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ROBERT EDGAR LONG: A LOOK BACKWARD.

The poet of old time as he reflected upon the mysterious passing of men away was reminded of the falling of leaves upon the earth, and he sang:

"The race of man is as the race of leaves."

The old leaf upon the tree when the season is far spent loses its hold easily, yet leaves a void behind, and falls quietly, peacefully to earth; but the young leaf in the green springtime is hurled to earth violently and the parent stem is left torn and bleeding. So has passed our friend, Robert Edgar Long, wrenched from us by fell disease and the place that knew him, that loved him so well, is torn with grief and filled with gloom.

"Open converse there is none,
So much the vital spirits sink
To see the vacant chair, and think
How good! how kind! and he
is gone."

The oldest inhabitants of the town have known two Roxboros. The first stretches far back into the past, back beyond the memory of men now living. The second Roxboro had its birth out of the first about the year 1889 and arose in its place. The older Roxboro was but a hamlet with a life to itself, complete and self satisfied. The great world of railroads and progress whirled on far off and its moving stirred not a leaf in the little community, in the center of Person county, shut in by high hills and difficult roads. Only echoes came now and then that kept it from forgetting that a world outside existed. Farmers round about went every year to carry tobacco to the big towns on the railroads, and came back with news gathered there from the talk of warehousemen and men about town. At certain seasons of the year merchants and tradesmen and sometimes even a traveler went forth to visit Northern cities and returned with tales of great sights that taxed belief and made gossip for weeks.

What a simple, retired life was this! The wagoners who plied between the village and distant depots, South Boston or Milton, told of swollen streams and hairbreadth escapes, and the listening children's eyes grew wide with wonder. Twice a year the court days brought their swarm of horse traders, their drunks, brought the judge and great lawyers from other places, and the "greatest speech ever made in the county" was duly delivered before an admiring throng. The visiting political candidate was thought to be of other days and was listened to as one inspired. The people had their gossip and their disputes, their sorrows and their joys, their marriages and their deaths to absorb their interest. Narrowness and religious prejudice were softened by much fervor and devotion. The preacher was the most influential personage in the village. The stranger who came to live, at first gazed at curiously as a nine days' wonder, was gradually absorbed into the village life and became one with those that were there before.

In the midst of such a community there played and sang and shouted boys and girls as light-hearted as

ever danced away the golden hours of youth. At morning they trooped forth from every home to school, reluctantly did their tasks and in afternoons laughed the journey home again. At evening they played before bright fire-lights and heard old time tales until they were tucked away to bed by tender parent hands.

In one such band of children were Edgar Long and Another Boy, the one who writes. Edgar was a little older than the rest of us, a little merrier, a little bolder, a little stronger, and proved himself a resourceful leader whether a game, a hunt, a fishing trip, a snow-ball fight of revenge upon an outsider who shouted "School Butter" in insult.

From early days he and the Other Boy were much together. They climbed the outer boughs of the cherry trees in June and in mid-summer gathered the ripe fruit in the orchard. Together they roamed the woods in search of adventure or dammed the running stream in the meadow and "went in-wash-in." At school they studied the same books and sat at the same desk—the old broken desk with one end resting on the floor, and it was ever a race which should first reach and claim its higher end. Daily they went from school together to "Music" and many a laugh they had in after years at recollections of "The Battle of Waterloo" and "Clayton's Grand March" thumped out with great pains upon the piano. The Other Boy loved him much, and often more like maidens than lads they would kiss to bring merriment to their girl companions. But the years slipped by and soon the days came when they must go to other schools and know other masters and new playmates. In 1888 they bade farewell to homefolks and playmates and each other, and went their separate ways, each to enter strange scenes and make new ties.

And the new sun rose bringing in the new year.

At High School and College Edgar manifested the same resourceful mind that had characterized the boy at home. The old town, interested always in the doings of its sons at home and abroad, took pride in the reports that came of his development. He was good in his studies, especially in those that took a practical turn. In Athletic sports he was a leader and the honors his fellow students put upon him proved his popularity among them. His companions loved to speak affectionately of him and with interest recalled his pleasant, jovial manner. But his heart was never deeply attached to the quiet ways of study and the peaceful life of schools; it was rather in the active business life that he saw about him which was changing the character of his native state. So he laid aside his school books, left his master and his fellows and made ready to do a man's part in the work where lay his tastes.

At the time the two boys said their farewells and entered that mysterious life of the school away from home, the old Roxboro was preparing to give place to the new. Railroad surveyors passing through quickened strange sensations in the

town. The pick and the shovel and cart made a red level pathway stretching away north and south. So many strangers made their way into the quiet of the hamlet that the folk ceased to wonder at them. Then the steel band was stretched through the village from one big city to another and the villages felt themselves rudely hustled into the current of busy American life. New conditions came, new ideas, new thoughts, new ambitions, new neighbors, and new businesses. Those that adjusted themselves to the new situation reaped reward of new hopes and new gains. Those that could not stand the shock fretted and grumbled at the new times, saying old times were best and went down to be little heard of afterward. Roxboro had but hooked itself into the large movement that was making a new South.

A brilliant young pessimist said to the writer one day, that the spirit of the Southern people had been crushed by the War and would not for generations rise from the ashes of defeat. He had not looked around him or pondered deeply. He had not noted the company of busy, hopeful young men and of old men with young hearts who were rebuilding old commonwealths with renewed energy and fresh courage. His ears had not caught in every breeze that blew from the South, the noise of hammers and the ring of anvils that were building new school houses and mills and factories. He had not heard the song of education and industry that were making a new land. The South had already shaken off her ashes and turned her face the future.

School days over, Edgar came back to the old home, and swelled by one the number of young Southerners who were building new states. With all the ardor of his soul he threw himself into his work. In his brief career he was able to employ himself in many fields of endeavor, in banking, in insurance, in trade, in manufacture, in building, in cotton milling; with restless energy he stamped success on all he put his hand to.

The Other Boy stayed longer in college walls and then, too, came back for two short years to offer in the old home his little mite of aid to the upward struggle of education. The old friend was ever ready to help in this, and many were the little things he did that encouraged and strengthened when others withheld their sympathy. All things that made for the upbuilding of the community had his support.

Perhaps in nothing was his character more manifest and in nothing did he contribute a better example for the young men of his acquaintance to admire and emulate than in his self-mastery. He was no preacher. Doubtless he was seldom if ever heard to discourse in general terms on self-restraint or self-control. He did better, he lived an example that showed but one failure, and that was over-work. Between pleasure and business he never for a moment hesitated to take business. The joys of dissipation never appealed to him nor ever drew him from the present duty. He was loved by men who took the social drink; yet so well known was his hold upon himself that no one

thought of offering him the tempting thing. Cool judgment always knew the folly of it; common sense knows that business success condemns it. And further, no wrong, real or fancied, provoked from him the hasty word, though in private his friends knew his indignation at a wrong. His love of fun was perennial and many were the pranks he played on unsuspecting friends. His sunny nature and merry ways made friends quickly and few did he ever lose. It was said by one upon the street that scarcely was known a boy who could make friends more easily.

The physical strain which his tireless spirit imposed upon the body proved at last too great. About a year ago the frail human system yielded, gave away. But the imperial will was yet inflexible, and he set out in pursuit of health with a determination which was characteristic of him. All the paths of hope in the Western mountains for many months were followed, but all in vain. His love of home was a ways with him a ruling passion. In the early spring, after winter's snows had melted and the buttercup and hyacinth had bloomed again, he could stay from home no longer, and he returned to Roxboro. Here he showed most of all the beauty of his spirit of self-mastery and happiness. In spite of the knowledge of his condition, he could be cheery still and could speak of the future with calmness. After his heart had once more drunk delight of the joys of home life, again he went on his quest of health. This time the Northern climate was sought, but alas, his brave and noble fight availed him nothing. In a few weeks he passed away beloved so soon even among strangers.

The last return, though sad and bitter, was yet a triumph. Hundreds of sorrow-stricken friends met him with bowed head and tear dimmed eye, and followed him on his last journey out to the edge of the village where sleep its dead. When

the mound was heaped above him, the ugly earth could not be seen for its deep covering of choicest flowers. Thus did the people bespeak the affection which he had won from them.

If we may believe that the immortal cares at all for the things of earth and for the mortal remains it must give joy to his soul that the clay which was his visible self in life should rest upon the very soil from which he sprung, mingling itself again to the elements that gave him birth.

From wandering here and there, over hill and valley and mountain, seeking the health that ever eluded his grasp he has come home to wander away no more. For him as for another the sweetest epitaph may well be:

"Here he lies where he longed to be;

Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter is home from the hill."

WILLIAM LINWOOD FOUSHER,
June, 1903.

Mrs Joe Person's WASH.

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MRS. JOE PERSON.

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Burlington, N. C.

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