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ROBERT E. LEE.

BY JEFFERSON DAVIS.

Robert Edward Lee, gentleman, scholar, gallant soldier, great general, and true Christian, was born in Westmoreland County, Virginia, on January 19, 1807. He was the youngest son of General Henry Lee, who was familiarly known as "Light-Horse Harry" in the traditions of the war of the Revolution, and who possessed the marked confidence and personal regard of General Washington.

R. E. Lee entered the United States Military Academy in the summer of 1825, after which my acquaintance with him commenced. He was, as I remember him, larger and looked more mature than the average "pleb," but less so than Mason, who was destined to be the head of his class. His soldierly bearing and excellent conduct caused him in due succession to rise through the several grades and to be the adjutant of the corps of cadets when he was graduated. It is stated that he had not then a "de-merit" mark standing against him, which is quite credible if all "reports" against him had been cancelled, because they were not for wanton or intentional delinquency. Though numerically rated second in his class, his proficiency was such that he was assigned to the engineer corps, which for many years he adorned both as a military and civil engineer.

He was of the highest type of manly beauty, yet seemingly unconscious of it, and so respectful and unassuming as to make him a general favorite before his great powers had an opportunity for manifestation. His mind led him to analytic rather than perceptive methods for obtaining results.

From the date of his graduation in 1829 until 1846 he was engaged in various professional duties, and had by regular promotion attained to the grade of captain of engineers. As such he
was assigned to duty with the command of Brigadier-General Wool in the campaign to Chihuahua. Thence the command proceeded to make a junction with General Z. Taylor in front of Buena Vista. Here Captain Lee was employed in the construction of the defensive work, when General Scott came, armed with discretionary orders, and took Lee for service in the column which Scott was to command, with much else that General Taylor could ill afford to spare. Subsequent events proved that the loss to General Taylor's army was more than compensated by the gain to the general cause.

Avoiding any encroachment upon the domain of history by entering upon a description of campaigns and battles, I cannot forbear from referring to a particular instance of Lee's gallantry and devotion to duty. Before the battle of Contreras, General Scott's troops had become separated by the field of Pedrigal, and it was necessary to communicate instructions to those on the other side of this barrier of rocks and lava. General Scott says in his report that he had sent seven officers since about sundown to communicate instructions; they had all returned without getting through, "but the gallant and indefatigable Captain Lee, of the engineers, who has been constantly with the operating forces, is just in from Shields, Smith, Cadwallader," etc. Subsequently General Scott, while giving testimony before a court of inquiry, said: "Captain Lee, engineers, came to me from Contreras with a message from Brigadier-General Smith, I think, about the same time (midnight); he, having passed over the difficult ground by daylight, found it just possible to return to St. Augustine in the dark—the greatest feat of physical and moral courage performed by any individual, in my knowledge, pending the campaign."

This field of Pedrigal, as described, was impassable on horseback, and crossed with much difficulty by infantry in daylight. After consultation with the generals near to Contreras, it being decided that an attack must be made at daylight, Captain Lee, through storm and darkness, undertook, on foot and alone, to recross the Pedrigal, so as to give General Scott the notice which would insure the cooperation of his divided forces in the morning's attack. This feat was well entitled to the commendation that General Scott bestowed upon it; but the highest praise belongs to Lee's inciting and sustaining motive, duty. To bear to the commanding general the needful information, he dared and suf-
fered for that which is the crowning glory of man: he offered himself for the welfare of others.

He went to Mexico with the rank of captain of engineers, and by gallantry and meritorious conduct rose to the rank of colonel in the army, commission by brevet. After his return he resumed his duties as an officer of the Engineer Corps. While employed in the construction of Fort Carroll, near Baltimore, an event occurred which illustrates his nice sentiment of honor. Some members of the Cuban Junta called upon him and offered him the command of an expedition to overthrow the Spanish control of the island. A very large sum of money was to be paid immediately upon his acceptance of their proposition, and a large sum thenceforward was to be paid monthly. Lee came to Washington to converse with me upon the subject. After a brief discussion of the military problem, he said it was not that he had come to consult me about; the question he was considering was whether, while an officer in the United States Army and because of any reputation he might have acquired as such, he could accept a proposition for foreign service against a government with which the United States were at peace. The conclusion was his decision to decline any further correspondence with the Junta.

In 1852 Colonel Lee was made superintendent of the United States Military Academy; a position for which he seemed to be peculiarly fitted as well by his attainments as by his fondness for young people, his fine personal appearance, and impressive manners. When, a year or two thereafter, I visited the academy, and was surprised to see so many gray hairs on his head, he confessed that the cadets did exceedingly worry him, and then it was perceptible that his sympathy with young people was rather an impediment than a qualification for the superintendency.

In 1855 four new regiments were added to the army, two of cavalry and two of infantry. Captain Lee, of the engineers, brevet-colonel of the army, was offered the position of lieutenant-colonel of the Second Regiment of cavalry, which he accepted. He was a bold, graceful horseman, and the son of Light-Horse Harry now seemed to be in his proper element; but the chief of engineers endeavored to persuade him that it was a descent to go from the Engineer Corps into the cavalry. Soon after the regiment was organized and assigned to duty in Texas, the colonel,
Albert Sidney Johnston, was selected to command an expedition to Utah, and the command of the regiment and the protection of the frontier of Texas against Indian marauders devolved upon Colonel Lee. There, as in every position he had occupied, diligence, sound judgment, and soldierly endowment made his service successful. In 1859, being on leave of absence in Virginia, he was made available for the suppression of the John Brown raid. As soon as relieved from that special assignment he returned to his command in Texas, and on April 25, 1861, resigned from the United States Army.

Then was his devotion to principle subjected to a crucial test, the severity of which can only be fully realized by a "West- Pointer" whose life has been spent in the army. That it was to sever the friendships of youth, to break up the habits of intercourse, of manners, and of thought, others may comprehend and estimate; but the sentiment most profound in the heart of the war-worn cadet, and which made the change most painful to Lee, he has partially expressed in the letters he wrote at the time to his beloved sister and to his venerated friend and commander, General Winfield Scott.

Partisan malignants have not failed to misrepresent the conduct of Lee, even to the extent of charging him with treason and desertion; and, unable to appreciate his sacrifice to the allegiance due to Virginia, they have blindly ascribed his action to selfish ambition. It has been erroneously asserted that he was educated at the expense of the general government, and an attempt has been made thence to deduce a special obligation to adhere to it.

The cadets of the United States Military Academy are apportioned among the States in proportion to the number of representatives they severally have in the Congress; that is, one for each congressional district, with ten additional for the country at large. The annual appropriations for the support of the army and navy include the commissioned, warrant, and non-commissioned officers, privates, seamen, etc., etc. The cadets and midshipmen are warrant officers, and while at the academies are receiving elementary instruction in and for the public service. At whose expense are they taught and supported? Surely at that of the people, they who pay the taxes and imposts to supply the treasury with means to meet appropriations as well to pay generals and admirals as cadets and midshipmen. The cadet's
obligation for his place and support was to the State, by virtue of whose distributive share he was appointed, and whose contributions supplied the United States treasury; through the State, as a member of the Union, allegiance was due to it, and most usefully and nobly did Lee pay the debt both at home and abroad.

No proposition could be more absurd than that he was prompted by selfish ambition to join the Confederacy. With a small part of his knowledge of the relative amount of material of war possessed by the North and South, any one must have seen that the chances of war were against us; but if thrice-armed Justice should enable the South to maintain her independence, as our fathers had done, notwithstanding the unequal contest, what selfish advantage could it bring to Lee? If, as some among us yet expected, many hoped, and all wished, there should be a peaceful separation, he would have left behind him all he had gained by long and brilliant service, and could not have in our small army greater rank than was proffered to him in the larger one he had left. If active hostilities were prosecuted, his large property would be so exposed as to incur serious injury, if not destruction. His mother, Virginia, had revoked the grants she had voluntarily made to the Federal Government, and asserted the state sovereignty and independence she had won from the mother-country by the war of the Revolution; and thus, it was regarded, the allegiance of her sons became wholly her own. Above the voice of his friends at Washington, advising and entreating him to stay with them, rose the cry of Virginia calling her sons to defend her against threatened invasion. Lee heeded this cry only; alone he rode forth, as he had crossed the Pedrígol, his guiding star being duty, and offered his sword to Virginia. His offer was accepted, and he was appointed to the chief command of the forces of the State. Though his reception was most flattering and the confidence manifested in him unlimited, his conduct was conspicuous for the modesty and moderation which had always been characteristic of him.

The South had been involved in war without having made due preparation for it. She was without a navy, without even a merchant marine commensurate with her wants during peace; without arsenals, armories, foundries, manufactories, or stores on hand to supply those wants. Lee exerted himself to the utmost to raise and organize troops in Virginia, and when the State joined
the Confederacy he was invited to come to Montgomery and explain the condition of his command; but his engagements were so pressing that he sent his second officer, General J. E. Johnston, to furnish the desired information.

When the capital of the Confederacy was removed from Montgomery to Richmond, Lee, under the orders of the President, was charged with the general direction of army affairs. In this position the same pleasant relations which had always existed between them continued, and Lee's indefatigable attention to the details of the various commands was of much benefit to the public service. In the meantime disasters, confusion, and disagreement among the commands in western Virginia made it necessary to send there an officer of higher rank than any then on duty in that section. The service was disagreeable, toilsome, and in no wise promising to give distinction to a commander. Passing by all reference to others, suffice it to say that at last Lee was asked to go, and, not counting the cost, he unhesitatingly prepared to start. By concentrating the troops, and by a judicious selection of the position, he compelled the enemy finally to retreat.

There is an incident in this campaign which has never been reported, save as it was orally given to me by General Lee, with a request that I should take no official notice of it. A strong division of the enemy was reported to be encamped in a valley which, one of the colonels said he had found by reconnaissance, could readily be approached on one side, and he proposed, with his regiment, to surprise and attack. General Lee accepted his proposition, but told him that he himself would, in the meantime, with several regiments, ascend the mountain that overlooked the valley on the other side; and at dawn of day on a morning fixed the colonel was to make his assault. His firing was to be the signal for a joint attack from three directions. During the night Lee made a toilsome ascent of the mountain and was in position at the time agreed upon. The valley was covered by a dense fog. Not hearing the signal, he went by a winding path down the side of the mountain and saw the enemy preparing breakfast and otherwise so engaged as to indicate that they were entirely ignorant of any danger. Lee returned to his own command, told them what he had seen, and, though the expected signal had not been given by which the attacking regiment and another detachment were to engage in the assault, he proposed that the regi-
ments then with him should surprise the camp, which he believed, under the circumstances, might successfully be done. The colonels went to consult their men and returned to inform him that they were so cold, wet, and hungry as to be unfit for the enterprise. The fog was then lifting, and it was necessary to attack immediately or to withdraw before being discovered by the much larger force in the valley. Lee therefore withdrew his small command and safely conducted them to his encampment.

The colonel who was to give the signal for the joint attack, misapprehending the purpose, reported that when he arrived upon the ground he found the encampment protected by a heavy abatis, which prevented him from making a sudden charge, as he had expected, not understanding that if he had fired his guns at any distance he would have secured the joint attack of the other detachments, and probably brought about an entire victory. Lee generously forbore to exonerate himself when the newspapers in Richmond criticised him severely, one denying him any other consideration except that which he enjoyed as "the President's pet."

It was an embarrassment to the Executive to be deprived of the advice of General Lee, but it was deemed necessary again to detach him to look after affairs on the coast of Carolina and Georgia, and so violent had been the unmerited attacks upon him by the Richmond press that it was thought proper to give him a letter to the Governor of South Carolina, stating what manner of man had been sent to him. There his skill as an engineer was manifested in the defences he constructed and devised. On his return to Richmond he resumed his functions of general supervisor of military affairs.

In the spring of 1862 Bishop Meade lay dangerously ill. This venerable ecclesiastic had taught General Lee his catechism when a boy, and when he was announced to the bishop the latter asked to have him shown in immediately. He answered Lee's inquiry as to how he felt by saying, "Nearly gone, but I wished to see you once more," and then in a feeble voice added: "God bless you, Robert, and fit you for your high and responsible duties!" The great soldier stood reverently by the bed of his early preceptor in Christianity, but the saintly patriot saw beyond the hero the pious boy to whom he had taught the catechism; first he gave his dying blessing to Robert, and then, struggling against exhaustion, invoked Heaven's guidance for the general,
After the battle of Seven Pines Lee was assigned to the command of the army of Virginia. Thus far his duties had been of a kind to confer a great benefit, but to be unseen and unappreciated by the public. Now he had an opportunity for the employment of his remarkable power of generalization while attending to the minutest details. The public saw manifestation of the first, but could not estimate the extent to which the great results achieved were due to the exact order, systematic economy, and regularity begotten of his personal attention to the proper adjustment of even the smallest part of that mighty machine, a well-organized, disciplined army. His early instructor, in a published letter, seemed to regard the boy's labor of finishing a drawing on a slate as an excess of care. Was it so? No doubt, so far as the particular task was concerned; but this seedling is to be judged by the fruit the tree bore. That little drawing on the slate was the prototype of the exact investigations which crowned with success his labors as a civil and military engineer as well as a commander of armies. May it not have been, not only by endowment but also from these early efforts, that his mind became so rounded, systematic, and complete that his notes written on the battle-field and in the saddle had the precision of form and lucidity of expression found in those written in the quiet of his tent? These incidents are related, not because of their intrinsic importance, but as presenting an example for the emulation of youths whose admiration of Lee may induce them to follow the toilsome methods by which he attained to true greatness and enduring fame.

In the early days of June, 1862, General McClellan threatened the capital, Richmond, with an army numerically much superior to that to the command of which Lee had been assigned. A day or two after he had joined the army, I was riding to the front and saw a number of horses hitched in front of a house, and among them recognized General Lee's. Upon dismounting and going in, I found some general officers engaged in consultation with him as to how McClellan's advance could be checked, and one of them commenced to explain the disparity of force and with pencil and paper to show how the enemy could throw out his baugus and by successive parallels make his approach irresistible. "Stop, stop," said Lee; "if you go to ciphering we are whipped beforehand." He ordered the construction of earthworks, put guns in position for a defensive line on the south side of the Chickahom-
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iny, and then commenced the strategic movement which was the inception of the seven-days' battles, ending in uncovering the capital and driving the enemy to the cover of his gunboats in the James River.

There never was a greater mistake than that which has attributed to General Lee what General Charles Lee in his reply to General Washington called the "rascally virtue." I have had occasion to remonstrate with General Lee for exposing himself, as I thought, unnecessarily in reconnaissance, but he justified himself by saying he "could not understand things so well unless he saw them." In the excitement of battle his natural combative-ness would sometimes overcome his habitual self-control; thus it twice occurred in the campaign against Grant that the men seized his bridle to restrain him from his purpose to lead them in a charge.

He was always careful not to wound the sensibilities of any one, and sometimes, with an exterior jest or compliment, would give what, if properly appreciated, was instruction for the better performance of some duty; for example, if he thought a general officer was not visiting his command as early and as often as was desirable, he might admire his horse and suggest that the animal would be improved by more exercise.

He was not of the grave, formal nature that he seemed to some who only knew him when sad realities cast dark shadows upon him; but even then the humor natural to him would occasionally break out. For instance, General Lee called at my office for a ride to the defences of Richmond, then under construction. He was mounted on a stallion which some kind friend had recently sent him. As I mounted my horse, his was restive and kicked at mine. We rode on quietly together, though Lee was watchful to keep his horse in order. Passing by an encampment, we saw near a tent two stallions tied at a safe distance from one another. "'There," said he, "is a man worse off than I am." When asked to explain, he said: "Don't you see he has two stallions? I have but one."

His habits had always been rigidly temperate, and his fare in camp was of the simplest. I remember on one battle-field riding past where he and his staff were taking their luncheon. He invited me to share it, and when I dismounted for the purpose it proved to have consisted only of bacon and cornbread. The
bacon had all been eaten, and there were only some crusts of corn-bread left, which, however, having been saturated with the bacon gravy, were in those hard times altogether acceptable, as General Lee was assured in order to silence his regrets.

While he was on duty in South Carolina and Georgia, Lee's youngest son, Robert, then a mere boy, left school and came down to Richmond, announcing his purpose to go into the army. His older brother, Custis, was a member of my staff, and, after a conference, we agreed that it was useless to send the boy back to school, and that he probably would not wait in Richmond for the return of his father; so we selected a battery which had been organized in Richmond and sent Robert to join it. General Lee told me that at the battle of Sharpsburg this battery suffered so much that it had to be withdrawn for repairs and some fresh horses; but, as he had no troops even to form a reserve, as soon as the battery could be made useful it was ordered forward. He said that as it passed him a boy mounted as a driver of one of the guns, much stained with powder, said, "Are you going to put us in again, general?" After replying to him in the affirmative, he was struck by the voice of the boy and asked him, "Whose son are you?" to which he answered, "I am Robbie," whereupon his father said, "God bless you, my son, you must go in."

When General Lee was in camp near Richmond his friends frequently sent him something to improve his mess-table. A lady noted for the very good bread she made had frequently favored him with some. One day, as we were riding through the street, she was standing in her front door and bowed to us. The salutation was, of course, returned. After we had passed he asked me who she was. I told him she was the lady who sent him such good bread. He was very sorry he had not known it, but to go back would prove that he had not recognized her as he should have done. His habitual avoidance of any seeming harshness, which caused him sometimes, instead of giving a command, to make a suggestion, was probably a defect. I believe that he had in this manner indicated that supplies were to be deposited for him at Amelia Court-House, but the testimony of General Breckenridge, Secretary of War, of General St. John, Commissary General, and Louis Harvey, president of the Richmond and Danville Railroad, conclusively proves that no such requisition was made upon either of the persons who should have received
it; and, further, that there were supplies both at Danville and Richmond which could have been sent to Amelia Court-House if information had been received that they were wanted there.

Much has been written in regard to the failure to occupy the Round Top at Gettysburg early in the morning of the second day's battle, to which failure the best judgment attributes our want of entire success in that battle. Whether this was due to the order not being sufficiently positive or not, I will leave to the historians who are discussing that important event. I have said that Lee's natural temper was combative, and to this may be ascribed his attack on the third day at Gettysburg, when the opportunity had not been seized which his genius saw was the gate to victory. It was this last attack to which I have thought he referred when he said it was all his fault, thereby sparing others from whatever blame was due for what had previously occurred.

After the close of the war, while I was in prison and Lee was on parole, we were both indicted on a charge of treason; but, in hot haste to get in their work, the indictment was drawn with the fatal omission of an overt act. General Grant interposed in the case of General Lee, on the ground that he had taken his parole and that he was, therefore, not subject to arrest. Another grand jury was summoned, and a bill was presented against me alone, and amended by inserting specifications of overt acts. General Lee was summoned as a witness before that grand jury, the object being to prove by him that I was responsible for certain things done by him during the war. I was in Richmond, having been released by virtue of the writ of habeas corpus. General Lee met me very soon after having given his testimony before the grand jury, and told me that to the inquiry whether he had not, in the specified cases, acted under my orders, he said that he had always consulted me when he had the opportunity, both on the field and elsewhere; that after discussion, if not before, we had always agreed, and therefore he had done with my consent and approval only what he might have done if he had not consulted me, and that he accepted the full responsibility for his acts. He said he had endeavored to present the matter as distinctly as he could, and looked up to see what effect he was producing upon the grand jury. Immediately before him sat a big black negro, whose head had fallen back on the rail of the bench he sat on; his mouth was wide open,
he was fast asleep. General Lee pleasantly added that, if he had had any vanity as an orator, it would have received a rude check.

The evident purpose was to offer to Lee a chance to escape by transferring to me the responsibility for overt acts. Not only to repel the suggestion, but unequivocally to avow his individual responsibility, with all that, under existing circumstances, was implied in this, was the highest reach of moral courage and gentlemanly pride. Those circumstances were exceptionally perilous to him. He had been indicted for treason; the United States President had vindictively threatened to make treason odious; the dregs of society had been thrown to the surface; judicial seats were held by political adventurers; the United States judge of the Virginia district had answered to a committee of Congress that he could pack a jury so as to convict Davis or Lee,—and it was under such surroundings that he met the grand jury and testified as stated above. Arbitrary power might pervert justice and trample on right, but could not turn the knightly Lee from the path of honor and truth.

Descended from a long line of illustrious warriors and statesmen, Robert Edward Lee added new glory to the name he bore, and, whether measured by a martial or an intellectual standard, will compare favorably with those whose reputation it devolved upon him to sustain and emulate.

Jefferson Davis.