

Down

Jan 1913
Down by Bill Cook

Sermon by Bishop Larsen

My brothers and sisters I feel that it is a singular honor to be asked to say a few words in Pon's funeral today. It's rather hard for me to collect my thoughts as I am a little emotional about the situation but I do feel that this is a great honor. To begin with I would like to read a short biography of Pon's life written by his sister Dora.

Memories of Pon Leemaster

Lucius A. Leemaster (Pon) was born in Castle Dale, Utah, Sept. 29, 1895, to John M. and Millie Whiting Leemaster. He was the second child in a family of 14 children.

The family lived in Castle Dale until Pon was about 9 years old at which time they moved to Sunnyside, where they lived for 6 years. Then they moved to West Hamathia, Utah, where they were among the first people in the mining camp. At this time Pon was not quite 15 years old. He went to work in the timber, getting prosps for the mine. His 2nd job was delivery boy for the company store. He drove a team of mules and a small wagon from West Hamathia to East Hamathia, a distance of 5 miles, delivering groceries. Many times the money for the mine pay roll was placed among the groceries in the wagon and the armed guards guarded an empty box in another wagon. After his father broke his hip and was not able to work for several years, Pon took over the responsibility of the head of the family. There were 9 younger children and it was a big responsibility for a young man.

In addition to his own family responsibilities he was particularly happy when he had the opportunity to play Santa Clause to all the children in the town. The mules made good reindeer that pulled the sleigh from house to house. He entered the Army when he was 22 years old, May 10, 1918, during World War I. Most of his term was served in Siberia. He was honorably discharged Nov. 5, 1919 and returned to Hamathia and back to the responsibilities of his brothers and sisters. He worked in the coal mines and helped the younger ones get through high school, and to have the things he himself never had.

His life was dedicated to helping his brothers and sisters and their children. At one time Glen was seriously ill with a ruptured appendix. He had not been married very long and had many obligations. Pon paid his bills, furniture payments, etc. When Glen was able to work again he wanted to pay Pon for the things he had done, but Pon didn't want it that way. He always was willing to share with others anything he had.

He always paid any obligation promptly. Pon enjoyed hunting and fishing and spent a lot of time in the mountains.

Not only his brothers and sisters, but his nieces and nephews considered him tops. The family of Pon will be missing a real buddy as well as a brother. Pon is survived by the following brothers and sisters: Mrs. Alice Cromble, Hamathia, Utah; Hilda Close, Las Vegas; Mrs. Joe (Dora) Arnold, Price; Clara Ketterer, Salt Lake City; Mrs. Glen (Carrie) Whimrey, Martin, Glen and Vernon, Huntington, Utah.

I have lived in Huntington now for nearly 20 years. One of the first families I got acquainted with here was the Leemaster family. I grew to know Pon, Mart, and Glen especially well. We associated together quite a bit. I

lived neighbors to Glen and Dell. Right shortly after moving to Huntington learned to develop a deep respect for these men. They were all men of personable character. They were easy to meet, always ready to lend a helping hand and always had a good word. I can testify to that by my experience with them. Fon's life as has been stated in this biography by Dore, was one of dedication and love for his family. I know this, I don't have to read this biography of Dore's to know about these attributes and qualities of Fon. I heard these from the family over the years and I know that they are true and that Fon did dedicate his life to his family. In doing so he sacrificed a lot of things he would like to have had, had he not had such a feeling of love and obligation to his family.

When he was a young man in his teens his father was badly injured. He had a fractured hip and was bed-ridden for practically two years. During this time Fon took over the responsibility of supporting the family.

In those days we didn't have the public assistance we have today. When you didn't have means to get along with, you had to make it one way or another. You had to be of good character to meet a situation of that type in order to get the things that were needed.

After his father had recovered from this incident, he had an unfortunate accident and broke his leg again, and was bed-ridden for another year. Fon being the oldest boy of the family, assumed the responsibility of taking over in his father's place. The family moved to Provo for a couple of years so the smaller children could attend school, and Fon would work in Hwasatha to support them. They lived in Provo for 2 years. Then they moved back to Huntington where they could live at home and drive to work and back. But Fon still assumed the responsibility of seeing that all the members of the family were taken of, and he saw to it that the smaller children got a high school education.

In Glen's case, particularly, Fon came through again. I heard this from Glen

on more than one occasion. He lost his wife, and was bed-ridden with appendicitis and about lost his own life. During this time Fon took over the responsibility of taking care of Glen. He took over his obligations in paying for the furniture bills, and Dr. bills, that Glen was trying to take care of. When Glen tried to make restitution, Fon wouldn't hear of it.

Fon's love for his family and dedication to them is a particular asset you don't find in too many people. He was always hesitant to take any credit for himself. He had traits of character that his family can be proud of, and that any one could be proud to have.

Any time we are faced with this problem of death it always brings to our minds the possibilities of what is going to take place after this life. We all think of this at one time or another, some more than others. But there are some things we have got to face and we try to realize what will happen to us after our life on this earth is over.

We do have means of finding out what our future is after this life. We have the holy scriptures which give us information as to what we can expect after this life. We know that there is such a thing as eternal life. By reading the scriptures we can take note of what is going to take place.

Advancement, knowledge and progress in fields of science indicate that we know we can not destroy life. We can destroy matter, but we can't destroy spirit. We can't destroy life which is the spirit. So when we stop and think of death and the resurrection, and the things that go along with it, we refer to the scriptures to see what we can expect in the life hereafter. We find in Mormon 9:13, "And because of the redemption of man, which came by Jesus Christ, they are brought back into the presence of God yea, this is wherein all men are redeemed, because the death of Christ bringeth to pass the resurrection, which bringeth a redemption from an endless sleep, from which all men shall sound, and all shall stand before his bar, being redeemed and loosed from this eternal band of death, which death is a temporal death."

When we think of the resurrection and life hereafter, if we study the scriptures

at all we find that the Celestial Kingdom is the highest Kingdom, which everyone would naturally want to attain. But there are many different degrees of glory. I know these things are true and if anyone will take the time to study the scriptures and to get down on their knees, they will have a feeling within themselves that there is a resurrection, and that there is a God. This is something to look forward to beyond this life. In speaking of the celestial Kingdom, we must realize that to reach this Kingdom we must reach a state of perfection. This will require time and preparation beyond this life... "The Lord has said that through obedience we can be sanctified from unrighteousness. Every law governing it must be obeyed. There can be no opposition to divine law, nor can anyone receiving this reward have any desire to change or disagree with anything prevailing there, for these laws are perfect. As well may a man in the mortal world object to the law of gravity or any of the other fixed laws of nature, as to object to the laws of the celestial Kingdom. They have been tried, proved and are eternal. This being the fact there can be nothing but peace and joy in that Kingdom."

We well understand that mortal man cannot be perfect, but immortal man can. To reach that condition will take time and we have eternity for it, for we are destined to live forever. In the revelations given the Church in this last dispensation this matter of perfection, yet to come, is made very clear. One of the most profound thoughts ever given by revelation is this one given to the Prophet Joseph Smith: "and that which does not edify is not of God, and is darkness. That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day."

There is one thing that we have got to recognize and that is, we have got to accomplish, through our efforts, our own salvation. I believe, and I have read of others that believe, that the progress that we make in this life is going to be credited us to what we are going to attain in the next life.

When we are resurrected I believe we will take with us the same qualities and status which we have attained in this life. We have the opportunity of going forward by confirming to these statements. I think that is a wonderful thing to look forward to. I think we look at death as being so much of a calamity. It is a parting, and it is sad we have to part with our loved ones, but if we have the right attitude it isn't so sorrowful. When we think of the life and all the responsibilities that go along with it, it's quite a load to carry. We have continuous conflicts on every side. Nations against nations, men against men, and families against families. There were no conflicts among the Learmaster family. They all have love and respect for one another. This is important in anybody's category of thinking. We don't necessarily have to refer to the scriptures, but that is the best place to refer to, to gain a philosophy of life. But I think of Christ and his mission on earth, when people get to thinking about these things, life, death, resurrection and immortality.

Jesus said: "seek and you shall find" What I can say is, if we do seek, we will be rewarded by discovery. But we cannot find without reading. This is a natural truth and we cannot get away from it.

In summing up this feeling of death and immortality, I would like to read a paragraph from a little book I have here. The title of the chapter is "Death and Immortality". "Increasingly as we go through life, we come to know that death is the common lot of all men--not that death which, with finality, consigns men to annihilation, but that death which is at once an ending and a beginning--by which men leave behind the cares of mortality and enter an existence yet more glorious. None of us can avoid it. It comes alike to king and pauper, to the religious and to the unreligious. Wherein we differ is not in our ability to avert death, but in the attitude with which we meet it, whether it be unto us or unto those we love. Learning to face death with trust and confidence is one of the greatest triumphs of the soul, and it belongs unto him who can say, when asked whither death will take him: "I go where the love and the mercy and the wisdom of my Father in Heaven wish to take me." Over him who can face it with

such serenity, death can hold no terror, and no sorrow beyond the sorrow of a temporary parting. Viewed with such certain faith as this, death becomes merely the last venture of this life and the first great adventure of that life which is to follow."

I think there is a tremendous amount of science and philosophy in that chapter. It is something to think about. I believe, too, if we read, study, and pray, that we will find. And if we will but cease our feeling of fear of death, certainly I think we should strive to that end. I feel strongly that Pon's spiritual life will continue from where he left off. He will have a chance to develop his outstanding qualities of character. A person who will sacrifice his own desires for the ones he loves, possesses a quality to be given such credit.

And Pon possessed this quality. He always pleased himself in the background. When I think of Pon's life, I think of the Sermon on the Mount. I think he will be included in some of the promises Jesus Christ gave in that sermon. We will be given a chance to grow and develop. I

I ask the blessings of the Lord upon Pon's spirit that he may continue with the fine qualities that he has and that he may obtain the eternal love of God, and that he may be given a chance to grow and develop in the Kingdom of God.

I ask the blessings of the Lord on Pon's family. He has a wonderful family, and I know that they will miss him at this time. He is probably better off, rather than remaining in poor health. I know his brothers and sisters will miss him but he is better off at this time, than he was here on this earth.

I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ. A men

FAREWELL to a FRIEND

Oh Men! It's rough to have you leave!
The folks, back here, who love you so
Have learned to count so much on you,
It's really hard to let you go.
To say goodby is hard to do,
For friends who are so fond of you.

How long have been these dreary days!
The world has turned to gray;
A gloomy pall has been over all,
since the day you went away.
Anxiously, the long day through,
We've waited for some word from you.

It hasn't been the same at all
Around here, since you went away.
We miss, so much, your perky nod,
And ready smile, from day to day.
We selfishly had hoped that you
Would soon return, as good as new!

But, say! It's great, that you could go
To be with loved ones, waiting there!
How glad they are, that you could come,
and once again, their friendship share!
So, I guess, it's best for us to smile
And say, "Farewell, friend, for a while."

Burdick

ANSWER in words of Lawrence Hawthorne.

It's kind o' tough I' have I' leave
So many folks you've learned t' know,
An have 'em grip yer hand an tell
How much they hate to see you go.
It's kind o' tough to say goodbye
To friends you've seen day after day
It's hard to break the happy bonds
O' comradeship an love away.

It's hard to pack up all yer things
An leave a cozy home behind...
The place where joys have come to you.
Where neighbors all have been so kind.
An when, at last, yer dearest pal
Is tryin' hard to make a bluff
At bein' brave, an breaks right down,
It's kind o' tough! It's kind o' tough!

But say! It's great to find old friends,
Just waiting fer a chance to show
How glad they are t' have you come
An live with them! It's great to know
That folks here love me just the same
No matter where I've chanced to roam
An if I let 'em have their way,
I'll soon be feelin right at home.

So, It's a long farewell, old friends;

May God be righty good to you,
Across the miles an'd down the years
You'll find my friendship always true.
And now, I turn with eager heart
To meet what life beyond extends;
To greet the folks that welcome me,
And meet again my dear old friends.

Fred W.
1895

When I was a small boy I listened to my Mother tell a story: It happened in the then-very-new mining town of Sunnyside. The Company houses were built along the bottom of a canyon and the stream bed, below, was overgrown with trees and brush to form a playground for the many neighborhood kids. That day, the screams and cries of children brought everyone out to see what had happened. The kids had molested a hornet's nest. The older ones got out, but fast. The little ones couldn't get away.

As Mother told the story, she came out to see at least a dozen toddlers being pushed, shoved, scolded, carried, actually thrown and driven out of the creek bed and away from the hornets, by a nine or ten year old boy. The boy was badly stung but he didn't seem to notice -- he was too busy. According to her, some of those youngsters would most certainly have been stung to death but for the heroic actions of that boy. She always said it was the bravest thing she had ever known a child to do.

As a boy I heard that story told and retold many times, but, as a child, I didn't separate fact from fantasy. To me, it was just another story along with Jack and the Beanstalk or Little Red Ridinghood. Years later, as a nearly grown man, I met and came to know Alphozo (Fon) Leamaster. We became friends and then, one day, Mother asked

"Do you remember me telling you of the boy who rescued those children from the hornets?"

I told her I did.

"Well" she said "That little boy was Fon Leamaster".

West Hiawatha consisted of a few dozen houses clustered in the head of a narrow canyon along with an Amusement Hall, a Company Store, Mine Office, Check Cabin, Hoist House, Greek Coffee House and a garbage dump. Miners bathed in number three wash tubs and emptied the water down the hill where little ditches carried it around their down-hill neighbors so it wouldn't run in their back door. Oarsner materiel like grape pulp and chicken feathers was carted down the hill and dumped in the creek bed where it added

a pungent twang to the ecology until it was carried away by the spring floods. Only un-perishables like busted bedsteads and broken bottles were placed in garbage piles to be gathered at irregular intervals in a one-horse dump truck. Contact with the outside world was maintained via a mile-long tramway and a muddy road. No one paid much attention to the road but the tramway had to be kept free of snow drifts so the mine could work.

The population of the town included Greek, Italian, Austrian, Japanese, Finns and some Utah Farmers. Other mining towns allocated different sections to different groups but West Hiawatha had no space for such so they were all lumped together. Oddly, enough, it worked out very well with very little racial trouble. Every one walked to the 'picture show' three times a week and everyone took advantage of any excuse whatever to stage a dance on Saturday nights. Otherwise, the men played cards or pool at the Amusement Hall and the women ganged up for sewing bees or whatnot and nobody missed radio or TV because no one had ever heard of such things. All this in the winter. In summer we went fishing.

I was seventeen when I went to West Hiawatha. I was in that stage when, like every other boy, I had to prove to myself that I was a man. I found there were two ways — one, I could shovel the most coal or, two, I could drink the most moonshine whisky. I was young and husky and didn't have much trouble showing my share of the coal but I found I had to practice if I was to keep up with the town drinking pros. That's when I met Fen. He was a past master in both lines.

Someone introduced Fen as "The best damn Machine Man in Carbon County! That title meant something in coal mine vernacular. A Machine Man was an underground Aristocrat — the very top of the totem pole, and Fen looked the part. He carried himself like a drum-major and walked with a military snap that made other men look sleazy. About five foot eight, an hundred ninety pounds and shaped like a wedge, he had the air of one to be reckoned with.

But it first sight conveyed an ominous impression, his quick and ready smile soon put you at ease. He was polite almost to a fault but the steady look in those wide-set eyes waylaid any idea that you were shaking hands with a ramby-pamby. Drunk or sober, he was affable, almost gracious, but (I found out later) he could be otherwise. I once saw him step into a fist fight, throw the contestants apart and snap "Cut it out!" He could make his voice crack like a whip. Another time I saw him pick a man up bodily and throw him fifteen feet into the river. That was one of the few times I ever saw him real mad. More about that later.

Circumstances brought Fom and I together: We both liked to fish and hunt and we both worked 'contract' in the mine so we had the same days off. I don't know how many times we borrowed Sid Patters' horses and rode over Gentry Mountain for a tour or five day week end. We always had plenty of 'jap whisky' and Fom loved to sit by a campfire and just drink and talk, and I was a good listener. He told me about 'Butch Switzer'; a butcher he had worked with, and about an affair he had had with a girl named Mary Smith. He told me many stories of Vladivostick where he was stationed during World War One. He told me of how he had shot and killed a man who tried to go through the guard line while he was on duty. "It gives you a funny feeling to kill a man" he said. Then he shuddered and gulped another drink. For that last he pledged me to secrecy, saying he had never told anyone else. I kept his secret 'till now. From all he told me, I was able to piece together a rough idea of his past.

Old John Leamaster brought his family to West Hiawatha in the early 'teens. John was a good two-fisted drinking man with a reputation of being rather tough. Like many men of his generation he was prone to put his drinking ahead of his family obligations. Because of this, Fom took a job as delivery boy for the Company Store. He was only a teenager but he shouldered most of the job of supporting the family. World War One took him away for a while, then he returned and went to work in the mine. By the time I met him he had taken over the job of raising his Dad's family. Old John (he was a cripple now) was pensioned off by the Company on a part time job that barely kept him in drinking material.

I admired the way the Leamaster family operated: Old John, never drunk, never sober, never very talkative, came and went as he pleased like it was nobody's business. Fon, without question, assumed responsibility as head of the family. His brothers, Glen and Del, stood behind him in that capacity. Pay days, they added the bills and each chipped in his share and that was that. Fon was very close to his Mother and, between them, they formulated family policy. All the bills were charged to 'L. A. With three pay checks behind him, Fon had the highest credit rating in town. Even grub stakes for hunting and/or fishing trips were put on L A's account and we settled with him. He was the under-writer of every expedition we planned. Always, the word was "Charge it to L A." He was more than just the head of the Leamaster family, he was Mr. West Hiawatha.

Fon's most outstanding characteristic was stability. Most people operate under a thin veneer of honesty and decency but, with him, it seemed to go all the way through. He had a rigid sense of right and wrong and he seemed incapable of knowingly doing wrong. I remember a time we were hunting rabbits and someone accidentally broke a pole in a pole fence. All of us, except Fon, would have laughed about it and went our way -- but not Fon. He insisted we go to the farmer's house and 'Make it right.' The farmer was real ignorant about it. He got belligerent and read us a nasty sermon, then demanded two dollars for the pole. Fon paid him the two dollars. As we drove away, someone said he should not have paid, that the pole was only worth four bits. Fon said he didn't give a damn, that he didn't want to go to bed that night worrying about a two dollar pole. I think it was Del, the eternal clown, who said "By God, that pole is paid for and I'm gonna take it home". We didn't take it home but we had fun arguing about it.

Of course, the one big failing in Fon's life was drink. He had an insatiable appetite for alcohol. Unlike Old John who drank steady but never to excess, Fon had a super-human capacity for the stuff. He was the one man I ever knew who could (and did)

go to bed with a full quart of whisky and get up next morning looking for a drink. I felt inferior because my stomach rebelled --- it had more sense than I did. Del used to say it was a waste of good whisky to pour it down my throat --- it just came back. But not Fom. He could put that stuff away by the quart and still walk and act sober. If he suffered any bad effects during those first years I knew him, it was not apparent. He drank hard, played hard and worked hard, and seemed to enjoy it.

If his capacity for drink was enormous, his stamina was amazing. He had a lot of energy to work off. I remember a time someone reported having seen bear tracks in Mud Water. Fom said "Let's go bear hunting" so we went bear hunting. We had both put in a hard day's work in the mine but we saddled 'Old Sid's' horses and rode over the mountain to Mud Water. It was almost morning when we hobbled the horses and un-rolled our blankets in a dense grove of pines. Minutes later (it seemed) Fom shook me and said "Time to get up." It was almost daylight and we hurried up a fire and made breakfast. By the time we had eaten it was dark. Fom grinned sheepishly "Do you suppose we slept all day?" I agreed we had. We saddled the horses and went home.

Another occasion, we walked over the mountain to Huntington Creek. The plan was we were to meet a party at the forks of the canyon about four days hence. We hiked and fished for four days and ended up at the forks on the appointed day with absolutely no grub except toasted fish. Fom kerited the salt sack and announced there was enough to last til breakfast day after tomorrow. He was out of cigaretts and I was on my last can of tobacco so we took turns on my pipe. It was late at night when the party showed up --- happy as larks --- all except Herb Henry. He was asleep in the back seat of the car. We hustled up a meal and were about ready to eat when Herb awoke and staggered out with his 30 in hand and wanted to know "What the Hell's going on around here!" Then he shot beans and coffee and red hot coals all over the flat. We scattered like chickens but when the gun was empty, Fom grabbed him by the collar and the seat of his pants, whirled him around like a ballet dancer and sailed him, spread-eagle, into the South Fork River.

The water was swift and about two feet deep. Herb would have drowned had not some of the boys went down stream and fished him out. Fom told him;

"You'd still be floatin' down the river if it had been up to me to get you out." I believe he would have.

Herb figured in a number of incidents: On another occasion Fom and Herb slept together. I was first up in the morning and I was coaxing the coffee pot along when Fom awoke. He didn't know I was watching. He sat up and found a drink. Then he lit a cigarette. Next, he pulled up his trousers and examined his legs. They were cut and scratched like he'd tangled with a wild-cat. He was plainly puzzled. He shook his head and took another drink. Watching him, I too was puzzled. Finally, he had an inspiration: He threw back the covers and there it was — Herb was wearing his long shank spurs!

Fom had a strong sense of right and wrong but I induced him to be wrong at least once. It started when Fom wanted to sober up after a three day wing so we drove up the canyon and sat in the shade by the river to talk. He was suffering a real bad hang-over. Suddenly, he spotted something in the river: He waded out and picked up two bottles of what looked like home brew.

"Do you think it belongs to someone?" he asked.

I told him "Yes, it belongs to us."

We sampled it. It was good so we drank it.

"What do we do now?"

I filled both bottles with creek water, replaced the caps and put them back in the river. Minutes later two fishermen came down the stream. One handed his pole to the other, then waded out and picked up the two bottles. He held them up for us to see, grinned, and joined his partner. They went to their car about fifty yards away.

"Shall we run?" Fom chuckled.

I told him it was no use.

They opened the bottles, tasted, looked at one another, then at us. Fom suggested we go apologize and pay them for it. I told him "If we do, they'll kick hell out of us,"

They tasted. They talked. They looked at us. Finally, they packed their fishing gear and left. Fox said "We should have paid them."

The West Hiawatha Mine was closed and the town abandoned in July of 1926. To many of us, that was a catastrophe that equaled the destruction of the Tower of Babel. I wonder how many people have had that experience -- to awake one morning and see a notice "As of next Monday this mine will be closed permanently." We couldn't believe it. It must be a monstrous joke!

But it was true. The Leamaster brothers went to work in the King 1 Mine at Hiawatha (formerly called Black Hawk) and I was transferred to Mohrland. For several years I bounced around try- to re-capture the past. I hated Mohrland, mainly because it wasn't West Hiawatha. I tried Kemilworth and Consumers mines, then went to work in King 1. But things were not the same and I began to realize they never would be.

For one thing, Fox was not the same. The enormous amount of liquor he had poured down his gullet was beginning to tell. I can't diagnose his case but he didn't carry his liquor like he used to. He lost work from sickness -- something he had never done -- and he became something of a 'slopy drinker'. Then, too, other things changed. His brothers, Glen and Del, married and made homes of their own. They still stood behind him but the old order was gone. His Mother told my Mother "I only wish I can out-live Fox. He needs someone to look after him." She felt a deep responsibility toward him as he toward her. There was a strong mutual bond between them. And my mother, though she apposed liquor, often said "If there is a place called Heaven, there is certainly a place there for Fox."

I recall a couple of incidents of that time: We organized a hunting party to Salina Canyon and Fox, as usual, drank too much on the way down. Next morning he was too sick to get out of bed. We left him, thinking he would come later. That evening he was still in bed and I took on the job of nurse maid to get him on his feet.

I prepared a cup of coffee and a bowl of Campbell's soup and spoon-fed him till he got feeling better. He got up and we were all gathered around the camp fire when I saw Fom with a bottle up-side-down in his mouth and he was gurgling like a suckling calf. I pulled the bottle down and told him "For Chris-sakes, Fom, pull down on this end when you want to stop!"

He grinned "I forgot."

Minutes later he clutched his tummy and headed for the tent. I followed and asked "What's the matter, Fom."

Writhing with pain he groaned "I knew th! I shouldn't have ate that damn Campbell's soup."

Fom had an affair with a girl friend. He asked my opinion of what he should do. The girl friend was pregnant. I asked if he was the papa and he said it could be. I asked if there was any doubt and he said that could be, too. He named another man involved who wanted to marry her but she wanted to marry Fom. I asked if he liked her — if he could stand to live with her for the rest of his life. He said they get along very well and he thought she would be a good wife. When I asked why he didn't just up and marry her he asked "What about Mother and the kids."

We talked it over and over, all night long. The talk went round and round in circles that always ended with "What about Mother and the kids." I reminded him that 'Mother and the kids' wouldn't be his problem forever. 'Mother' was quite old and the 'Kids' were leaving one by one. I told him it was only a matter of time till he would be alone, that he was middle-age and, if he wanted a wife, he best get her now. I also suggested his house was big enough for a wife along with Mother and the kids.

All night we talked. All night I sermonized just like I knew what I was talking about. All night we went round and round and always we came back to 'Mother and the Kids'. He was still undecided when morning came but, in the end, he didn't marry the girl.

My prediction came true: Within a few years he was alone. Not exactly alone -- the Leamasters are a close knit family and Ron was more than welcome in any one of a dozen homes, but he had lived a life of doing for others and the idea of being on the receiving end was foreign to his nature. He was still the titular head of the clan but he was lost without a feeling of responsibility even though he was unable to assume such. He wanted to feel that someone someone depended on him, that he was needed, but that was something his family could not provide.

His declining years were not happy years and yet, not sad. He had everything he needed in a material way, his family saw to that. He had nieces and nephews to listen to his stories. He had friends with whom to reminisce. But he lived more and more in the past. He missed his mother. He missed Old West Hawaitha. He missed the old gang that used to charge everything to L. A. and go fishing. He missed the day when he stood head and shoulder above the crowd and commanded the respect of the whole community. He walked in one world and lived in another. The townspeople knew him as a little old man who never learned to walk slow. His once-crisp military gait became a mincing pace. His smiling "Good Morning" was sometimes a bit forced. He came and went quietly as if to disturb no one. Like all good soldiers, he did not die, he just faded away. They lay him close to his mother, the woman he loved best.

It is not my intent to write an eulogy to the memory of L. A. Leamaster. Rather, I attempt to sketch his life as I knew it. If my slant is wrong, it is because my facts, my judgement, my viewpoint is twisted. I admit to prejudice -- if he were on trial my testimony would be biased in his favor. His convictions of right and wrong stemmed from the simple and basic axioms of honesty, tolerance and common decency. These precepts were so deeply imbedded in his mind he needed no theological dogma to support them. His criterion was the simple niceties of human relations. The only reward he asked was the inner pleasure he felt when he acted in accord with the dictates of his own conscious.

To me he was a great teacher. He came into my life when I was young and impressive and un-sure of myself. He seemed to me to be one who practiced what other people preached. He offered a philosophy that was satisfying but not demanding. He had great faith in his fellow men and he placed a high value on friendship, on trust and on human dignity. If he had fault or weakness it was to his own detriment and never offensive to others.

I make no apology if my sentiments are flavored with nostalgia. For looms big in my life as one who influenced me at a time I was changing from a boy to a man. His homey council has endured the test of changing times and his strong convictions of right and wrong are the guide posts by which I have lived. His human weakness I can excuse as that part of a man that stems from a desire to live his own life. He took his faults with him but he left a wealth of good feelings in the memories of those who knew him. To me, he will always be Mr. West Hiawatha, The Little Giant, and the Little Hero who rescued those toddlers from the hermits.