

he even seriously thought of going to France and joining the revolutionary army! These plans were abandoned when he met Ann Hill Carter, the woman who became his second wife. Had Lee not met Miss Carter, he probably would have gone to France and on June 30, 1793, would have been assisting Robespierre rather than taking his wedding vows.¹⁶ And what is more, the world would never have known the great son of this union, Robert E. Lee, who was born nearly fourteen years later, on January 19, 1807.

For a time after the marriage, Lee seemed to improve. But soon, the fever of speculation hit him again. Things went from bad to worse until finally, on April 11, 1809—after many more failed ventures—Lee was arrested and jailed for a debt of some 5,400 Spanish dollars, which had accrued interest for seven years. He did not receive his freedom until the spring of 1810, and by then, all that was left of his estate was a small bit of unsalable land.¹⁷

Hope now died in "Light-Horse" Harry. Helpless to provide for his family, he determined to leave the country and go to the British West Indies in order to regain his health and, one suspects, his vision. He left home in the summer of 1813, leaving behind a loving (if long-suffering) wife and five adoring children. Though little of his once fine reputation remained abroad, he was still the hero at his own fireside.

Henry Lee died in the early spring of 1818, while he was seeking to return home. He was forced by failing strength to stop at Cumberland Island, off the coast of Georgia, where the daughter of his old comrade General Nathaniel Greene resided. Refusing to allow the physician to operate, he said, "My dear sir, were the great Washington alive, and here, and joining you in advocating it, I would still resist."¹⁸ He lingered only a short while before passing from this life on March 25, 1818. The details of his death were not known by his family until that autumn.

A CARRIAGE GOES TO ALEXANDRIA

of beauty and of glory, his father came to the last humiliation: Odds and ends of real estate that had been left to him after nearly thirty years of wild trading had to be deeded away. Of everything that could be sold, he was stripped bare. And even this did not save him. On April 11, 1809, he was arrested for a debt of some 5400 Spanish dollars, with accrued interest for nearly seven years, and was confined to jail at the county seat of Westmoreland. Later in the year he was imprisoned for the same reason in Spotsylvania. Not until the spring of 1810 was he at liberty, and then he had nothing left him except some lands he could not market.³⁷ While incarcerated, he had written a large part of his *Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States*. With a shadow of his old optimism, he flattered himself this book would enjoy a great run,³⁸ but that, of course, was almost as much a gamble as any of those on which he had lost his fortune.

At home again, writing furiously on his book, but with no immediate income, he decided on the move to Alexandria. Henry was twenty-four and could not be expected to supply food and shelter indefinitely. There was no money with which to employ a tutor for the three children, who were now requiring instruction. Everything left to Mrs. Lee and her young brood was the return from a trust that had been set up for her benefit under the will of her father. When the estate was settled, the revenue from this fund, which Henry Lee could not dissipate, would provide shelter, food, and clothing but nothing besides.

The little caravan from Stratford ended its journey at a small, but trim and comfortable brick house on Cameron Street in Alexandria, close to the Episcopal church. Life was easier there than in the sprawling Stratford mansion, but cares increased. During the winter, after the family settled in town, the new baby, a girl, was born to the burdened mother.³⁹ There were now five

³⁷ Boyd, 297 ff.; H. Lee's *Observations*, 180-81; *Orderbook of the Court of Spotsylvania County, Virginia*, 1805-7, p. 308; 1807-10, pp. 199, 208, 252, 262, 267, 268, 277, 288, 296, 300, 305; 1810-11, p. 35.

³⁸ Henry Lee to Colonel Rhea, Trenton, N. J., MS., March 16, 1811, New York Public Library.

³⁹ Catharine Mildred Lee, known in the family as Mildred, born Feb. 27, 1811.

*Arlington, Virginia (Washington City P.O.)
20 April 1861.
Hon. Simon Cameron
Secty of War*

Sir:

*I have the honor to tender the resignation of
my commission as Colonel of the
1st Regt. Of Cavalry.*

*Very resp'y Your Obedient Servant.
R. E. Lee
Col 1st Cav'y.*

There was no rancor, no bitterness, and no resentment, but there was pain. Lee had no doubt about where his rightful allegiance lay, but he had no desire to fight against the flag he had served for so many years. Writing to General Scott on the same day, he stated his difficulty in resigning from a service to which he had devoted, in his words, "all the best years of my life and all the ability I possess."⁷¹

When he came downstairs, he calmly said to his wife, "Well, Mary, the question is settled. Here is my letter of resignation and a letter I have written to General Scott." Mary Lee was not surprised. She, too, understood the call of duty. A man's first obligation is always to his home, family, and countrymen. Robert E. Lee loved America, but he was first and foremost a Virginian.

Before the day closed, Lee took up the pen to write one more letter, this time to his sister:

THE ANSWER HE WAS BORN TO MAKE

His resignation was not prompted by passion, nor did it carry with it resentment against the Union he left. On the contrary, if there was any resentment, it was against the authors, Northern and Southern, of the consummate wickedness of bringing about division within the Union. There was a pang and a heartache at the separation from brother officers whose patriotism he had seen vindicated in the hardships of campaigning and in the dangers of battle. He was willing to defend Virginia, whatever her allegiance, but he did not desire to fight against the flag under which he had served. If he must see the Union wrecked by men who would not forbear and plead for justice through constitutional means, if he must tear himself from the service of a nation of which he had been proud, then the hope of his heart was that he might never again be called to draw a sword which only Virginia could command. It was in this spirit that he wrote farewell to General Scott, that loyal old friend, who had admired him, taught him, and advanced him. He penned this letter:

Arlington, Va., April 20, 1861.

General:

Since my interview with you on the 18th inst. I have felt that I ought no longer to retain my commission in the Army. I therefore tender my resignation, which I request you will recommend for acceptance. I would have presented it at once, but for the struggle it has cost me to separate myself from a service to which I have devoted all the best years of my life and all the ability I possessed.

During the whole of that time—more than a quarter of a century—I have experienced nothing but kindness from my superiors and a most cordial friendship from my comrades. To no one, General, have I been as much indebted as to yourself for uniform kindness and consideration, and it has always been my ardent desire to meet your approbation. I shall carry to the grave the most grateful recollections of your kind consideration, and your name and fame will always be dear to me.

Save in defence of my native State, I never desire again to draw my sword.

Be pleased to accept my most earnest wishes for the continuance

hand and his gauntlets in his left, he walked from the room, followed by Marshall. There was a hallway, and Lee paused just inside the open door to the porch, pulling himself together. He thought that no one but Marshall could see him, but George Forsyth, a Union general who had not been in the parlor, was watching from a room across the hall. Forsyth saw that Lee was turning red, "a deep crimson flush, that rising from his neck overspread his face and even tinged his broad forehead . . . Booted and spurred, still vigorous and erect, he stood bareheaded, looking out of the open doorway, sad-faced and weary."

Lee put on his hat and stepped out. Several tired Union officers who were resting on the porch, having no idea that the meeting was over, jumped to their feet and saluted. Lee returned the salute "mechanically but courteously." At the top of the steps he pulled on his gauntlets and gazed to the northeast, where his men remained in defensive positions a mile away, many of them with no idea that he had just surrendered them all. With the exception of deaths in his family, this session in the parlor had been the worst ordeal of his life, despite Grant's efforts to ease it. Now he had to face the splendidly loyal troops who had given him a thousand proofs of their courage and determination.

Some Union officers in the yard below had come to attention, but Lee was still standing at the top of the steps, staring toward his army, noticing nothing around him. Now he looked to his right and left, wondering where his horse was. "Orderly!" he called in a choked voice, "orderly!" Sergeant G. W. Tucker, the one other Confederate who had come to this meeting, appeared instantly, leading Lee's horse Traveller.

Lee went down the steps, Marshall behind him, and paused on the lowest step while Tucker replaced Traveller's bridle. Again he looked sadly in the direction of his army, and "thrice smote the palm of his left hand slowly with his right fist in an absent sort of way." Then, as Tucker buckled the throat latch, Lee finally looked at this grey horse he loved. He lifted Traveller's black forelock from under the brow band, parted and smoothed it, and patted his forehead.

Sergeant Tucker stepped back. Lee "swung himself slowly and wearily, but nevertheless firmly, into the saddle . . . as he did so there broke unguardedly from his lips a long, low, deep sigh, almost a groan in its intensity, while the flush on his neck seemed, if possible, to take on a still deeper hue."

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how many men does your present force consist?" Grant asked. Lee hesitated, and then said, "Indeed, I am not able to say. My losses in killed and wounded have been exceedingly heavy, and besides, there have been many stragglers and some deserters." Grant offered to send 25,000 rations—more than double the number of Lee's men—asking if Lee thought that would be sufficient. "I think it will be ample," said Lee, "and it will be a great relief, I assure you." The rations Lee had been searching for—first from Richmond, then from Farmville, and finally from Lynchburg—had all been captured by Union forces.

The papers were soon signed, and Lee took up his hat and walked out the door. Several Union officers were resting on the porch and, upon Lee's appearance, jumped to their feet and saluted. Lee returned the salute and pulled on his gauntlets, while looking in the direction where his army waited. Those valiant men, who were totally ignorant of the fact that he had just surrendered them to their foes—what would they say? Lee, in a voice choked with emotion, called for Traveller, mounted slowly, and with a "long, low, deep sigh, almost a groan in its intensity," turned in the direction of his lines.¹¹⁹

As Lee began to ride slowly away, Grant came down the steps and started across the yard. Suddenly realizing that Lee was leaving, he stopped and took off his hat. Every other Union soldier did the same. Lee lifted his hat in silent salute and turned through the gate into the road. Grant stood silently watching the great man ride away. One of his staff said to him, "This will live in history." Grant made no reply, but stood watching until Lee was out of sight.

As Lee turned Traveller's head away from the house, General Grant came down the steps and started across the yard toward his horse. Grant, too, was in an abstracted state. When he realized that this was Lee leaving, he stopped and took off his hat. So did every other Union soldier in the yard. Lee raised his hat silently, and turned through the gate into the road.

Grant stood watching him ride away. The Union officers wanted to mount their horses and get back to their commands, but as long as Grant stood there they had to remain standing as they were. One of Grant's staff said to him, "This will live in history."

Grant did not reply, and watched Lee until he was out of sight.

THE RETURN HOME

We may be annihilated, but we cannot be conquered.

—R. E. Lee

As Lee rode back toward the lines, the men—spotting their hero—began their characteristic cheers for him. But this time things were different. There was something about his manner and expression that stopped the cheers in their throats. Slowly, the unthinkable began to enter their minds. "General," some cried, "are we surrendered?"

Lee tried to ignore the question, but his men began to crowd around him, pulling off their hats in respect. Lee removed his hat as he acknowledged his faithful warriors with their "frenzied, famished faces." "Men," he said, "we have fought the war together, and I have done the best I could for you. You will all be paroled and go to your homes until exchanged." Tears welled in his eyes as his fabled self-mastery failed him. All he could manage was a choking "good-bye" as he again sought to move on toward the orchard which was serving as his temporary headquarters.

II

Riding the twenty miles back to Richmond on Traveller, Lee had much to consider. His talks with his cousin had narrowed the geographical area in which he would look for a farm. He had loved his days in the country, and he was enthusiastic about bringing his wife and daughters to some quiet retreat.

As for the presidential proclamation, Lee would call some aspects of all this oath-taking "absurd," but he was satisfied that these conditions of the victor were within what he was prepared to accept. His conclusion was to emerge in talking to Custis, who wrote that his father said, "It was but right for him to set an example by making formal submission to the Civil Authorities." If he regained his citizenship, Lee told Custis, he might be able to help other Confederates who had not, "especially Mr. Davis."

Thus, as he rode back into the city, the two matters — a farm, and taking the oath — had twined. It would be better to clear up his status before buying a farm; indeed, there was some question as to whether he could legally own property in his present situation. If he could apply for a pardon and get it over with, along the lines held out by that encouraging proclamation, the quiet rural life he wanted might be his.

Arriving at Franklin Street, Lee was greeted by the news that a Federal grand jury in Norfolk had just indicted him for treason, a crime whose punishments included death by hanging. The other shoe had dropped.

The news of this formal accusation and prospective trial rocked the South, producing anger and fear. Although no move was made to arrest him, many thought it was only a matter of time. Mildred was sitting with her father in the back of the front hall when the doorbell rang. Lee opened the door and faced "a long, tall, lean man dressed in homespun and his shoes and lower part of his trousers covered with dust."

As Mildred told it, this man "grabbed the General's extending hand" and said, "General Lee, I followed you four years and done the

best I knowed how. Me and my wife live on a little farm way up on the Blue Ridge Mountains. We heard the Yankees wasn't treating you right, and I come down to see 'bout it. If you will come up thar we will take care of you the best we know how as long as we live."

The veteran had taken both Lee's hands as he said this, and tears were running from his eyes. Lee was so startled and moved by this appearance of a self-appointed protector who had hurried more than a hundred miles to shield his old commander, that tears suddenly started down his cheeks.

At a loss for once, Lee looked around the front hall, which was often filled with little presents that were delivered at the front door by admirers. He knew that a box near the door contained a man's suit. Taking one of his hands from the mountaineer's grip, Lee lifted the box and said, "My friend, I don't need a thing. My friends all over the country have been very kind and have sent me more clothes than I can possibly use, so I want to thank you for coming and give you this new suit."

Mildred described what happened next.

The man snatched his hand from General Lee, crossed his arms, straightened himself, and said, "General Lee, I can't take nothin' offen you." After a few moments he relaxed, put one hand on the box and said, "Yes, I will, General, I will carry them back home, put them away and when I die the boys will put them on me."

Offers of assistance came in from both Northern and Southern lawyers, but Lee first had to decide what stance to take. While he spoke of his problem in a philosophical manner — "Well!" he said to one group of friends, "it matters little what they do to me; I am old, and have but a short time to live anyhow" — he moved swiftly to ascertain the views of Ulysses S. Grant. Lee and his army had surrendered on Grant's terms, the last words of which were that they could "return to their homes not to be disturbed by United States authority as long as they observe their paroles and the laws in force where they may reside." It was Lee's belief that "not to be disturbed by United States authority" meant just that: Grant had promised Lee and his men that surrendering was enough, and that no further action would be taken against any of them, including Lee.

To reach Grant's ear, Lee used his friend Senator Reverdy Johnson of Maryland, a man who had supported the Federal government dur-

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opened the door and there stood a tall, gaunt man dressed in homespun and covered in dust. As Mildred told it, this man "grabbed the General's extending hand and said, 'General Lee, I followed you four years and done the best I knowed how. Me and my wife live on a little farm way up on the Blue Ridge Mountains. We heard the Yankees wasn't treating you right, and I come down to see 'bout it. If you will come up thar we will take care of you the best we know how as long as we live.'"

The old veteran was holding both of Lee's hands as he said this, tears streaming down his cheeks. Lee was so taken aback by this man—who had traveled over a hundred miles to offer him shelter—that tears filled his eyes as well. At a loss for something to say, Lee began to search among the presents friends had left in the front hall for something to give to this man. He finally spied a box that he knew contained a new suit. Handing the box to the man, the general said, "My friend, I don't need a thing. My friends all over the country have been very kind and have sent me more clothes than I can possibly use, so I want to thank you for coming and give you this new suit!"

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The man snatched his hand from General Lee, crossed his arms, straightened himself, and said, "General Lee, I can't take nothin' offen you." After a few moments he relaxed, put one hand on the box and said, "Yes I will, General, I will carry them back home, put them away and when I die the boys will put them on me."¹²⁷

Incidents like these were too numerous to count. It was these encounters which made life after the war so difficult for

In Richmond 145

Lee. He grieved over the plight of the old soldiers and the people of the South who had so valiantly stood with the army and had suffered the loss of all things.

If the anguish in the South was great, as great was the anger directed toward her by many in the North. While the majority of Northerners were in favor of reconciliation with the South, hotheaded revolutionaries, full of the wine of victory, sought to carry forward policies more akin to the French radicals under Robespierre than anything ever seen in this country.

Hatred towards the South intensified after President Lincoln's assassination. More than one called for retribution to be given to the "enemies of the people." Congressman George W. Julian of Indiana declared in a speech that he, if he were in charge, would hang Jefferson Davis "in the name of God." He went on to say that it was an outrage that Lee was left at liberty, and were it his decision, Lee would be hanged as well. The lands of prominent Southerners should be divided among the blacks and a former plantation owner should not be left even enough land "to bury his carcass in."¹²⁸

An orator in a meeting held in the Customs House of New York City stirred the crowd to a frenzy with the chant, "Hang Lee! Hang Lee!" The proposals for the punishment of Lee and other Southern leaders were many and varied. In early June, Lee was indicted by a federal grand jury for the crime of treason, among the punishments for which was death by hanging. Though never brought to trial, the possibility weighed heavily upon him. It was a most uncertain time. Yet Lee remained quiet.

Lee steadfastly refused to be drawn into disputes, or to respond to slanders against himself. He was accused of many things, but one of the most painful to him was the slanderous allegation that he had mistreated his slaves. This libel was

There were echoes of this treatment, postwar statements that in no way resembled the behavior of the combat veterans at Appomattox. Congressman George W. Julian of Indiana, who had never come near a battlefield, cried out in a speech that he would hang Jefferson Davis "in the name of God," and that it was an outrage that Lee was at liberty. Lee should be hanged, too: "I would hang liberally, while I had my hand in." The lands of prominent Southerners should be divided among the blacks; a former plantation owner should not be left even enough land "to bury his carcass in." An orator at a public meeting at the Customs House in New York City whipped the crowd into a chant: "Hang Lee! Hang Lee!"

Ulysses S. Grant knew the realities. He wrote his wife, "The suffering that must exist in the South . . . will be beyond conception; people who speak of further retaliation and punishment do not conceive of the suffering endured already, or they are heartless and unfeeling."

Richmond slowly began to move again. The railroads, repaired by the victors, started to deliver supplies. From the passenger cars there alighted a variety of Northerners. There were dedicated men and women schoolteachers, some sent by missionary societies and some employed directly by the Freedmen's Bureau. Their job was to open schools for the black children, who previously had received no education; indeed, a Virginia statute of 1831, sometimes enforced and sometimes not, made it a crime to teach a black to read. These teachers would be besieged by newly freed adult blacks, begging to be taught how to read and write.

The trains also brought less idealistic Northerners. Although the great influx of "carpetbaggers" was not to come for another two years, itinerant promoters traveled south to exploit both whites and blacks. Some bought up the land of whites who were hungry and helpless; others sold worthless deeds to gullible blacks who wanted to own the land they had been forced to work as slaves.

Tourists thronged to see the surrendered Confederate capital, coming down on the train from Washington in the morning and returning in the late afternoon. Although they might not catch all the nuances, their walks around the city included sights such as a young Confederate colonel, leader of one of Lee's best regiments only a few weeks before, now supporting himself and his family as a taxi driver, using an old