

REFLECTIONS--BEFORE THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL

A Beautiful Tribute

by
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Who am I?--I shall be called Legion. For I am one of the thousands who have stood before the Lincoln Memorial in the past. I am one of the thousands who will stand before it in the future. One of the thousands who pause briefly to stand bareheaded in the summer sun or winter snow to pay homage to a great and humble man.

I am a newly arrived immigrant, respectfully standing, hat in hand. Not understanding things in a strange land, but knowing instinctively that here is something that stands solidly for freedom.

I am one of the many more thousands who have never seen or never will see the majestic beauty of a kindly man, a Godly man, captured incredibly by an artist in glowing marble glory. Yet I know, and feel deeply, its beauty and significance.

I feel a new richness, a new courage to face a strangely widening world. A world of talk about space and about terrible forces that could destroy all alike. I close my eyes a moment in a solemn prayer to an understanding God. A prayer that I, in my own small way, may live up to and follow more closely the teachings of integrity.

An ancestor of mine was one of the men who fought at the battle of Gettysburg. He marched with Sherman to the sea. Another was a soldier in grey who fought so gallantly for a cherished cause--and lost.

My inheritance, written in blood, is those immortal words--"and that we shall resolve that these men shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that the government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

Yes, my name is Legion. I come from all walks of life. I am a merchant, a milkman, a doctor, a peddler, an engineer, a student, a truck driver, a soldier, a plumber, a salesman, a minister, a contractor, a sailor, a beggar, a teacher, a statesman, a policeman, a banker--I am all of the people--I am heart and soul for freedom--it is the pulse and heartbeat that is traditionally American. Yes, my name is Legion.

I trace the life of the man who looks down upon me--a sunbeam softens and warms the eyes of stone. I remember his humble beginning in a cabin in Kentucky. I remember the poverty and his gentle love for his fellowman--his great sense of fairness--his wisdom, his understanding. I recall with a chuckle his barbed wit and keen sense of humor. His many stories told at his own expense. Yes, even the hatred his enemies bore him. A hatred that held in it an element of respect. Those enemies are long since forgotten but the immortal spirit of Lincoln lives on.

I picture the struggles of a poor young lawyer. Never being too proud to admit that he might be wrong. His unfailing belief in mankind, his desire to be loved, yet realizing his physical ugliness, accepting it and making of it something good. The rugged ugliness of a man whose strength of spirit shone from within.

I know of his unfaltering devotion to duty and his deep and lasting love for the beautiful and tempestuous Mary Todd. His realization that marriage could be a satisfying thing--and who humbly accepted without complaint, the fact that his wife was a woman of moods. I vision the deep and lasting scar left by the loss of his two beloved sons.

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