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LEONARD C. CROUCH, 1866-1953

Edmund H. Lewis

For those of us who knew Judge Leonard C. Crouch the memory of his friendship is precious and will remain undimmed. By his death, which occurred on July 3, 1953, when he had attained the age of eighty-six years, Cornell lost a distinguished alumnus whose devotion to the well-being of that University and of its School of Law was prompted by one of the deep loyalties of his life.

Born in Kingston, New York, on July 30, 1866, the son of Henry Gage Crouch and Almira L. Callender Crouch, Judge Crouch prepared for college at the old Kingston Academy. He graduated from Cornell in 1889 and thereafter attended the Cornell School of Law for a period of two years. After practicing law for a brief period in Kingston, he moved to Syracuse in 1892 where he engaged in private practice until 1899 when he formed a law partnership with Albert P. Fowler and Irving D. Vann which continued until 1913. In that year he was appointed and later was elected a Justice of the Supreme Court in which capacity he served as a Trial Justice in the Fifth Judicial District until 1923 when he was designated by Governor Alfred E. Smith as a Justice of the Appellate Division, Fourth Department. In 1932 Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed him a Judge of the Court of Appeals to which court he was elected in the following year. His service on the Court of Appeals was terminated on December 31, 1936, by the Constitutional age limitation of seventy years. In 1937 he qualified as an Official Referee from which position he resigned in 1940, thus ending his service as a judicial officer which had covered a period of twenty-seven years.

Judge Crouch possessed far more than technical competence in the interpretation and administration of law. As a practitioner at the Bar—where his name was associated with important cases—every item of his legal work bore the marks of accuracy, thoroughness and intellectual exactness.

As a trial Justice his days’ work amply demonstrated the fact that
in his book of life a judicial officer was a human being, not an embodied institution.

His designation to the Appellate Division, Fourth Department, and his accession nine years later to the Court of Appeals gave him opportunities, of which he was abundantly worthy, to put to use in appellate work his splendid talents and his broad culture. He brought to each appellate bench of which he was a member a fine, disciplined mind, legal scholarship of high order, sound judgment and a tolerance that did not spring from compromise, fear or indecision. His opinions, to be found in the official reports of the Appellate Division and the Court of Appeals, are demonstrations of judicial writing at its best.

One of the most rewarding interests which engaged the attention of Judge Crouch in the sixty-four years while he was a Cornell alumnus, was his association with the School of Law. There he served for a time as a lecturer, and in later years—after he had retired from judicial office—he complied with the Dean's request that he organize a course in appellate court presentation. In doing so, his classroom became an appellate court, the records on appeal used by his students were those of cases recently argued in the Court of Appeals, and his students acted as jurists and as counsel. Those who had the privilege of observing him as the official critic at those moot courts recall his obvious pleasure in the interest shown and benefit gained by his students, and his own satisfaction that he was having a minor part in what the Cornell Law School was producing.

The affection in which the memory of Judge Crouch is held by those who knew him intimately is a tribute to the rare quality of the man.