full expression.

Posey was about thirty-five years old at the time of his death. His father was of Scotch and Irish blood and his mother a full-blood Creek. His features were classic in outline, his complexion swarthy, his black eyes keen and penetrating, and his manner modest, almost to timidity in the presence of strangers. He had the pride and sensitiveness of his Indian ancestors, and often it was difficult to engage him freely in conversation. In the forests or along the rivers, however he found his

tongue, and loved to give each flower and natural object its name in the Creek language, the only language he spoke fluently until he was near the age of manhood. His library was filled with many books. Thoreau he admired above all other writers. Posey attributed his poetical "inclinations," as he called them, to his Indian blood, and once said:

"All of my people are poets, natural born poets, gifted with wonderful imaginative power and the ability to express in sonorous, musical phrases their impressions of life and nature. If they could be translated into English without losing their characteristic beauty and flavor, many of the Indian songs and poems would rank among the greatest productions of all times. Some of them are masterpieces. They have a splendid dignity, gorgeous word-pictures, and reproduce with magical effect many phrases of life in the forests -- the glint of the fading sunshine falling on the leaves, the faint stirring of the wind, the whirring of the insects -- no detail is too small to escape observation, and the most exquisite language. The Indian talks in poetry of the fields, the sky, the river, the sun and the stars. In his own tongue it is not difficult for

the Indian to compose; he does it instinctively; but in attempting to write in English he is handicapped. Words seem hard, form mechanical, and it is to these things that I attribute the failure of the civilized Indian to win fame in poetry."

Posey's mother has never attempted to talk the English language. She is fond of repeating bits of history and the legends of her people to her children. She was very proud of her poet-son, and the love and comradeship between the two was never broken from his childhood to his manhood. He translated into the Creek language for her benefit all that he wrote, and always sought her criticism of his poems, that contain many pictures of the scenes around his childhood home, and of his humorous sketches.

"It is enough to say concerning my youth," wrote Posey of his boyhood, "that I was raised on a farm, and was accounted a pretty crop. The cockle-burs and crab-grass grew all the more prolifically after I had been given a good threshing. Tom, an orphan boy adopted by my parents, was my youth-long companion, and I often look back to the days of the lost sunshine, when we romped in our long shirts,

or 'sweeps,' as we called them, which my mother fashioned for our use. These shirts, or sweeps, were long, flowing garments made on the order of a tunic, but longer and more dignified. There was vast freedom in these gowns -- freedom for the wind to play in; and they were so easily thrown aside at the 'ole swimmin hole'. We looked forward with regret to the time when we would have to discard them for jeans coats and pants and copper-toed boots, though these were desirable to chase rabbits in on a snowy day. Those who have never worn sweeps have never known half the secrets whispered by the winds of boyhood.

"My first teacher was a dried-up, hard up, weazen-faced, irritable little fellow, with an appetite that caused the better dishes on my father's table to disappear rapidly. My father picked him up somewhere, and seeing that he had a bookish turn, gave him a place in our family as a private teacher. From him I learned the alphabet and to read short sentences, but I never spoke any English until I was compelled to speak it by father. One evening when I blurted out in the best Creek at my command and began telling him about a horse hunt, he cut

me off shortly. 'Look here, young man, if you don't tell me that in English after supper, I am going to wear you out!' I was hungry, and this put an abrupt end to my desire for the good things I had heaped on my plate. I got up from the table and made myself useful -- brought water from the well, and turned the cows into the pasture -- thinking maybe this would cause my father to forget what he had said. My goodness, however, was without avail, for as soon as he came from the table, he asked me in a gentle, but firm voice to relate my horse hunt. Well, he was so pleased with my English that he never afterward allowed me to use Creek in conversation with him -- but we children all used Creek in talking with out mother."

Posey was born near Eufaula, August 3, 1873. His father belonged to the Broken Arrow clan of the Creeks and his mother to the Tuskegee clan. After attending a public school at Eufaula, he spent five years at the Indian academy near Muskogee. He learned the printer's trade, became editor of a country newspaper, and took an active part in Creek tribal politics. For a number of years, and at the time of his death, he was in the employ of the fed-

eral government. He was married to Minnie Harris of Fayetteville, Arkansas, in 1896, and found in her a sympathetic companion. Two children, a boy Yahola, meaning "Echo," and a girl Wenema, meaning a "child of the forest," were born to them. Posey's homestead allotment, near Bald Hill, is one of the most picturesque and romantic spots in the entire Creek Nation, chosen by him for its wildness and closeness to nature, for which he manifested a poetic sympathy in his early youth, his mother relating this incident: One snowy day when Posey was two years old, he slipped through the back fence and ran away from home, followed by his pet dog, "Shep." During his rambles he found a pretty flower under a sheltering ledge and plucked it. When his mother tracked him through the snow, it so touched her heart to have him offer a gift so rare in a bleak season, that she dropped her switch and kissed him for his truancy.

These poems were taken from the many in Posey's journals and manuscripts, to show his intimate appreciation and understanding of the natural beauties peculiar to the region in which he lived.

Son of the Oktahutche

Far, far, far are my silver waters drawn;
The hills embrace me lothe to let me go;
The maidens think me fair to look upon,
And trees lean over, glad to hear me flow.
Thro' field and valley, green because of me,
I wander, wander to the distant sea.

Thro' lonely places and thro' crowded ways;
Thro' noise of strife and thro' the solitude,
And on thro' cloudy days and sunny days,
I journey till I meet, in sisterhood,
The broad Canadian, red with the sunset,
Now calm, now raging in a mighty fret.

On either hand, in a grand colonnade,
The cottonwoods rise in the azure sky;
And purple mountains cast a purple shade
As I, now grave, now laughing, pass them by.
The birds of air dip bright wings in my tide
In sunny reaches where I noiseless glide.

O'er sandy reaches strewn with rocks and mussel shells
Blue over spacious beds of amber sand,
By hanging cliffs, by glens where Echo dwells --
Elusive spirit of the shadow land --
Forever blest and blessing do I go
A-sidening in the morning's roseate glow.

Tho' I sing my song in a minor key,
Broad lands and fair attest the good I do;
Tho' I carry no white sails to the sea,
Towns nestle in the vales I wander thro';
And quails are whistling in the waving grain,
And herds are scattered o'er the verdant plain.

TO THE INDIAN MEADOW LARK

When other birds despairing southward fly,
In early Autumn time away;
When all the green leaves of the forest die,
How merry still art thou and gay.

O golden-breasted bird of dawn,
Through all the bleak days singing on,
Till Winter, wooed a captive by thy strain,
Breaks into smiles and Spring is come again.

THE MOCKING BIRD

Whether spread in flight,
Or perched upon the swinging bough,
Whether day or night,
He sings as he is singing now --
Till ev'ry leaf upon the tree
Seems dripping with his melody.

Hear him! Hear him!
As up he stringeth --
As high he wingeth
From roof to limb!

If you are sad,
Go cry it out!
If you are glad,
Go laugh and shout!

Hear him! What heart can shut him out!
He has a song for every mood,
For every song an interlude,
To dry the tear or stem the shout!

Whether you work, whether you rest,
Hark! listen! hear him sing!
As careless as he builds the nest
For his mate in the Spring!

NIGHTFALL

As evening splendors fade
From yonder sky afar,
The Night pins on her dark
Robe with a large bright star,

And the new moon hangs like
A high-thrown scimeter.
Vague in the mystic room
This side the paling west,
The Tulledegas* loom
In an eternal rest,
And one by one the lamps are lit
In the lome of the Infinite.

*Tulledega is a Creek Indian word meaning
"border line," and refers to a long range of hills
along the Oktahutche, near the poet's home.

IN TULLEDEGA

Where mountains lift their heads
To clouds that nestle low;
Where constant beauty spreads
Sublimier scenes below;

Where gray and massive rocks
O'er hand rough heights sublime;
Where awful grandeur mocks
The brush, and poet's rhyme,

We say the ev'ning blush
Above the rugged range,
We heard the river rush
Far off and faint and strange.

"BOB WHITE"

A speck of brown adown the dusty pathway runneth he,
Then whirreth, like a missile, shot into a neighboring tree.

Bob--Bob White!

The joyous call comes like a silver chime,
And back across the fields of summertime
The echo, faint but sweetly clear,
Falls dying on the list'ning ear--

Bob--Bob White!

And when the Cherry voice is dead,

And silence soothes the wind to rest
Among the oak boughs overhead,
 From valley, hill, or meadow's breast
There comes an answering call --
 Bob--Bob White!
And, once more, over all
The spirit Silence weaves her spell,
 And light and shadow play
At hide and seek behind the high
 Blue walls around the day.
Again, from where the wood and prairie meet,
Across the tasseled corn and waving wheat,
Awak'ning many tender mem'ries sweet--
 Bob--Bob White!

THE CALL OF THE WILD

I'm tired of the gloom
 In a four-walled room;
Heart weary, I sigh
 For the open sky
And the solitude
 Of the greening wood
Where the blue birds call
 And the sunbeams fall
And the daisies lure
 The soul to be pure

I'm tired of the life
 In the ways of strife;
Heart weary, I long
 For the river's song,
And the murmur of rills
 In the breezy hills;
Where the pipe of Pan--
 The half hairy man--
The bright silence breaks
 By the sleeping lakes.

TO A DAFFODIL

When Death has shut the blue skies out from me, sweet Daffodil,

And years roll on without my memory,
Thou'lt reach thy tender fingers down to mine of clay,
A true friend still,
Although I'll never know thee till the judgment day.