

MIRROR MEDITATION

By EMMITT L. BRINSON

It was a beautiful morning, March 14, 1962. A little chilly perhaps, even though the sun shown brightly through the trees.

Hundreds of Citizens were gathered at the New Bern National Memorial cemetery to pay honor to those who gave their last measure that a nation might remain alive. As one looked about, almost every name on the white markers rang with strange familiarity, yet the departing dates were one hundred years ago this month. Many had fallen in the Battle of New Bern.

The cemetery was well kept, with budding shrubbery, majestic trees, and the busy little birds indicated spring was just around the corner. Stately statues stood orderly about with plaques of inspired memorial inscriptions.

There was very little movement among the people. Only hushed greetings of recognition. This was a solemn and sacred occasion. A feeling of respect and patriotic emotion prevailed. It could be sensed as it radiated throughout the crowd.

The click in cadence of the pacing color guard and firing squad was strangely at reverence as it marched past. The commands in muffled whispers added to the tone of feeling of this gathering. They took their position at a statuesque attention. Old Glory unfurled and gracefully draped itself in stillness as if commanded by the silent voice of a waning breeze.

One could almost feel the presence of thousands of troops standing erect behind each stone, in Blue and Gray, with dignity and pride, watching those gathered.

Here were the offspring of those who won and lost a cause. A people now tempered through trial and error, molded into the greatest nation the world has yet produced. "The United States of America!"

Prayers were offered and a visiting dignitary, the Lt. Gov. of Ohio, spoke briefly in tribute. Maybe it was that the tempo was set for the impact, but somehow the next few moments told the writer it was more than that, for there unfolded one of the most unforgettable moments of my life.

A young southern minister, the Rev. Fred A. Mauney, stepped to the center of the gathering in front of the Color Guard. He paused a few seconds and a hush quickly prevailed. His voice, well pitched, rich, and with inspired expression rang out as he delivered the following message, great indeed were his words and it shall live forever in the hearts of Americans everywhere.

"Today we stand not in the center of tragedy but in the very heart of triumph. General Douglas MacArthur was right — "Old Soldiers never die. They just fade away."

A hundred years have come and gone. But the memory of even the first, who was here committed back to the very dust from which he came, has not gone. In reverence, and with pride, we salute those who "died that a nation might live."

One century ago a bold line divided our nation into the North and the South. Today there is no North, nor South, no East, nor West. Now we have the United States of America. The bodies here buried seal forever our unity.

On the wings of a March breeze their spirits can be heard to whisper — "United we stand. Divided we fall." Today there is no gray, nor blue unfurled in division. There is only the red, white, and blue of the star spangled banner to wave over the "land of the free and the home of the Brave."

No! These soldiers have not faded away. By their sacrifices for their convictions and their Country they shall never be forgotten.

What message have we for those whose spirits are yet with us? What answer have we for the test of Gettysburg, Vicksburg, New Bern, and the scattered battle fields of the Civil War?

Let us speak with life and with lip. Let these be told of their triumph. Let the message ring loud. Let it be clear that this nation "Conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal shall long endure."

To these "honored dead" let it be said that they have not died in vain. Let the spirit of their voice of their President ring around the world that peoples of all race, color, and creed shall know that the new birth of freedom has matured; and that "The government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall never perish from the earth."

Here, among the stones that mark the memory of these who have fallen, we think not in terms of sadness but of gladness; we bow not in defeat, but hold high our heads in victory! we herald no news of tragedy but sound the note of triumph. For the spirits of those who came from the North and those who rallied to the South have not faded away. In unison — their voices sing with ours:

"God bless America, Land that I love,
Stand beside her, and guide her
Through the night with the light

from above."

And now, until the sound of the last trumpet and the dawn of the Resurrection Day, when this corruption shall put on incorruption and this mortal put on immortality, let us here and now affirm that their death is swallowed up in victory."

As he came to the words "in Unison their voices sing with Ours" the phenomenon occurred. A gust of wind swelled as with the breast of every one there. It lifted and unfolded the still draped flag from its standard and it fluttered proudly erect. It waved and snapped briskly in the breeze as if it expressed the voice of Americans past and present, and it remained at a vigorous rippling attention unto his last words and until the last volley was fired.

As the first note of taps echoed from a far off corner the great flag again bowed in reverence and lay in still calmness. As if again expressing in unison the respectful prayer of those living and dead.

For a few seconds after the dying tones of the trumpet faded away, a strange stillness hovered

over all. Even the birds were noticeably quiet — not a sound — the penetrating vacuum seemed to encompass eternally the unspoken words in the hearts of each tearful soul.

"Dear God — only under thee and thy guidance will America remain Free! Great! and Strong! We pray that it shall always be so."

Earnest resolution has often seemed to have about it almost a savor of omnipotence.—Samuel Smiles

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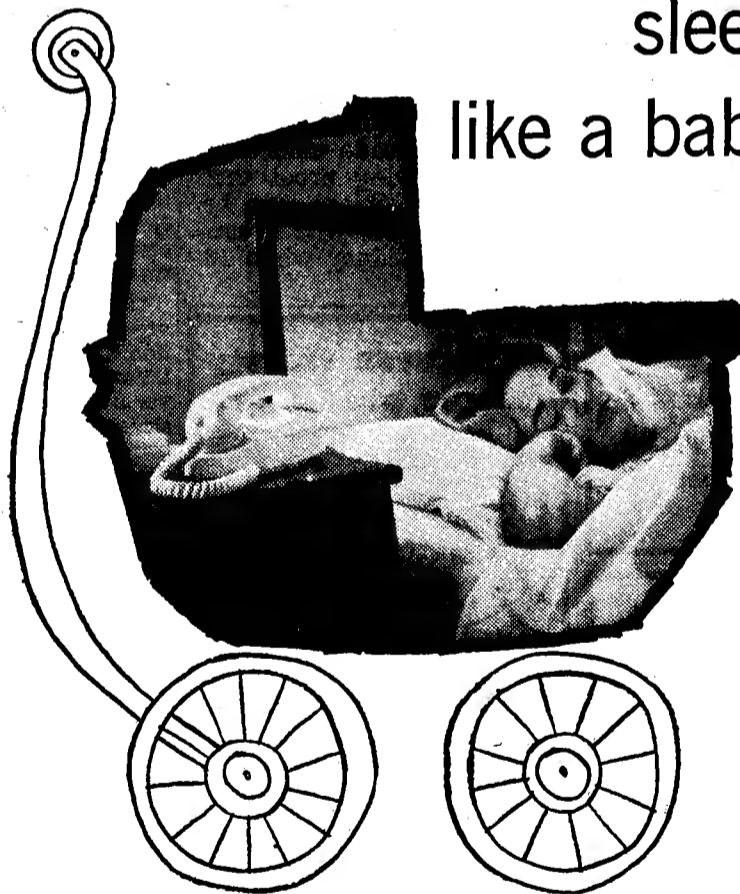


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