

# **THE CHRONIC LOAFER**

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The Chronic Loafer by Nelson Lloyd

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**NELSON LLOYD**

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LOAFER**



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NELSON LLOYD



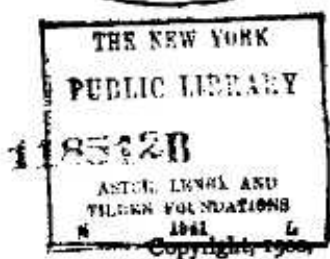
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## CHAPTER I.

### *The Reunion.*

IN the center of one of the most picturesque valleys in the heart of Pennsylvania lies the village and at one end of its single street stands the store. On the broad porch of this homely and ancient edifice there is a long oak bench, rough, and hacked in countless places by the knives of many generations of loungers. From this bench, looking northward across an expanse of meadows, a view is had of a low, green ridge, dotted here and there with white farm buildings. Behind that rise the mountains, along whose sides on bright days play the fanciful shadows of the clouds. Close by the store is the rumbling mill, and beyond it runs the creek, spanned by a wooden bridge whose planking now and then resounds with the beat of horses' hoofs, so that it adds its music to the roar of the mill-wheels and

## 6            The Chronic Loafer.

ring of the anvil in the blacksmith shop across the stream.

One July day the stage rattled over the bridge, past the mill and drew up at the store. The G. A. R. Man, the only passenger, climbed out of the lumbering vehicle, dragging after him a shapeless, battered carpet-bag. He limped up the steps in the wake of the driver, who was helping the Storekeeper with the mail-pouch, and when on the porch stopped and nodded a greeting to the men who were sitting on the bench kicking their heels together—the Patriarch, the School Teacher, the Miller, the Tinsmith and the Chronic Loafer.

*Chronic* The loungers gazed solemnly at the new arrival; at his broad-brimmed, black slouch hat, which though drawn down over his left temple did not hide the end of a band of court-plaster; at his blue coat, two of its brass buttons missing; at his trousers, in which there were several rents that had been clumsily sewed together.

The silence was broken by the School Teacher, who remarked with a contemptuous curl of the nose, "So you've got home from Gettysburg, have you? From your appearance one would judge that you had come from a battle instead of a reunion."

"Huh! A good un—a good un!"

All eyes were turned toward the end of the bench, where sat the Chronic Loafer. He was a tall, thin, loose-jointed man. Thick, untrimmed

locks of tawny hair fell from beneath his ragged, straw hat, framing a face whose most prominent features were a pair of deep-set, dull blue eyes, two sharp, protruding cheek-bones and a week's growth of red beard. His attire was simple in the extreme. It consisted of a blue striped, hickory shirt, at the neck-band of which glistened a large, white china button, which buttoned nothing, but served solely as an ornament, since no collar had ever embraced the thin, brown neck above it. A piece of heavy twine running over the left shoulder and down across the chest supported a pair of faded, brown overalls, which were adorned at the right knee by a large patch of white cotton. He was sitting in a heap. His head seemed to join his body somewhere in the region of his heart. His bare left foot rested on his right knee and his left knee was encircled by his long arms.

"A good un!" he cried again.

Then he suddenly uncoiled himself, throwing back his head until it struck the wall behind him, and swung his legs wildly to and fro.

"Well, what air you so tickled about now?" growled the G. A. R. Man.

"I was jest a-thinkin' that you'd never come outen no battle lookin' like that," drawled the Loafer.

He nudged the Miller with his elbow and winked at the Teacher. Forthwith the three broke into loud fits of laughter.