

# THE DIARY OF JOHN D. LONG

By James L. Ford

“**A**MERICA of Yesterday”, compiled from the diary of the late John Davis Long by Lawrence S. Mayo, is well named, for it portrays a career of the sort common enough in New England in days gone by and shows the rise of a farmer’s boy from his native village in Maine to the governorship of Massachusetts and a post in McKinley’s Cabinet.

It cannot be said that the volume sheds any new or especially interesting light on the period of our national history in which Mr. Long played at times a not unimportant part. It is interesting, however, in its record of upward growth through the various stages then considered the inevitable stepping stones toward distinguished ends. Young Long received his early training in the village academy and at the age of fifteen was ready to enter Harvard College. There he seems to have devoted his time to the pursuit of learning, and although he speaks of an upper classman who was suspended for getting drunk and doing considerable damage to a freshman’s room, the picture he draws of college life takes on a distinctly academic color.

At the age of eighteen he became a schoolmaster, as did almost every New England boy of that period destined to later renown. In the town of Westford, Massachusetts, twenty miles northwest of Boston, he became the head master of the local school and secured lodging and board for \$3.25 a week, including washing. Besides instructing a large number of boys and girls he organized the Westford Literary Association, which met on alternate Monday evenings for decla-

mation and debate and was designed to take the place of the rather boisterous meetings of the village sewing circle.

After two years of teaching he entered the law office of Sidney Bartlett in Boston and here he "read law in the good old-fashioned way", to quote his biographer's words. Admitted to the bar in 1861, Long returned to his native village of Buckfield, Maine and hung out his shingle on the ell of the family homestead. His practice here did not prove lucrative and he returned to Boston, where he entered the law office of Chandler and Shattuck. It will surprise many of Mr. Long's friends to learn that in 1863 he sold a play to Maggie Mitchell which was produced at the Boston Theatre.

To my mind the later years of Mr. Long's life as depicted in his diary are singularly lacking in interest when we consider that he filled the position of Secretary of the Navy during our war with Spain and was at all times in close association with the many distinguished men and women then in Washington. What he has to say about President McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, and the various notabilities concerned in the war is distinctly commonplace.

Diligent perusal of the different works of biography and autobiography that have appeared in this country during the past two or three decades has convinced me that the interest in those volumes depends not on the importance of the writer or of the events chronicled but on the ability to write vividly and to see the picturesque side of things. The ex-Kaiser's book should be nailed to the barn door of every man who purposes the setting down of his recollections as a solemn warning of the results of intense egotism. No man of our time had enjoyed greater

facilities for watching history in the making and meeting the most celebrated men and women in Europe than had Wilhelm II, yet few men have written a duller book. Mr. Long shows no egotism, but he evidently failed to observe the things best worth writing about.

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America of Yesterday, As Reflected in the Journal of John Davis Long. Edited by Lawrence Shaw Mayo. The Atlantic Monthly Press.