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‡ Famous American Indians ‡

ALEXANDER LAWRENCE POSEY

By JOSEPH MATTE, Chemawa Student

Alexander Lawrence Posey, better known to his friends as Alex Posey, translated Indian music and the music of his own spirit into poetry. Even his numerous prose writings were poetical. Posey was a Creek Indian, born Aug. 3, 1873. He is known as the Creek Indian poet.

Posey was not only a poet, he was a humorist, philosopher, satirist and a "man of affairs." He loved out-of-doors and lived next to nature, yet he was militant in defense of his people against injustice.

As a child Posey was a real boy. He was very quick and observing and Hiawatha's boyhood could have been said of him: "He learned of every bird their language." He played many pranks, and, living in the day before the paddle had gone out of style, Posey's mother frequently applied the rod to her mischievous son. As a little child he would not wear a dirty dress and throughout life he was well groomed.

Posey's father was Scotch-Irish and his mother was a full-blood Creek Indian. He spoke the Creek language until he was twelve years of age. Once, when speaking to his father he started to tell him of a horse hunt in the Creek language. Posey's father told him if he did not tell him the story in English after supper that he would be "worn out." Posey did many errands after supper, hoping to cause his father to forget, but his father remembered and called for the story. Posey gave it and his father would never allow him to speak Creek afterwards.

"All of my people are poets," said Posey. "All Indians are poetical by nature, creators by instinct, and in their conception of life is manifest their religion. Gifted with wonderful imaginative powers and the ability to express in sonorous musical phrases their impressions of life and nature, many of the Indian songs and poems, if they could be translated into English without losing their characteristic beauty and flavors, would rank among the greatest productions of all times. English words seem hard, sound mechanical,

and it is to these things that I attribute the failure of the civilized Indian to win fame as a poet." Posey overcame the harshness of the English words as compared with the softness of the Creek words and let the music that it seemed his soul must say come forth.

Posey's love for his mother and his family approached worship. He loved and worked for the Indian and his welfare. The subject of one of his poems was "Sequoyah:"

The names of Waitie and Bondinot,
The valiant warrior and gifted sage,
And other Cherokees, may be forgot,
But thy name shall descend to every age;
The mysteries enshrouding Camus' name
Cannot obscure thy claim to fame.
The people's language cannot perish—nay,
When from the face of this great continent
Inevitable doom hath swept away
The last memorial—the last fragment
Of tribe—some scholar learned shall peer
Upon thy letters, seeking ancient lore.
Some bard shall lift a voice in praise of thee,
In moving numbers tell the world how men
Scoffed thee, hissed thee, charged with lunacy!
And who could not give enough honor when
At length, in spite of jeers, of want and need,
Thy genius shaped dream into a deed.
By cloud capped summits in the boundless west,
Or mighty river rolling to the sea,
Where'er thy footsteps led thee on that quest,
Unknown, rests thee, illustrious Cherokee!

Posey won his fame in literature when he was editor of the Indian Journal. Here he brought the attention of the public to the graft and plunder that had begun among the Indians such as had never been seen in America. He wrote letters in a humorous and satirical way, all original in conception and unique in literary annals. These letters were published all over the country and caused many truly sensible people, not of the "slush and sentimental kind," to fall in line with Posey's ideas and really to help the Indians.

He was not only a writer of prose and poetry, but was the author of several documents of state that are noted today for their simple, clear English.

While every one thinks of Posey as a poet he filled many positions of trust and responsibility. He graduated from Bacone University in 1895. While at Ba-

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