

Tribute to Perry Maxwell

Charles Evans, secretary of the Oklahoma Historical Society, widely known and former head of the Ardmore schools, was moved by the recent death of Perry Maxwell, Ardmore, golf course designer, to write a tribute to his memory.

Evans wrote:

Not long ago I came to the city of Ardmore to sit near the body of a man whose spirit I had known and loved for almost 60 years. Perry Maxwell was one of the most remarkable citizens Ardmore has ever known. He came to Ardmore with his remarkable and beloved wife as early as 1904 and from the first he devoted every element of his spirit in making that city the very best place in which to live. There have been many splendid leaders in Ardmore through the years but I doubt if any surpassed this man in the development of a rounded material and spiritual atmosphere for Ardmore which every city needs but which too few ever secure.

Tennyson, one of England's greatest poets, says in his tribute to Arthur Hallam, his Oxford student friend, as he passed out into the spirit world, this:

"I sometimes hold it half a sin
To put in words the grief I feel.
For words like nature half reveal,
And half conceal the soul within."
This is the attitude I take in telling the splendid people of Ardmore of some things I have learned of and from the life of Perry D. Maxwell.

I was born within 10 miles of Marion, Ky., and after my graduation in the university, I was honored in a little while by being placed at the head of the system of schools of Marion. In a little while after my election, a visiting ball club came from Marion to my home town and in this group were two boys some 16 years of age, Perry Maxwell and Edward Gray. With the bearing and charm of men, yet with the fervency of youth, these two boys came up to me and said, "You are to be our principal." We chatted pleasantly and they went away and I met them in the morning of the school session in Marion, Jan. 19, 1895. Both of these young men were the leaders of the high school and alone completed the high school course as a class of two in 1896. So Perry Maxwell and Edward Gray were the two first high school graduates whose diplomas I have signed through the long years, in my school career.

These boys were not only students but they were companions, friends, and I went in and out their homes, became a part of their fine lives, in school, in church, and in all activities that were interesting to aspiring youth. Maxwell moved toward the University of Kentucky, but, after staying there a year, his health would not permit him to go on. In the short stay, however, he was honored by being chosen as representative in a speech contest, a genuine contest to Kentuckians, between the university and Old Center of Danville, Vanderbilt, Georgetown, and some other old and noted colleges. Maxwell, always modest as to his undertakings and accomplishments, came to me and discussed not only what was demanded of him, but presented me the choice of a declama-

tion, "A Scene from Quo Vadis." Knowing his power as I did, I recall saying, "You are wholly capable of this; you have chosen a very wonderful piece of drama. Do as you always have. Throw yourself unreservedly into this and the results will be nothing less than good." He won.

His health demanded that he travel and so he went out to the south and west. Life was moving rapidly and he was anxious to find his life-work. In my school, as a boy, he had found his life-mate, Miss Ray Woods, a brilliant and marvelous spirit. On one of his western trips, coming back to his home, he stopped in the city of Ardmore where the Cruce family had made their home. He found the climate suited to his desires for outdoor living, for he had become attached to tennis and to golf. He decided to make Ardmore his home and in 1904, Perry and Ray Maxwell started a life in Ardmore whose influence never ceased for good for some 48 years.

The values that made him one of the greatest men I have ever known and I choose my words very carefully, for I do not dare play loosely with my estimates of this man, are few and I shall set them forth as I intimately knew them.

Perry Maxwell was born well. His ancestry was of the very blood and bone of Scotland, England, with the best of the pioneer stock of America. Maxwell was proud of his family, and justly so. His grandfather Maxwell, through his ninety years of a quiet, a persevering Scotch purpose, accumulated a splendid fortune for his day. His sons, Dr. William Maxwell and Press Maxwell, inheriting his fortune, added to it and kept it moving in proper channels. Dr. Maxwell, the father of Perry, married a Miss Harris, one of the pioneer families of Paducah, Kentucky. The Harrises lived for a half century or more in Paducah and left their impress upon the history of that city. This sterling and sturdy stock largely set, not only the bone and sinew of this man and his sister, Mrs. Mary Belle Strabley, but wove into the very fibre of his being, a reverence for all the tenets and principles of the Christian religion. I can see him now as a boy walking by the side of his mother to the Presbyterian church where she for many, many years met the Kindergarten children in the church and gave them their first lessons about Jesus and his chosen ones.

So it was no wonder then in the Ardmore years he entered into every phase of church development and finally bringing about him many noble men and women of his faith, he drew a vision of a church building worthy of splendid citizens of Ardmore. As his body rested there the other day I looked up and saw groined

arches and sustaining beams, a small but a beautiful presentation of the noblest of church architecture, and I said, "from foundation to the chimas above this is one of the expressions of love for good he helped to give in the largest way to Ardmore."

In the first days of his Ardmore living he linked himself with the banking interests of the city. He won the esteem and honor and confidence of all that met him. But in his reading, travel and creative thinking he learned to know that not only for his physical development but for the great golf architects of the world as one among three or four of national and even international fame, golf became his life's sphere.

His ability to love and understand Nature, the roll of the land, the character of ravines, the trees, not only in their decorative value but in their shaping of a driveway, all this, and the culture that came through books and travel, he not only used in developing the Twin Hills course of his home town, but in the building of many of the great million dollar golf courses stretching across central and eastern America. He loved to build a golf course, but he loved better to develop acres of beauty and charm where men, women and children would gather and while they played, they also worshipped God. The last time I talked with him he came to take me in his car to the great new municipal roll of Oklahoma City had called him to design and to finish along the edges of Lake Hefner.

Last summer as I read with deepest pride and satisfaction a splendid citizen, a real philanthropist, was bringing to my old hometown the greatest golfers of the world, I rejoiced above measure. But the finest satisfaction of all was that the man who was largely responsible for the Twin Hills Golf course and the fine educational influence which that course had given to all Ardmore's life, upon which these master artists played, was my first high school graduate and had made all this possible more than any other man. No wonder that Waco Turner took occasion to pay Perry Maxwell the highest tributes.

I shall not leave his influence on the entire world of this noble sport before I recount the meeting of Scotland's and the world's great architect, Mr. McKenzie, to whom Maxwell introduced me in the Biltmore Hotel in Oklahoma City. Perry praised McKenzie for his world renown in golf. The Scotchman turned to me and said, "Mr. Maxwell speaks of my ability to make a good fairway or develop a worthy green, but I wish to tell you that in laying out a golf course and to give it everything that the science and art of golf demand, Mr. Maxwell is not second to any one I know." I believe he knew what he said.

There was no cessation or period of vacant rest in this man's life. He early learned how to know that the best definition of rest is divine activity. He filled every day full to the brim. After a

ceaseless round of labor which took him out into the fields and hills at the first dawn of light, he seldom stopped until the shadows falling eastward told him that the day was done. Then began some of his most wholesome and creative hours. If at home and near his library he read, read incessantly, and thereby talked with earth's greatest men and women, Maxwell was one of the best and most discerning readers that I have ever known in all my life. Whether it be a play of Shakespeare, or the modern philosophy of Will Durant, whether it was a Tennyson or a Robert Frost, Maxwell often sat by my side and read and I came to know these thinkers of the world better because he often interpreted them better than I could. His library was never large, perhaps in number of books, but it was as large as all time in his choice of world wide and diversified authorship. He became such a man of learning that when he visited the great universities, the noted libraries of the world, or found himself in certain centers of learning as at Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, Ann Arbor, all these and more, eminent scholars welcomed him and made him a friend. Often he would return from a trip to the East, bringing a fine volume of the modern classics with the author's name written upon the fly-leaf and then he would tell me of the hours of conversation held and the views this scholar had given him along with the book.

So ran the full stream of life for this fine soul. His beloved and intelligent wife bore him four children in Ardmore. What a beautiful family it was, in their home on top of the high rolling ridge not far distant from where he built with Ray helping him, the beautiful Twin Hills. But fate dealt him an all but killing blow in 1919 when it took from his side his adored wife. She had understood him when others thought him a visionary. She had given him faith, complete faith in all his endeavors. Her spirituality equalling, if not superior, to his, gave him always an atmosphere of refinement and culture, which his nature demanded. I heard from an old Oklahoma City neighbor of his severe sorrow and loss. I immediately took a train for Ardmore and I met him at the gate of his home. He said to me, "I knew you were coming. I have told the minister that he could sneak of the church life of my wife but that I wanted you to tell of her youth, her loved ones, and of our home life. I am going to place her form out yonder on the Twin Hills golf course which we shared in love together, high up on the long ridge bordered by bold oaks she will rest and I shall build an archway there, perhaps a nameless one, but it will tell of my silent and everlasting devotion." So, on that June day, I stepped to the side of the grave and with a number of those who loved her, stood beneath a wonderful blue sky and great green oaks, and with God's open spaces reaching far out to the top of the Arbuckles, I told the story of the life of two fine souls I had seen mate and pass from my school room out into the world. I have experienced many occasions in a long life where I was called upon to interpret the deeds of men and women. Never have I ever known an exultation surpassing that, wherein I felt that every word I said was used in defining two lives as good as any I had known.

It took years to cure the distress of a life alone. Work, constant work, travel, were poor substitutes for the strength and joy she had brought him. Out of the rich experiences of the early friendships the Maxwells had met some very cultured companions. In this group, one rare friend had married and had moved on to widowhood. In the last fine years of his life, Perry Maxwell learned to lean upon this good heart for peace and faith. A quiet call of seasoned and noble love brought them together as man and wife. Perry said to one of his closest friends in Ardmore in one of the last visits he made to that city, "Say, my friend, has not God been good to me? Through His Grace, I have been permitted to live with two of the noblest women man could be given to know."

So the story runs of his wonderful life. Let no man or woman who may read this think for one moment that anything said here smacks of overemphasis. I end this brief offer of my love to Perry D. Maxwell as I began it. He, in truth, was one of the greatest men Ardmore has ever known.

The entire home, school, church and cultural life of Ardmore, out to the very edges and on through the state and nation have been enriched for all time by the work of this man.