

POEMS

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Poems by Innes Randolph

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INNES RANDOLPH

POEMS

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BY

INNES RANDOLPH

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Compiled by his Son from the Original Manuscript

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PREFACE.



As most of the poems contained in this little volume were written with no thought whatever of publication, it may not be amiss to offer a few words concerning their author, and how they came to be written.

Innes Randolph was one of those personalities, not, perhaps, very often met with, in whom was combined so many clearly defined and varied talents as to prevent the complete development of one. It is, however, not easy to say what his career might have been had his birth and early training been different. Born and brought up in Virginia at a time when the old-fashioned, narrow ideas concerning the "pursuits proper for a gentleman" held full sway, he was not permitted to turn his attention to music, painting, sculpture or literature, in any one of which, with proper training, he might have accomplished great things. It is also possible that even these early obstacles might have been overcome had not the Civil War broken out at the critical moment of his life and robbed him of four of its best years. After serving in the Confederate Army throughout the whole of the great struggle, he found himself at its close, in common with so many of his brothers of the South, confronted not with questions of artistic or literary development, but the more immediate problem of

bread and butter. After three or four years spent in Richmond, Va., years mainly devoted to an uphill fight to provide for himself and family the ordinary necessities of life, he determined to remove to Baltimore, and there undertake seriously the practice of law, in which he had graduated before the beginning of hostilities. With so clear and brilliant a mind as his, and so unusual a command of language, he must perforce have made in this an enduring and substantial success, had his heart been thoroughly in the work; but the law, like many another calling, is an exacting mistress, and requires from her devotees an unmixed allegiance. More especially does she frown upon any dalliance with the arts, and it was simply not in him to blot out of his life that which so deeply appealed to him, be the worldly reward what it might. It was during the early period of his residence in Baltimore that he found himself most strongly drawn to sculpture, and among the various evidences which remain to attest his skill in this direction may be mentioned several life-size busts of prominent men, among them one of Judge Wm. Pinkney, a marble copy of which now occupies a niche in the concert hall of the Peabody Institute. He also found time to take up the study of the violoncello, upon which instrument he finally came to play with considerably more than the ordinary ability of the amateur. But it was in music, which was, after all, his ruling passion, that he felt most keenly the lack of early technical training, so that no lasting mark remains to tell the world of this

gift. It was, perhaps, not unnatural that, finding himself lured hither and thither by such varied attractions, he should finally have drifted into journalism, for it is in this field that a wider range of knowledge and accomplishments is called into play than in any other. But the newspapers of today are like huge furnaces in which men's brains are used as fuel, giving out heat and light, it is true, while the consumption lasts, but leaving no enduring memory—merely a pinch of ashes, which is finally scattered to the winds. During the many years in which my father was a regular contributor to the various daily and weekly papers of Baltimore, his musical and dramatic criticisms, literary reviews and miscellaneous editorials commanded the admiration and respect of all readers; but of them all, no trace now remains save in the dusty files of "back numbers."

The poems, of which the larger portion now appear for the first time in print, belong to no definite period, but were written at various times throughout his entire life, and are indeed but the irrepressible outpourings of a naturally poetic and artistic nature. Of those contained in this volume, the ones bearing upon the war will require a word of explanation in order that they may be fully understood by the general reader whose memory does not reach back to that stormy epoch of fire and sword. "Twilight at Hollywood" was written about a year after the war, at the request of the Women's Confederate Memorial Association, and was read at the service on Decoration Day

at Hollywood Cemetery, in Richmond, where many thousands of the heroes who gave their lives for the cause that was so dear to them, lie buried. It must be remembered that the South was then passing through the scorching ordeal of "reconstruction," and the spirit that inspired the enthusiasm of 1861 was still alive, though broken and wasted by defeat, and the utterances of this poem touched very deeply the sentiment of the time—sentiments now almost forgotten—faded memories without bitterness. But Southern pride in the undaunted gallantry of the "boys in gray" will endure forever.

The "Fish Story" was written at about the same time, and had as its sub-title, "A Parable Without a Moral." Old Ned typifies the negro in slavery, and the fish symbolizes liberty. Liberty is secured by the negro without effort on his part, and they perish together. The prophetic foreshadowing of the increased mortality among the negroes under their changed conditions was fully confirmed by subsequent official statistics.

The lines to "John Marshall" were written immediately after active hostilities had ceased, and the whole South was aching under the humiliation of defeat. The States were occupied by the conquering army, and divided into military districts. Virginia was District 1. At this time the bronze statue of Chief Justice Marshall was added to and completed the fine group of Virginia statesmen that surrounds the noble bronze equestrian statue of Washington in the Capitol Park at Richmond.