

# Words of Tribute

Spoken at

Service in Memory

of

Elizabeth Burrill Curtis

March 15, 1914

Church of the Redeemer

New Brighton, N. Y.

**William G. Willcox spoke**

**for the Civic League—**

Dear Friends:

We are met together this afternoon to share a common sorrow which is so keen and so recent that it seems almost an intrusion for anyone to attempt to put it into words. I did not know until I saw the program that I was expected to speak from the standpoint of the Civic League, but I have no heart to talk at length of that work. Miss Curtis' interest in the Civic League was only the same interest which she felt in every good work for the welfare of the community, and her encouragement and help were the same that she gave to any of her friends who tried to do anything to help others or to improve social and civic conditions in any way.

It is rather as a personal friend that we are thinking of her and that I would speak of her to-day. In this busy, crowded life of ours, we are apt to take friends who come to us very much as a matter of course, without much thought of weighing their value or importance, until one day they drop away and leave us wondering how we can possibly go on without them. So it was that Miss Curtis came

into the lives of many of us, and so it is that she has left us sadly telling over to ourselves and to others the great loss which we feel so keenly.

I have not seen much of her of late years, but with me, as with how many others, there was ever the consciousness that her sympathetic interest and encouragement and her wise counsel were always to be counted on. I do not know that it is much worth while to try to analyze her character or the secret of her influence in our community. We do not analyze the sunshine or the breezes or the songs of the birds or the flowers of the field, which contribute so much to our happiness, and her influence was hardly less unconscious than theirs.

There are two things, however, which must have impressed all of her friends as they have impressed me. Her quick intuition and sympathetic interest were always at the service of her friends. No one ever came to her for comfort or counsel, to be met with a long story of her own troubles. Indeed she always seemed so much more interested in the affairs of others than in her own, that one might almost have doubted if she ever had any need of sympathy or comfort herself. And again, or rather growing out of this, was her confident optimism which was such an inspiration, and



which so brought out the best in anyone fortunate enough to fall under its spell. It was impossible to know her without gaining a little higher estimate of one's own powers and a firmer ambition and determination to make the most of them. And, after all, there is nothing much finer in life than to so influence others to rise to the best things of which they are capable.

I am very glad of the opportunity to pay this brief tribute to her sweet memory, to say that I too loved her, and that my life has been worth more to myself, more to my friends, and more to this community because of her encouraging and inspiring influence.

**Mrs. William G. Willcox spoke**

**for the Political Equality Club—**

When I was asked to say a few words today I decided that although undoubtedly there would be many people here whose recollections of our friend went back as many years as mine, perhaps nobody else would speak of them.

Miss Curtis was born on April 15th, 1861, the day Fort Sumter was fired on, and Mr. Curtis was wont to say that it was remarkable how that event, which shook this nation to its foundation, paled before the advent of his first little daughter.

My first recollection of Miss Curtis is sailing a horse-shoe in the brook and that she was a very little girl and knew nothing of the law of specific gravity is proved by the fact that she could not understand why we had lost it, and hunted for it long after among the grasses and bushes of the banks.

She was an omniverous reader teaching herself when only three years old. She read Shakespeare long before she understood the meaning of the words, or the story, but the rhythm and cadence of the lines appealed to her.

They tell a story of finding her curled up

in the big chair reading and when they asked her what book it was she raised her big blue eyes and solemnly answered: "The Leg End of Sleepy Hollow." This reading stimulated her imagination and she had a host of stories at her command. It was a common sight to see her surrounded by a swarm of little cousins eager to hear the next chapter of the story which was continued from week to week or month to month.

We played imaginative games in those days and she was a splendid player, always remaining true to the pre-arranged plot, and never embarrassing us by doing the unexpected. By some strange chance she was always the villain, and a most virile and vituperative villain she made.

I sat beside her in school and well I know her modesty and self-effacement. She never realized her powers, nor how we less clever and less well-prepared girls looked for her to save a poor recitation from well deserved rebuke. She was always quick to recognize and acknowledge any little talent or aptness in any of the others.

She must have been in her early twenties when she was asked to prepare and read a paper at a Unitarian Convention held in one of the towns in the north of the state. She read it and was complimented on it by her hearers,



but when she reached home she was overcome by that modesty which was one of her most salient features and in a burst of discomfiture over what she thought had been a failure, threw her manuscript into the fire. Hardly had it burned when the post brought her an urgent request to come somewhere else and re-read the paper.

Miss Curtis began her first public work for the Suffrage Cause in 1895. In the summer of that year a Constitutional Convention in New York was held and in the early spring Miss Curtis was asked to help in the task of educating the women.

She addressed meetings on this Island, arguing, persuading and teaching, and by the force of her personality raised the cause from a subject for ridicule to one at least for serious consideration.

She went to Albany and addressed the Committee of the Convention and by her able presentation of the subject commanded the attention and respect of the men who heard her, although she did not gain the end for which she had been working.

In subsequent years she attended many State and National Conventions and among the 'up-state' workers in the Suffrage cause she is remembered today as an able and eloquent speaker.

The year following the Constitutional Convention she founded the Political Equality Club of Richmond County and was its President for many years and its Vice-President at the time of her death. To this Club were attracted many of the most liberal women of Staten Island, who believed in equal rights for women. It was the first woman suffrage organization on the Island.

Miss Curtis believed, as her father's daughter could not help believing, that the political enfranchisement of women made for the best interests of the Nation, that it made for the uplift of the women of the world, and was but one more step in the progress of Civilization.



**Mrs. William Bryan spoke**

**for the Samaritan Circle of King's Daughters**

The Samaritan Circle of the King's Daughters accepts, with sorrowful hearts, this opportunity to pay their tribute to the memory of Elizabeth Burrill Curtis.

For the greater part of twenty-five years of organization Miss Curtis has been our President, and to her rare and wonderful ability we owe much.

Our motto, chosen when the Circle was first organized, is "Faith Without Works Is Dead," and no one more fully exemplified this than Miss Curtis. Her works speak for themselves and for her faith. Her breadth of view and her unusual capacity for seeing all sides of a question has made the Circle a power for good and the work delightful for us all.

For the past year we have been planning for a celebration in honor of our twenty-fifth birthday which will be in May. No one has been more interested than was Miss Curtis. Her death leaves us with no heart for the gala day we had in mind, but we are hoping to make it an occasion for some special work that will be a memorial worthy of our dearly loved President.

In the larger work of the King's Daughters, Miss Curtis was much interested. Often has she said, "I like to belong to the great order," and it was at her suggestion that in 1895 the Samaritan Circle invited all the Circles on Staten Island to meet with them and confer about their work. This was the first County Convention.

Miss Curtis was long the President of the County organization formed at this time, and only declined re-election because of ill health.

"To look up and not down; To look out and not in; To look forward and not back; To lend a hand," was always Miss Curtis' spirit in life.

The Samaritan Circle is deeply conscious of its own great loss, of its legacy of high ideals—and of its inestimable privilege in having had Miss Curtis for its member and its President."

**Mrs. Charles M. Porter spoke**

**for the Woman's Alliance—**

Oh, blessed memory. We meet here today in memory of Elizabeth Burrill Curtis, a blessed memory indeed. An active and deeply interested member of our church, she joined the Woman's Alliance when our branch was formed in 1897. She served as President for two years and held the office of secretary at the time of her death. We deeply mourn our loss. She was ever ready to help on the committee work, and year after year she has arranged our programs or given us the benefit of her thought and mind, often writing on some intellectual theme or vital subject of the day, always with the natural graciousness which was essentially hers. It was a privilege to have her among us and as all her active interests were on Staten Island, especially in the later years of her life, she gave to this community her best.

“And still the beauty of that life,  
Shines star-like on our way,  
And breathes its calm amid the strife  
And burden of to-day.”



**Mrs. John Q. Adams spoke  
for the Fortnightly Club—**

The Fortnightly Club of New Brighton acknowledges its profound obligation to Miss Curtis for the past twenty-two years.

She was twice its President and was completing a two-year term when she was taken from us.

Even when she was not well enough to meet with us, we always felt we could depend upon her; she helped us with such efficiency and graciousness,—she was so generous with her splendid powers.

If any members felt they could not take their papers, she, whose strength was probably less than theirs, she, whose pain was perhaps greater than theirs, often took the afternoon's work. Three times this year she had taken the program for the afternoon; and those who heard her recite the poems of Alfred Noyes in December will never forget it.

One of the last pieces of work she did was to make out a complete list of subjects as a suggestion for next year.

Most people, gifted as she was, would have sought the society of the gifted—if not to let their own light shine, at least to enjoy the light of others; but she seemed content to

work with those whose development of brain and soul was much less than her own.

More than one member of the Fortnightly has said to me within the last few days, "We never had anybody on the Island like Miss Curtis;" and, they add, sorrowfully, "We never shall have, again, anybody like her."

**Thomas Garrett, Jr., spoke**

**for the Unitarian Sunday School—**

Almost twenty-five years ago, the Sunday School of this church was started by Miss Curtis and Mrs. Hicks. The old church, which had stood upon this site had been abandoned for want of interest. These devoted women determined that this church should not entirely disappear.

They proceeded to plant the seed in fertile soil. I refer to the youth of the community. At first the little Sunday school met at the homes of teachers and scholars. It grew and continues a living monument to the devotion of those women and their associates. That Sunday school was the nucleus, about which was built the present church and this group of buildings with their potential usefulness for the good of the community.

Children respond to work along the lines of idealism. The youthful leaven produced courage and hopefulness in the old, and this larger institution is the result. Miss Curtis was an idealist and her happy, joyous idealism was the key note of the Sunday school. Nor did that spirit of looking upward as a practical guide to life cease with the Sunday



session. It lingered through the six secular days of the week.

To that work Miss Curtis applied the inherited and kindly genius which had made her father's public life and work a lasting inspiration to the youth of America.. Her work with the young was more than a mere inspiration. For she was the kindly practical guide as well. And she led through the development of individual independence. About her were always gathered through the week the boys and girls who looked up to her as a leader and friend.

This little Sunday school claimed her as its inspiration. Her memory will ever remain its proudest possession. Not only does it belong to the Sunday school as an institution, but personally to all those individuals, who throughout her service, came as boys and girls under her magical influence.

The pride I feel, as one of the oldest and first of her pupils here, is shared by all who have followed down through the Sunday school as it now is.

May her memory ever serve as a guide and inspiration to us who are left to carry on the work which she nobly began.

## Tribute from the Town of Ashfield.

*(Intended for this service but delayed in transmission.)*

There is a silence of sorrow and of bereavement in our town. On the morning of March 6, from her home on Bard avenue, West New Brighton, Staten Island, N. Y., in the zenith of her powers, passed out of this life, Elizabeth Burrill Curtis.

Miss Curtis had from childhood a summer home in Ashfield. Blest by inheritance with rare qualities of mind and heart, she grew to rich and gracious womanhood. Here, with her parents and friends, not only did she cherish increasing joy in the ever new attractions of our well known heights, but as everywhere, in the spirit of her distinguished father and in unison with her long widowed mother, she proved an unflinching aid to all uplifting endeavors for the general good.

To our young people she was a constant charm and inspiration. Just and firm in her estimates of character and of enterprises, she was equally genuine in her friendships. Through the light of her consecrated soul so radiant was she, that the golden threads of her earthly robe will ever be, to those who knew her here, the warp and woof of the shining garments that now enfold her, on the hills of eternal peace and joy.

A. H. H.