

## MEMORIAL DAY ADDRESS

Virgil Warren

The saying goes, “The future of an event belongs to the event.” Let me explain. When something happens, it does not just happen disconnected from what is around it. Out of it flows what it leads to. That fact opens up a way to measure the importance of the occurrence. How long do its effects last? How many people does it impact? How much capacity does it have for its consequences to grow as time goes on?

Now quickly to the point. The importance and meaning of what happens is determined by what becomes of it. In the War of Independence, the Great War, World War II, and so on, the importance and meaning of those victories becomes greater as we carry forward the purpose and values those conflicts established. Something that changes history for two thousand years is more important than one that affects things for twenty. Those who “follow in their train” make it what it is.

An illustration from my own experiences shows what we mean here. Earlier this spring, I visited the old family farm in southeastern Indiana. That is where I lived all through my school years. The house I slept in is falling down. The kitchen where my folks and I ate supper has caved in. Sheathing boards have rotted out and fallen through the rafters. Old asphalt shingles hang draped over the remaining rafters. You dare not walk on the floors; you risk falling through into the basement.

Up the road a mile is Elmer Kaiser’s farm. I worked for him quite a bit growing up. His house was probably built about the same time as ours. The owners have kept a good roof on it. They have maintained the white paint and blue trim over the years. People continue to live there as they have for some hundred and fifty years.

The men that built the two houses were equally skilled, equally dedicated to their work, equally hard-working as they dug out the cellars, laid up the rock foundations, erected the frames and decking, nailed on the clapboard siding and wood-shingle roofs, and finished the plaster-lath walls inside. The difference is the maintenance. Building Elmer’s house has become a greater event than building ours. Building his house increases in importance as people keep living in it.

That pattern applies to the “honored dead” who lie here and to what they took part in before this day. Oddly, it may seem, the importance of our parents and ancestors does not lie so much with them, what they accomplished and stood for, as it lies with us. It is for us to make increasingly important each victory of the past. Of course, it is for us to have gratitude for the achievements of bygone days. But more importantly it is for us to muster resolve to maintain and grow what they have handed down to us.

“The future of a victory belongs to that victory.”

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