

9th November 2021

Permanence

“Don't take life so serious, son, it ain't nohow permanent.”

Walt Kelly, from the comic-strip “Pogo”

We were soldiers once ... and young, published in 1992, is a book by Lt. Gen. Harold G Moore (ret) and war journalist, Joseph L Galloway about the USA's involvement in the Vietnam War. It focuses on the Battle of the La Drang Valley, the United States' first large-unit battle of the war. Adapted as a movie in 2002 under the title of *We Were Soldiers Once*, the book was a *New York Times* best seller, one critic describing it as “A stunning achievement – paper and words with the permanence of marble.” But I want to take issue with the critic about the use the word “permanent” and the metaphor of “marble” he puts alongside it.

When I was young, I read about “The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World”, a list of remarkable constructions from classical times. Of the “seven wonders”, only one is left – the Great Pyramid of Giza. Five of the others – the Colossus of Rhodes, the Lighthouse of Alexandria, the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, the Temple of Artemis and the Statue of Zeus – have long-since been destroyed, and there is doubt whether the Hanging Gardens of Babylon existed at all. If they were as wonderful as people say, they might have been considered permanent. But did they have any greater permanence, set like marble, than the words of a book?

And, of course, we would like to think that *we* could be permanent, but we know well enough that we are not. It's not that we don't make an important contribution to our world while we are here. And we may spend our lives working out how useful that contribution might be. But we will never be marble. We are transient beings. We will never find permanence.

*The things of time will soon decay and crumble into dust;
For transience can never offer substance we can trust;
If you want immortality, kiss the things of time goodbye,
And grasp what is eternal – then your love will never die.*

From “What Lasts?” by Tom Gordon, *A Blessing to Follow*, www.ionabooks.com

“Don't take life so serious, son, it ain't nohow permanent” might be a good mantra to live by.

A prayer for today

In my impermanence, help me to remember that your love is unchanging. Amen

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon

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