

Impressions at the Tomb of Abraham Lincoln

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I HAVE WALKED, with silent tread, the marble floors of Westminster Abbey, where a host of Great Britain's heroes and scholars, scientists and sages, kings and men of noble birth and attainments, repose; I have paused amid the tombs of Sweden's noble dead, in the temple that rises above them, in one of her cities of the far North; more than once have I visited the city of Paris, where I beheld monuments of marble and bronze—visible reminders of the military aspirations and achievements of France—and, in that city, I have looked down, with kindling interest, upon the tomb of Napoleon the Great; I have visited the resting-place of Thomas Jefferson, the author of America's Declaration of Independence, and, with keen appreciation of his worth, have thought of him as a great statesman, a friend and promoter of liberal culture, and an advocate of

justice and liberty, in the interest of all men; I have visited the sacred soil, on the banks of the Potomac, where the remains of George Washington, the first President of the United States of America, are entombed, and thought of that military hero and statesman, as the founder of a great government, which, as Americans think, is the freest and best in all the world; I have visited annually, during two score of years, my native city, Richmond, Va., where is the home of the late Mr. Jefferson Davis, President of the Southern Confederacy, and where, in the "Capitol Square," and along an avenue of monuments, are seen the statues, in granite and marble and bronze, of soldiers and statesmen, who were in life and are in death the pride and glory of the South; I have visited the consecrated ground, on the Hudson, where repose the remains of General Ulysses S. Grant, recognizing in that chieftain the man of iron will, who put an end to the great Civil War, thereby making it possible for me, and the people of my race in America, to possess and enjoy the privileges and advantages, which are ours as free and native-born American citizens; yes, I have visited all these places, which are sacred in the memory of nations, and often have I gazed upon statues of Abraham Lincoln, and even upon the Lincoln Memorial at Washington, D.C., which the Nation has erected at great cost, but never, in all these sixty-odd years of my personal freedom, and the freedom of the people of my own blood and kind, have I been so strangely and so tenderly wrought, as, when at Springfield, Illinois, on the fifteenth day of September, 1926, I stood over the dead and buried body of Abraham Lincoln, and laid a wreath upon his tomb. Somehow or other, I thought of Jesus of Nazareth, thought of His life, thought of His vicarious death and sufferings, thought of the manifold

blessings of God which are mine in Christ, in fine, as I stood over the very body of Abraham Lincoln, I saw in Mr. Lincoln's life and spirit something truly Christ-like, and something Christ-like in his death.

I am not accustomed to weep, but as I stood and thought, and thought the more, the depths of my affection were broken up, and it was only by resolute effort that I could keep back the tears which for a moment dimmed my sight—tears of love and gratitude.

When our little group of visitors was about to turn away from that sacred shrine, Mr. H. W. Fay, the faithful custodian, singled me out, as an ex-slave, and remarked: "Do you wish to say anything?" I reflected a moment, then unhesitated myself after this manner:

"Abraham Lincoln saved the government of the United States of America, when its very existence was threatened, and rendered his government the better service still, in issuing his Proclamation of Emancipation, as a death-blow to the institution of slavery, as it existed in the states then at war with the government of the United States. For, Mr. Lincoln realized in his inmost soul, that the institution of slavery was the real cause of the great Civil War, and had been a source of unrest, and social and civil strife from the very foundation of the Republic. In removing this cause of his country's years of unrest, and his government's greatest peril, he freed millions of bondmen, and left his country one, though bleeding and torn, himself dying amid the throes of the Nation's new birth, stricken down by an assassin's hand.

"Precious in the sight of humanity may the memory of Abraham Lincoln be till time itself shall end, and doubly precious may he be to me and to the people of my race, who have come into the opportunities and glories of this new day."

When I had finished my brief statement, I lingered yet a moment longer at the tomb of Mr. Lincoln, and again my soul was wrought. In that moment I felt as though God himself was calling to me to dedicate myself anew to all that is noblest and best in human life, and to work, with greater energy than ever, in righteous self-elevation, elevation of race, elevation of all men to whom I may lend a helping hand, or give hope and inspiration; for, after all, Abraham Lincoln was only the instrument through which the omnipotent God answered the cries of America's enslaved millions, working as He ever works and through whom He wills, in times of peace and amid the desolations of war, to the accomplishment and glory of His own eternal purpose.

My brethren according to the flesh, and brethren of the common faith, however cast down we may be, however many our trials, however bitter our foes, let us never lose faith in God. "The triumphings of the wicked are but for a season." Let us never cease to love all men, and do good to all men as we have opportunity; and the day of a brighter glory shall be ours in this land of privileges and great opportunities.

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