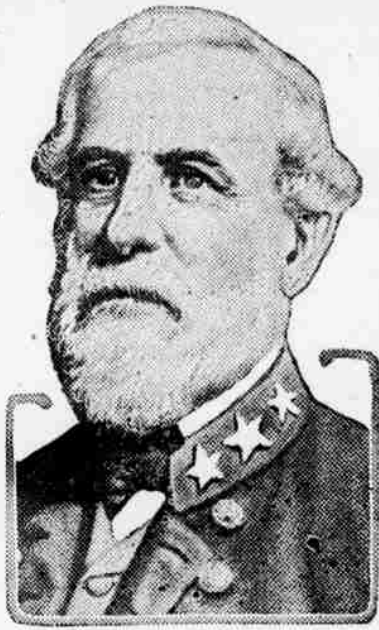


GEN. ROBERT E. LEE

Commemorative Address Before the New York Southern Society on the Anniversary of the Great Commander's Birth

The South may claim with pardonable pride that it furnished not only the President of each of the divided sections in the struggle for the establishment of a separate Confederacy, but the great central figure of the Civil War for the North as well as for the South. History will accord that Abraham Lincoln was the one conspicuous figure on the side of the Union, and for the South none will challenge that claim for Lee. They were, moreover, representatives of the widely divergent classes of our section, the plebeian and the patrician. The story of Lincoln might well be classed with



Gen. Robert E. Lee.

"The short and simple annals of the poor." While Lee came straight from the cavaliers and their descendants, the wealthy cultured aristocracy of Virginia. "His father, Colonel Henry Lee, better known as 'Light Horse Harry,' was the beau sabreur of the American army in the War of Independence, and it was he who proclaimed George Washington as 'First in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen.'"

Upon his mother's side he claimed the lineage of the Carters of Shirley. Born on January 19th, 1807, his childhood and youth were passed in the cultivated circles of the Tidewater region of Virginia. At the age of 18 he entered West Point and completing the course of study without a single mark of demerit, he graduated second in a class of forty-six. For several years he served in the Engineer Corps, constructing coast defenses, and for a part of this time in charge of the astronomical department of the Government. In 1832 he married the daughter of George W. Parke Custis, the adopted son of Gen. Washington, and later was made captain on the staff in the Mexican War.

Of all the brilliant reputations among the younger group of officers which were won in that campaign Lee's was the most conspicuous. Upon him the commander-in-chief leaned as upon no other. At Cerro Gordo he was brevetted major for exceptional gallantry. At Contreras and Churubusco he was officially proclaimed for meritorious conduct, and on account of a wound received in the assault on Chapultepec, September 13, 1847, he was given his promotion to lieutenant-colonel. It was at Contreras, when the army was baffled, that the quick eye of Lee discovered, by a daring reconnaissance, a line of approach hidden from the enemy by which the position might be taken. This the commander-in-chief of the army characterized as "the greatest feat of physical and moral courage performed by any individual during the entire campaign."

In his report General Scott said: "I am compelled to make special mention of Capt. R. E. Lee, engineer. He greatly distinguished himself at the siege of Vera Cruz, was indefatigable

Confederacy, the people of the Old Dominion with one voice turned to him as commander of her army. Then:

"Forth from its scabbard, pure and bright,
Flashed the sword of Lee!
Far in front of the deadly fight,
High o'er the brave in the cause of Right,
Its stainless sheen, like a beacon light,
Led on to victory."

"Out of its scabbard! Never hand
Waved sword from stain free,
Nor purer sword led braver hand,
Nor braver led for a brighter land,
Nor brighter land had a cause so grand,
Nor cause a chief like Lee!"

The story of his military career is practically the story of the Army of Northern Virginia, and it reads more like romance than history. Through four years of the bloodiest war known to history at that time that army, composed of the flower of Southern manhood, under its matchless leader, made a record of victories never surpassed in the annals of warfare, a record which we of the South and our children's children to the remotest ages should claim as our proudest heritage.

He assumed command of this army in June, 1862, when McClellan was immediately in front of Richmond. On June 26, with an army inferior in numbers and equipment, he attacked the forces of McClellan in their intrenchments and for seven days the bloody conflict raged, until McClellan took refuge under the protection of his gunboats at Harrison's Landing. This army defeated Lee turned upon a second larger than his own, marching upon Richmond from another direction.

By one of the most brilliant and daring movements in the history of wars, Lee, with his able Lieutenant, Jackson, routed Pope's army at Groveton and Second Manassas and drove him for safety under the protection of the fortifications at Washington. McClellan had been removed for his defeat and Pope followed in his train. Disregarding both these defeated armies, Lee moved rapidly into Maryland, captured Harper's Ferry and its large garrison on the way and fought at Antietam on September 17, 1862, the bloodiest battle of the Civil War. McClellan, who after Pope's defeat had been reinstated in command, was again removed for failing to inflict a crushing defeat upon Lee, and Burnside was made Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Potomac. This same army of Lee signally defeated the army of Burnside at Fredericksburg. Burnside was removed and General Hooker placed in command. In May, 1863, Hooker marched on Richmond, having issued a general order in which he said that the Confederate army must "either ingloriously fly or come out from behind its intrenchments, where certain destruction awaited it." A few days after this announcement was made, Hooker's army was surprised and attacked by Lee and Jackson simultaneously in front and rear at Chancellorsville and overwhelmed, fleeing in the greatest disorder from the field. Lee invaded Pennsylvania, where at Gettysburg after three days of bloody conflict, unable to carry the Federal position, he remained twenty-four hours in line of battle with his army in their immediate front inviting attack and then withdrew without interruption to Virginia.

It was in 1864, in the campaign from the Wilderness to Petersburg, that the star of Lee reached its zenith. Under his leadership the Army of Northern Virginia up to this time in offensive warfare had held every battlefield upon which it had fought with the exception of Gettysburg and Sharpsburg, although it failed to beat the army pitted against it, it stood in battle array on each occasion for twenty-four hours, was attacked and marched away unmolested.

He was now to show that in defensive fighting he was a greater master of the art of war than in his offensive operations. Grant, with the largest army ever marshalled upon this continent under a single commander, with unlimited resources of men and money, with the world to draw upon for all that was most useful in destructive warfare, advanced upon this army of Lee wanting in everything but valor, and so decimated that as Grant expressed it "had robbed the cradle, and the grave" to fill the gaps between the veterans that still survived. There followed from May 5, 1864, in the Wilderness, at Spottsylvania Court House, at Cold Harbor and the North Anna a series of conflicts so frightful in their havoc that the history of this campaign might well be written in blood.

The most recent, and in my opinion the most reliable history of the United States, written by James W. Rhodes of Boston, a conscientious student, a capable analyst and just recorder, says: "Grant's loss from May 4 to June 12 in the campaign from the Rapidan to the James was 54,000, a number nearly equal to Lee's whole

army at the commencement of the Union advance. The confidence in Grant of many officers and men had been shaken."

At Spottsylvania Nicolay and Hay, authors of the Life of Lincoln, say "Grant was completely checkmated. That it is true is evident from the fact that turning aside from the direct route to Richmond, with Lee's army in front of him, which army announced in the beginning of the campaign as his objective, he marched toward the James River, which he crossed in the effort to capture Petersburg by surprise."

The army of Lee was, however, at Petersburg in time, and there held Grant at bay for nine months of the summer and winter of '64 and '65.

As far as the Confederates were concerned, the annals of the siege of Petersburg might well be termed the annals of starvation, exposure and misery. True to its colors, the army of Lee was starving to death. The Commissary General reported that "the Army of Northern Virginia was living literally from hand to mouth." Beef sold for \$6 per pound and flour at \$1,000 a barrel. At one time, pleading with his government for food, Lee said that for three days his men had been in line of battle and had not tasted meat.

In the early spring of 1865, after nine months of persistent effort, Grant with 113,000 men, well fed, clad and armed, broke through the lines defended by Lee's force of 49,000 veterans, half starved, ragged and most of them shoeless.

Then came the end at Appomattox, where on April 9, 1865, the remnant of this once magnificent army, now numbering less than 28,000 (of which only 15,000 were carrying arms) surrendered, and the Confederacy was no more.

Upon this world's stage no more pathetic scene, no more heroic incident has ever been witnessed. With what pride the generations yet unborn shall claim descent from those who, true to their sense of duty, which Lee himself said was "the sublimest word in the English language," fought under the banner of this immortal soldier and died on those victorious fields, or surviving, stood true to his colors at Appomattox.

In his farewell address to his army he said: "You will take with you the satisfaction that proceeds from the consciousness of duty faithfully performed; and I earnestly pray that a merciful God will extend to you His blessing and protection. With an unceasing admiration of your constancy and devotion to your country and a grateful remembrance of your kind and generous consideration of myself, I bid you an affectionate farewell."

Soon after the surrender he accepted the presidency of Washington College at Lexington, Va. He had refused large proffers of money for his service or the use of his name for various enterprises. He declined them all, saying he felt it his duty to live with his people and to endeavor in educating the youth of the South to do all in his power to aid in the restoration of peace and harmony and the acceptance of the policy of the State or general Government.

Through war in all ages and with all people arouses that which is worst in human nature, and though bloodiest and bitterest is internecine war, it still seems difficult to believe even after the lapse of so short a time as forty years that for the part this noble man took in obedience to his conviction of duty Andrew Johnson, then President of Duty Andrew Johnson, obtained his indictment for treason. Against this unwarranted and ignoble act the great soldier Grant arose and stayed the hand of malice and persecution. It seems equally incredible to conceive that within two months of the death of Lee, which took place on October 12, 1870, speaking to a resolution which had for its object the return of the estate of Arlington to the family of Lee, Charles Sumner said in his place in the Senate: "Eloquent Senators have already characterized the proposition and the traitor it seeks to commemorate. I am not disposed to speak of General Lee. It is enough to say that he stands high in the catalogue of those who have imbued their hands in their country's blood. I hand him over to the avenging pen of history."

As man and soldier "the avenging pen of history" has already written this of Lee: "In nobility of character, in moral grandeur, attested by his humanity, he lived 'the model for all future times.'" In the annals of war his place is with the greatest.

What of this charge of treason and what kind of traitor was Lee? A dis-

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tinguished soldier and citizen of Massachusetts, Charles Francis Adams, reared in the New England school of politics, himself throughout the war in the army which confronted Lee, son of that Charles Francis Adams who as United States Minister to England during the Civil War probably did as much as any other one man to defeat the cause of the Confederacy, grandson of John Quincy Adams and great-grandson of that elder Adams who succeeded Washington as President of the United States, a man who so differed from Lee in his interpretation of the duty an American citizen owes as between his State and the central Government that he declared he would go against Massachusetts for the Union, has written this for history:

"If Robert E. Lee was a traitor, so also and indisputably was George Washington. Washington furnishes a precedent at every point. A Virginian, like Lee, he was also a British subject; he had fought under the British flag, as Lee had fought under that of the United States; when, in 1776, Virginia seceded from the British Empire he went with his State, just as Lee went eighty-five years later; subsequently Washington commanded armies in the field designated by those opposed to them as 'rebels' and whose descendants now glorify them as 'the rebels of '76,' much as Lee later commanded and at last surrendered much larger armies, also designated 'rebels' by those they confronted. Except in their outcome the cases were, therefore, precisely alike; and logic is logic. It consequently appears to follow that if Lee was a traitor Washington was also."

He further says: "In him there are exemplified those lofty elements of personal character, which, typifying Virginia at her highest, made Washington possible. Essentially a soldier, Robert E. Lee was a many-sided man. I might speak of him as a strategist, but of this aspect of the man enough has perhaps been said. I might refer to the respect, the confidence and love with which he inspired those under his command. I might dilate on his restraint in victory; his patient endurance in the face of adverse fortune; the serene dignity with which he in the end triumphed over defeat. But, passing over all these well-worn themes, I shall confine myself to that one attribute of his which, recognized in a soldier by an opponent, I cannot but regard as his surest and loftiest title to enduring fame. I refer to his humanity in arms and his scrupulous regard for the most advanced rules of modern warfare."

Denying the contention that war must be made hell, holding up to execration the authors of the bloodiest deeds in history, this generous foe and great American said:

"I rejoice that no such hatred attaches to the name of Lee. Reckless of life to attain the legitimate ends of war, he sought to mitigate its horrors. Opposed to him at Gettysburg, I, here forty years later, do him justice. No more creditable order ever issued from a commanding General than that formulated and signed at Chambersburg by Robert E. Lee, as toward the close of June, 1863, he advanced on a war of invasion. 'No greater disgrace,' he then declared, 'can befall the army, and through it our whole people, than the perpetration of barbarous outrages upon the innocent and defenseless. Such proceedings not only disgrace them, but are subversive of the discipline and efficiency of the army, and destructive of the ends of our movement. It must be remembered that we make war only on armed men.'"

"In scope and spirit Lee's order was observed, and I doubt if a hostile force ever advanced into an enemy's country or fell back from it in retreat leaving behind less cause of hate and bitterness than did the army of Northern Virginia in that memorable campaign which culminated at Gettysburg."

In dwelling on this theme, in contrast to Lee's humanity may not "the avenging pen of history" quote from "Ohio in the War," by the Hon. Whitelaw Reid, at this time Ambassador of the United States at the Court of St. James, who in speaking of the burning of Columbia wrote:

"It was the most monstrous barbarity of this barbarous march. Before his movement began General Sherman begged permission to turn his army loose in South Carolina and devastate it. He used this permission to the full. He protested that he did not wage war upon women and children. But, under the operations of his orders, the last morsel of food was taken from hundreds of destitute families that his soldiers might feast in needless and riotous abundance. Before his eyes rose, day after day, the mournful clouds of smoke on every side that told of old people and their grandchildren driven, in midwinter, from the only roofs there were to shelter them, by the flames which the wantonness of his soldiers had kindled. Yet, if a single soldier was punished for a single outrage or theft during that entire movement we have found no mention of it in all the voluminous records of the march."

May not this avenging pen of history which Sumner invoked, record that order of General Halleck, chief of staff and military adviser to President Lincoln, which said to General Sherman: "Should you capture Charleston I hope that by some acci-

(Continued on page 3.)

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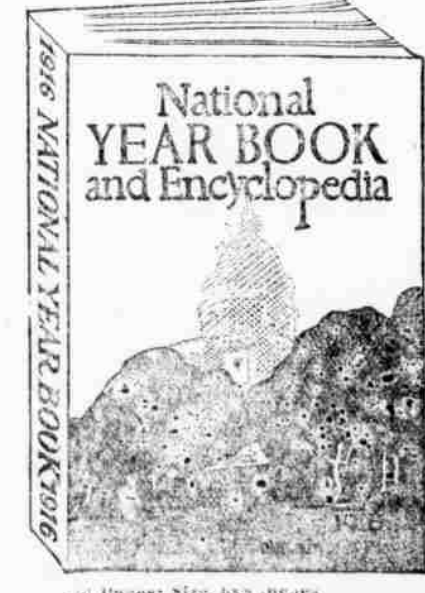
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