The Queen of American Agriculture

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Appendix 5

Complete Text of “Roads of Remembrance” by Virginia Meredith*

Today, on this May morning, wherever our flag flies there are roads of remembrance—roads of remembrance that lead to some consecrated place—roads of remembrance perhaps to the stately tomb dedicated to the unknown soldier, or to the rows of soldiers’ graves in the big cemeteries, perchance to the crosses on Flanders Field, or to a lone grave in a remote country graveyard. Everywhere flowers are borne, beautiful flowers that speak a language of remembrance and forget the ugly scars of ugly war.

I like to read again and again some lines written by an Indiana woman—Susan Perkins.

The Flag
Pray for your flag when it goes forth to war
With courage in cause that is just—
Let anger be slow
Let resentment not grow
Save with knowledge, unbiased, assured.
But where your flag leads
Even though your heart bleeds—
Pray for strength to endure,
Pray for faith that is pure.
Let us lift up our eyes
To where our flag flies—
And again let us pray
That forever and aye
It may stand in its might
For humanity’s right
To freedom, to justice,
To peace and to joy—
Pray, pray for your flag.

* Virginia Claypool Meredith, “Roads of Remembrance.” Speech delivered at the Purdue University Memorial Day Exercises in West Lafayette, Ind., on 30 May 1933. Original program located in Special Collections and Archives, Purdue University Libraries, Stewart Center, West Lafayette, Ind.
I recall clearly that day when the news came that Fort Sumter had been fired on; I recall how hearts were heavy, and the world looked black. And wherever there were young men—in college, in factory or on farm—patriotic fervor mounted high. It has been said that all wars are fought by boys and that the sorrows of war are borne by women; always, however, there are groups of mature men—patriots—who do the hard thinking and planning that belong to the actualities of war.

I often feel that in Indiana we have not kept glowing as we should the memory of the great war governor, Oliver P. Morton. His task was like that of Lincoln—a heart-breaking, a mind-racking task. Governor Morton was a familiar friend in our home; I heard daily the story of his struggle with a turbulent legislature—the kind of legislature that is a terror to its own constituents and a hindrance to a governor who would loyally serve his country. The support given Governor Morton by wealthy men at home was a splendid patriotic service that helped Morton’s “glowing reason” to keep Indiana in loyal line—a much more difficult and hazardous undertaking than our histories record.

It is said that the poet has an insight which gives the gleam of truth to his verse. [William] Dudley Foulke in his life of Morton [book titled Life of (Oliver P.) Morton] quotes Riley:

... One whose earthly will wrought every mission well,
Whose glowing reason towered above the Sea
Of dark disaster like a beacon-light
And led the ship of state, unscathed and free, out of the gulf of night.

I like that phrase—“glowing reason.” At the time of the War of the Rebellion organization was lacking, pitifully lacking, in the care of our soldiers at the front, and upon home folk fell a heavy burden; there was work for all. I myself, a young girl, rose to heights of heroism—at least I felt that I was rising to such heights. At the time when Morgan’s army invaded our state, I loaned my own riding horse to one who was going with the mounted company to repel the invasion. Well, my horse came back safely, as did the gallant volunteer who rode him!

Horses were far more important then than now. We had on our home farm three pensioners, horses that had seen service in the Army of the Potomac. Barney, a gaited saddle horse, shared Indiana honors in the battle of Gettysburg. Barney was one of the noted horses of the Army of the Potomac with speed and endurance; at the battle of Gettysburg Barney was the only horse of the Iron Brigade that escaped with his life. He was then sent to the home farm to end his days in Indiana.

On those historic days of ’63—July 1, 2 and 3—the Rebel General [Robert E.] Lee rather surprised the northern army by his rapid advance and it became imperative to “hold” the Rebel army by engaging it in battle until the Union troops...
could be placed in position. For this duty the “Iron Brigade” was chosen because it had seen service and proved itself; in that brigade, First Division, First Army Corps, was the 19th Regiment Indiana Volunteers. Barney belonged to Lieutenant Samuel Meredith and shared the glory of the day. In the annals of warfare never was there such gallant defense and never was there such dreadful slaughter. “The gallant six hundred” glorified by Tennyson must yield to this record, never surpassed.

A second pensioner was a big roan, Tom, sent home from Gettysburg. In the early days after Appomattox there was a constant stream of soldiers coming to our home in a very active effort to qualify for Government help, and every old soldier wanted to see “old Tom” and stroke his glossy shoulder.

And there was still another pensioner—a handsome bay horse given to General Meredith—Turk. On parade he was so prancingly grand that he justified all the equestrian statues that now adorn the land! These three pensioners had the freedom of the pasture, and when Fourth of July came and when the enthusiasm of a little town fired cannon to celebrate the day, it was most interesting to see these three horses join in a mad gallop to the farthestmost point in the pasture. They remembered the cannon’s roar—and they wanted no more of it!

Just what is the contribution of these wars that destroy our youth—what is their contribution to the ideals of citizenship? “The best project anywhere,” says Dean Bailey, “is a good man or woman working in a program, but unhampered.” What is the program?

One never ceases to wonder, to speculate, about the world war—was it a rendezvous of youth? I have a fantastic notion that there was held a conclave of the spirit of youth. Did they, the youth from every nation, find that they were speaking the same language—a language not understood by their elders? Did they, in that strange language, in some mysterious mood, in some strange place—high Olympus or deep cave of the gods—did they say to each other that they would bring to pass a new order? That they would take apart the old world and put it together again after a new pattern? Is this chaos that is now so confusing, so perplexing, that one cannot discern whether it is the trumpet call of the new order or the wail of farewell to the age—is it the old hope of a time when war drums should throb no more?

The past is ours! The past is safe! Columbus found a world, with no science, no art, “save the invincible surmise of his soul”! Can we save our souls, if we travel these roads of remembrance, cherishing glorious memories?

I have seen three “impossible” things come to pass. In the span of one life I have seen slavery abolished in the United States; I have seen the position of Labor changed completely; I have seen Florence Nightingale open to the mothers of men doors that had been closed and sealed through all the centuries! I count it a high point in my life that on a certain Sunday morning, in Edinburg—in old St. Giles Church, the Church of John Knox, the very Gibraltar of what is fixed and finished and
unalterable—I there heard Ian McLaren, John Watson, preach from an address to “the weary and heavy laden” made 2,000 years ago by a modern teacher, with a new note—“Come unto Me.” He of the Bonnie Briar Bush said, “Nothing—nothing—is impossible to a hundred men with pure hearts and strong souls.”

The past is safe—let us cherish it. Always there will be open roads of remembrance whereon shall crowd those who seek a lost love and others looking for courage glorified, for sacrifice sanctified by faith. Wherever they may be, these hallowed places known to each heart, we would invoke for them the benign mood of Nature.

On this May Day we would invoke Nature's peace and quiet, and repeat the good lines of Richardson:

Warm summer sun,
Shine kindly here;
Warm southern wind,
Blow softly here;
Green sod above,
Lie light, lie light;
Good night, dear heart,
Good night, good night.