

Impressions

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LIKE MANY ANOTHER city our nation's capital is crowded with picturesque scenes and memorials to history and culture. It has one place that would be difficult to duplicate, a place that is made most effective by night. We stop at the Reflection Pool and gaze at a square, colonnaded memorial. At first we are reluctant to get a closer view because of the seemingly endless number of steps to climb. But even at a distance there is something in the face of the softly lighted marble statue in the rotunda that draws us up those steps until we are standing at the feet of Abraham Lincoln. Shyness causes us to blink hard to hide the tears as we stand in silence, gazing into the face of this homely and sad-looking man. And yet around us are many, mostly foreigners and Negroes, who are not so inhibited. They are weeping and kneeling in homage. A prayer rises in our heart, "Grant us a small portion of the humility and strength of this great man."

We read the Gettysburg Address that is inscribed on the wall "dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. . . . government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth." How often our thoughts, words, and actions break faith with these promises made for us! Costly wars have been fought to gain these principles of democracy and equality; yet we as individuals thoughtlessly neglect the obligations and privileges of our government; daily we succumb to racial and religious prejudices. Could that sad expression on Lincoln's face be disappointment in us for our selfishness and indifference, our taking without giving?

As we descend the steps we see in the pool perfect reflections of an obelisk and a sparkling dome-topped building. Our eyes rise farther and we see in the distance the austere shaft of the Washington Monument and behind it the brilliantly lighted Capitol. So in this one spot we see the symbols of our nation's ideals—greatness, courage, defiance, strength and humility; and a quiet "thank you" rises in our hearts.