

## A LIFE OF ACHIEVEMENT

By SEN. JOHN T. CLARKSON

The people of Iowa learned to admire and love Ed. Meredith for his many sterling qualities. He was a native of our beloved state, born and reared in the healthful environment of agriculture, to which he gave his best, that it might advance and keep pace with other lines of endeavor. While thus engaged on a large scale, he at the same time became a master mind in other lines of business and statecraft.

When our forefathers proclaimed to the world the sound fundamental doctrine that man has "certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed," the sages, the men of letters and statecraft in the Old World, were moved to voice their opposition thereto, as the philosophy thus proclaimed was by them unknown and unthinkable.

It was said by one then regarded as an authority, that a government founded upon the basis of such philosophy could not long survive, nor could it develop men of character or quality. Let the record of over a century and a half be submitted as evidence in support of the soundness of the philosophy thus proclaimed.

We find the lives and accomplishments of Webster, Lincoln, Blaine, Cleveland, Roosevelt, Bryan, Wilson, and in our own state, Harlan, Allison, Kirkwood, Weaver, Cummins, Dolliver, Dodge, Young, the Wallaces, and the man we now honor, as truly worthy, along with a host of other valiant, patriotic, liberty-loving men, representative of a great people. These men stand out among their fellows, yet typify a standard made possible by popular government, where the best in man has opportunity for development and expression.

In this environment and as a result thereof men have achieved fame and name in oratory, letters, statecraft, and business; but few if any stand out more conspicuous than Edwin T. Meredith. He was endowed with a wonderfully pleasing personality, a commanding presence, a keen intellect, and his ability to vigorously present and ably defend his convictions made him one of Iowa's outstanding figures in the many affairs of life, always the champion of what he believed to be the right in public and private affairs.

#### SOUGHT COLLEGE TRAINING

Having received the benefit of a common school education he sought to better prepare himself for his life's work at Highland Park college in Des Moines. Little could his fellows there have foreseen the useful life in the making. While young Meredith was in school in Des Moines his grandfather, Uncle Thomas Meredith, owned and published a small newspaper devoted to the principles of government espoused by the Greenbackers, afterward known as the Populist party. The zeal, energy, active mind, and organizing ability of the young man was pressed into service by the owner, first as the handy man about the premises, then as bookkeeper, advertising manager, and finally in addition to his school work he was placed in management of the publication.

When he was married at nineteen years of age, Uncle Thomas Meredith gave to him, as a wedding present, the plant known as the *Farmers' Tribune*, which he operated for a time, but sold within a few years; and a publication that became so large a part of his life was launched upon an uncharted sea. Here his genius for organization found expression, and his ability to handle the larger affairs of business, en masse, grew and grew, until *Successful Farming* became known throughout the nation, in every walk of life, and especially among those who endeavor to develop and keep agriculture on a high standard, and those engaged therein on the front rank of forward thinking, moral living, useful men and women of the world.

To *Successful Farming* he later added the publication known as the *Dairy Farmer*. Then came one of the proudest achievements of his life—the publication of *Better Homes and Gardens*. In this he gave expression to his very soul in his endeavor to inspire, aid, and assist in building and developing better homes; expressive of his realization that a people cannot become great, nor long endure as such, without a strong, energetic, and constructive love of home and home life, not merely in the ownership of the home alone, but all that goes with it to make the ideal “home” such as finds lodgement in the hearts and souls of the best men and women, expressing the love of the beautiful ideal, though it be but a humble cottage.

His active life was not devoted entirely to the happiness of the adult. He created a fund to be loaned to the young people upon the farms with which to buy a pig, a calf, a lamb, or a colt, in order to develop and encourage a love for animal life, and the spirit of thrift and usefulness in the business world. This act on his part attracted the attention of men interested in the training of youth and became the nucleus of a national organization for like purpose, which organization he served as an honored president.

He was identified with and was an official of some of the strongest and leading banking institutions of the city of Des Moines, and was a director of the Federal Reserve bank. He was an active member and official of the Chamber of Commerce, both city and national, but withal he kept in close contact with and in active control of his large publishing house, where the Meredith publications were issued under his guidance, with the aid of over five hundred assistants, all of whom became inspired with the spirit of co-operation drawn from the genius and the love and affection of their leader. So firmly and well has the institution's foundation and structure been laid and built that the work goes on, guided and influenced by the hope and good will estab-

lished; a house where beauty abounds, adorned by the best in literature, art, and sculpture, where the most humble workman finds pleasure in the doing of his part, and wherein he is wont to take pride in saying: "I am a part of the institution."

#### HIS ORGANIZING ABILITY USED

When we became engaged in the World war our president availed himself of the services of Mr. Meredith, and he was sent abroad to study conditions that we might the better organize our industrial forces to aid and assist in doing our part. Upon his return his active, energetic organizing ability was felt nationally, as we had known and felt it in our state. Then came the opportunity for our war president to give to the people the services of a genius for public service, and he selected Meredith to become a member of his cabinet as secretary of agriculture. Promptly he began the work with that same energetic, inspiring force displayed at home, so that when his successor took office he found a revolutionized department, one that became and has held its place among the other strong departments of our national government.

Meredith's voice and influence were given without reserve in behalf of the plans, hopes and aspirations of our war president to establish a system by which wars between nations could be avoided, wherein it was said that we were morally bound to take the step to make good the favorably accepted proclamation that we were engaged in a war to abolish wars. In short, that if our Christian civilization hoped to survive we must become identified with other nations in establishing a World Congress, if you please, to pronounce international law for the guidance of nations in international affairs, and a Court of Justice in which disputes could be adjusted without armed conflict, but nationalism was too firmly imbedded in the minds of men, and we were not permitted to take a part, though we had given to the world a concrete example in establishing a national congress

with a Federal court for all of our states. Meredith passed to the Great Beyond firmly believing that our people erred and that in a time not far distant we would reverse our present policy for the more advanced one, in accord with the spirit in which we live and teach.

#### A FULL LIFE IN SHORT SPAN

As we measure the age of men, Meredith passed on when a comparative young man, but during the thirty years of his business life, beginning in the days when he used a pushcart to transport his publications to the postoffice, and ending in 1928 with a world-wide experience and as a national figure among men and affairs, he lived a full, active life, far beyond the average of men of affairs. Though short in years, his was long in achievements, and the satisfying thought comes to us that it was not a selfish life, but one devoted actively to the betterment of all mankind.

It is well to emphasize the lives of such men, so that the on-coming generations may know the kind and character of men who have grown and developed as world figures under our philosophy of life and government and made secure to our successors in a written constitution. And if we would have men and women noble in character, strong in the virtues that go to make a great people, ever working to improve the standard, we must religiously guard the portals of constitutional government where human rights are recognized as inherent, and where government is organized among men to guard and protect such rights as an aid in our pursuit of happiness. Let us again and again draw from the fountain of faith that we have in our fathers, who made it possible that we and our successors might enjoy the blessings of liberty as we know them under our form of government.

My personal acquaintance with Meredith dates back to the time when he was a boy of eleven years of age, and later became one of close, warm, personal friendship. As members of the same political faith I enjoyed

his confidence and joined with him in the many efforts to carry out the principles which he firmly believed to be to the best interests of all concerned.

My mind goes back to the days when equal suffrage was a paramount issue, and I cannot forget his sincere, aggressive interest therein. Temperance to him was a gospel of faith, and no influence, financial or otherwise, could swerve him from a course having for its purpose the advancement of his cause. Better highways was an ever constant subject to which he gave time and money. In truth his devotion to hard-surfaced highways in his candidacy for governor lost for him the support of those who believed Iowa's soil was good enough, as it had served those who had gone before. And, as an employer of labor he gave active support and influence to bring about the enactment of the workmen's compensation law in Iowa.

When it became apparent to his family and friends that his physical strength could not long endure the demands made thereon by his active participation in so many varied and important issues and activities, he was admonished and urged to refrain from taking such an active and energetic part in the many interests so close to his heart, but his was a heart that could not stand by or be regarded as one among a number of others to be counted as so many men in a movement. Thus, until the last, he was engaged to his utmost capacity in the furtherance of every cause which he believed to be right.

It was not strange, nor unexpected, that one of Meredith's active life would meet with opposition, but it can be said in truth that in all of his efforts, actively aggressive as they were, he left no personal wound among his fellows or those he opposed. Disappointed at times, yet never discouraged, he accorded to others the rights and privileges he claimed for himself. He went on with the work until called upon to pass on. He lived the part of one of Iowa's distinguished citizens, a great American.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.