

# POEMS

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Poems by John R. Ridge

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**JOHN R. RIDGE**

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# P O E M S .

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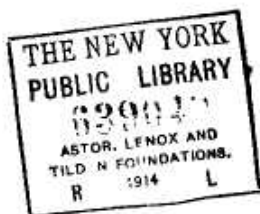
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## PREFACE.

Most of the poems in this little volume are the productions of boyhood; very few of them were written after the author had reached the age of twenty. Like other men of his temperament, Mr. RIDGE lost in the excitement of political life his youthful ambition for literary fame: consequently many of his latest and best poems have been lost. Some that are embodied here, however, have elicited high praise from the Pacific and Eastern press. The severe critic may think that it had been better taste, perhaps, to have omitted some which have here been preserved—and he may be correct; but, they who have treasured the worn-out shoe and useless, threadbare garment of one who has gone to return no more, will not be harsh in their judgment of our taste.

The propriety of prefacing this book with a bio-



graphical sketch of the author has been suggested to us. Such a sketch must necessarily be short. To go into the details of a life fraught with many stirring incidents, would require time; and, as we have not the requisite time at our command, we propose to give Mr. RIDGE's own brief account of his parentage, and that dark misfortune of his childhood which cast a shadow over his whole life, as we find it in a letter written by him to a friend in 1849—only a few months before he came to California. As his career on this coast, in connection with political and literary journalism, is familiar to all readers, we will add nothing to this letter.

"I was born in the Cherokee Nation, East of the Mississippi River, on the 19th of March, 1827. My earliest recollections are of such things as are pleasing to childhood, the tenderness of a kind father, and smiles of an affectionate mother. My father, the late John Ridge, as you know, was one of the Chiefs of his tribe, and son of the warrior and great distinguished Cherokee Councils and battles, who was known amongst the whites as Major Ridge, and amongst his own people as Ka-nun-ta-cla-ge. My father grew up till he was some twelve or fifteen years of age, as any untutored Indian, and he used well to remember the time when his greatest delight was to strip himself of his Indian costume, and with aboriginal cane-gig in hand, while away the long summer days in wading up and down creeks in search of crawfish.

"At the age which I have mentioned above, a missionary station sprang into existence, and Major Ridge sent his son John,

who could not speak a word of English, to school at this station, placing him under the instruction of a venerable Missionary named Gambol. Here he learned rapidly, and in the course of a year acquired a sufficient knowledge of the white man's language to speak it quite fluently.

"Major Ridge had now become fully impressed with the importance of civilization. He had built him a log-cabin, in imitation of the border-whites, and opened him a farm. The Missionary, Gambol, told him of an institution built up in a distant land expressly for the education of Indian youths (Cornwall, Connecticut), and here he concluded to send his son. After hearing some stern advice from his father, with respect to the manner in which he should conduct himself amongst the 'pale-faces,' he departed for the 'Cornwall School' in charge of a friendly Missionary. He remained there until his education was completed. During his attendance at this institution, he fell in love with a young white girl of the place, daughter of Mr. Northrup. His love was reciprocated. He returned home to his father, gained his consent, though with much difficulty (for the old Major wished him to marry a chief's daughter amongst his own people), went back again to Cornwall, and shortly brought his "pale-faced" bride to the wild country of the Cherokees. In due course of time, I, John Rollin, came into the world. I was called by my grandfather 'Chees-quat-a-law-ny,' which, interpreted, means 'Yellow Bird.' Thus you have a knowledge of my parentage and how it happened that I am an Indian.

"Things had now changed with the Cherokees. They had a written Constitution and laws. They had legislative halls, houses and farms, courts and juries. The general mass, it is true, were ignorant, but happy under the administration of a few simple, just, and wholesome laws. Major Ridge had become wealthy by trading with the whites and by prudent management. He had built him an elegant house on the banks of the 'Oos-te-nar-ly River,' on which now stands the thriving town of Rome, Georgia

Many a time in my buoyant boyhood have I strayed along its summer-shaded shores, and glided in the light canoe over its swiftly-rolling bosom, and beneath its over-hanging willows. Alas for the beautiful scene! The Indian's form haunts it no more!

"My father's residence was a few miles east of the 'Oos-tenar-ly. I remember it well. A large two-storied house, on a high hill, crowned with a fine grove of oak and hickory, a large, clear spring at the foot of the hill, and an extensive farm stretching away down into the valley, with a fine orchard on the left. On another hill some two hundred yards distant, stood the school-house, built at my father's expense, for the use of a Missionary, Miss Sophia Sawyer, who made her home with our family and taught my father's children and all who chose to come for her instruction. I went to this school until I was ten years of age—which was in 1837. Then another change had come over the Cherokee Nation. A demon-spell had fallen upon it. The white man had become covetous of the soil. The unhappy Indian was driven from his house—not one, but thousands—and the white man's ploughshare turned up the acres which he had called his own. Wherever the Indian built his cabin, and planted his corn, there was the spot which the white man craved. Convicted on suspicion, they were sentenced to death by laws whose authority they could not acknowledge, and hanged on the white man's gallows. Oppression became intolerable, and forced by extreme necessity, they at last gave up their homes, yielded their beloved country to the rapacity of the Georgians, and wended their way in silence and in sorrow to the forests of the far west. In 1837, my father moved his family to his new home. He built his houses and opened his farm; gave encouragement to the rising neighborhood, and fed many a hungry and naked Indian whom oppression had prostrated to the dust. A second time he built a school-house, and Miss Sawyer again instructed his own children and the children of his neighbors. Two years rolled away in quietude, but the Spring of '39 brought in a terrible train of