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A Brief Sketch of the Life of J. William Lloyd

J. William Lloyd

February 8th, 1940

I was born on June 4th, 1857, at the tiny village of Westfield, New Jersey, (about 20 miles from New York City), of British, immigrant parents, who were almost unschooled, but not illiterate; my father a carpenter, my mother a seamstress.

A last and belated child in the family (the next eleven years older), I was brought up in a clearing in the woods, alone mostly, in the day time, with my mother, with only a few and occasional playmates. Went, in the winters, beginning at the age of seven, to two little, country, one-room, one-teacher schools, to be taught by "rote" the "four R.s", tho I was always the school's dunce in "rithmetic". Left school at 14 to earn my living by hard work. Never so much as heard of High School, unknown at that time in those parts. My education has come from life and the reading of books and an innate flair for literary style.

Did farm work first, then was apprenticed to the carpenter's trade but after one year carpentry collapsed in the "panic" of 1873. Took up gardening, but the second year a late drought destroyed my garden. When worked my way thru the Hygiee-Therapeutic

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College of drugless medication, at Florence, New Jersey, which system I later practiced in Kansas, Iowa, Tennessee and Florida. Lacking means, became next a pioneer on the Kansas frontier; first as a worker on a cattle-ranch, co-punching and prairie-breaking; later on my own homestead. With help of a friend, built myself a little stone cabin, and the girl I had become engaged to at the college, (Maria Elizabeth Emerson, a distant relative of Ralph Waldo) came out from Boston and married me in 1879. We were most happy together, but continuous drought from several years gave us very hard times. No work anywhere. Lived on whole-wheat bread, from borrowed wheat, and milk, with occasional prairie-chicken or rabbit. Only cash we had was \$2.00 a month sent from my home. Local doctor, but almost no patients in that hardy and destitute population. Finally accepted invitation from head of Sanitarium at Vinton, Iowa, (who had heard of me from my articles in Medical Journals), to be assistant physician there and left Kansas, successful experience, but institution finally failed from accumulated debts. Followed another invitation to a Health Colony in the mountains of Tennessee. Again hard times. Built myself a beautiful little log cabin and cleared some land, worked in a saw-mill, had a few patients, drove a milk wagon, peddled home-made yeast. All would not suffice, work gave out, colony failed, and I sold out and moved to a similar colony in Florida, "Waldena". Cleared a five-acre lot there, and built myself a two-story log-house, 40x16 splitting out all the shakes for the roof, and all the pickets for my garden, with a "frow". Practiced medicine, but again folks were too healthy and too poor for any profit. Hoed in orange groves for neighbor and one winter cleared 15 acres of pine forest for him. But their colony failed too, work gave out, and I moved to Palatka and worked on a poultry farm. While there Yellow-fever struck Florida as a plague, the State was quarantined, and my beautiful married life ended by my wife dying from some mysterious internal disease, probably cancer of the liver. So, as soon as I could leave the State, I had to take my two little children (a boy born in Kansas and a girl in

Tenn.), back to my parental home in N.J., to be cared for by my sister.

To find employment was imperative, and as my school of medicine was recognized there I became a nurse in New York City, specializing on the care of the insane, and also giving massage. My parents soon died, and with the help of my sister and my children, I tried to establish a little chicken-farm, on the old place, on the side.

When in Kansas I had written for the local newspaper and some Medical Journals, in Florida I had written for radical journals and reform papers, and always, ever since I was in college, I wrote poems, almost as a habit (still a habit in my eighties), but now, in New York, I began to bring out books and take literature more seriously, my first book, "Wind-Harp songs" appearing in 1896, and others gradually following: the most important, "Dawn-Thought" in 1908 and its sequel, "Life' Beautiful Battle", in 1910.

On March 7th, 1907, my Oriole, my lovely, beautiful daughter and dearest comrade, herself a fine poet and starting a printing-shop of her own, who had always seemed so healthy, died suddenly in Pennsylvania, from appendicitis and peritonitis. One of the great blows of my life. And my sister, Emily, so devoted to me, died in 1912. I had contracted a second marriage in 1901, but that had been unfortunate; we were incompatible, and after first separating were finally divorced. I would have been alone, but my son, who had become a dentist, and married, brought his wife to our home, and we all lived there till 1922. At my sister's death I had inherited the old home.

In 1913, on sudden impulse, and accompanied at first by my bosom friend, Leonard D. Abbott, I started to make a knapsack trip over the British Islands. We went over much of Ireland together, had a period in England, and had just entered Scotland, when the sudden death of his father, forced Leonard to return, I went over most of England, making my headquarters with Dr. John Johnston and the Whitmanites of Bolton. Johnston had written a book on

Whitman and was the physician of Edward Carpenter. I spent two days with Carpenter, incidentally meeting Henry S. Salt, the biographer of Thoreau. Also two weeks with William Atkinson, the dear old naturalist of Midhurst, in Sussex, studying the birds of England. A dear, affectionate old man, and what good times we had, tramping the commons and downs. Went into Surey. Went to Gilbert White's "Selborne". Went to Stonhenge and to Stratford-on-Avon. Visited William Platt, an English poet, went to Chichester and to Chester. Over Devonshire to Glovelly, over all the lake Country. To Winchester and Salisbury. To Milton's Cottage and to Wordsworth's Cottage, and to the old meeting house of William Penn. Hike over North Wales, and over Snowdown with knapsack on back. Over Isle of Man, and Isle of White, and Guernesye and Jersey in the Channel. Spent a day at St. Malo in Brittney. Slipped over to Switzerland and saw the Matterhorn. Visited Havelock Ellis in London and started a friendship lasting till death. Again in Scotland saw all the Burns country in Ayrshire., going out to Afton Water on one trip, seeing Burn's Cottage and birthplace. And, standing on the Brig-'O-Doon, felt the full thrill of the place and how he must have loved it. Went up the Caledonian Canal to Inverness, incidentally climbing Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in the British Isles, and making snowballs there in August. Sailed, for a rip, out of Oban to see Fingal's Cave, and Iona's holy Isle, catching a glimpse, from the sea, of the Isle of Skye, with its dark and tragic peaks.

Returning to Glasgow from this trip, I took ship on the Allen Line for Canada, going up the St. Lawrence, stopping a short time at Quebec and spending several days at Montreal, with Horace Traubel at the hospitable home the Bains. Then came home by way of Boston, going out to Wellesly to see my friends, the Dentons.

Altogether I was gone about four months, at a total cost of about \$400.00 and having one of the most delightful experiences of my whole life. And getting just ahead of the World War.

Back in 1903, (something I forgot to tell in its right place) I had gone out to the Pima Indians of Arizona, on the invitation of one

tribe to get their wonderful old legends, living with them, as one of them, and building these stories into my "Am-Am-Tam Indian Nights" and some of the experience into "The Songs of the Desert"; on my return visiting the Grand Canyon of the Colorado and the Petrified Forest at Adama; La Veta and Denver, Colorado, Pike's Peak and the Garden of the Gods.

But I had not seen enough of my beloved West and in 1915, I bought a special trip ticket to the California Fairs, on the way seeing Salt Lake City, Yellowstone Park, the Columbia river, Shasta, and going out, after the Fair, from San Francisco to Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove; then two weeks with Dutch friends near Santa Cruz, and some days with other friends at Santa Barbara, thence down to Los Angeles, friends there, and all the sights and cities of Southern California, including the San Diego Fair. On the homestretch visiting a dear friend at Prescott, Arizona.

In 1922, my son who was going to California to live persuaded me to sell out and do the same. And this brought me finally to Freedom Hill. In 1925 I visited the Society Islands. And the rest of the story is in my "Like an Old Chinese Poet", accurately told there.

My books are not popular and no publisher wants to risk them but they get extravagant praise from the greater minds, and brought me all my great friends. And in various way, at my own expense, or from the subsidies of devoted friends, some twenty have gotten into print, and I have unpublished manuscripts to make as many more, which may be published after my death -- who knows? Dead is often a man's best advertisement. And it can't be long now, for I am nearing 83, and the lightning keeps hitting closer.