

## Douglas Southall Freeman: R. E. Lee

### Foreword

After I had accepted the invitation Charles Scribner's Sons extended me in 1915 to write a biography of General Robert E. Lee, I was surprised to find that much the larger part of the source material had never been consulted. The records of the Bureau of Engineers and of the United States Military Academy had not been explored for information on Lee's professional career. Few collections of manuscripts belonging to Southern families had been searched for his letters. No effort apparently had been made to determine his state of mind in the winter of 1860-61 by examining the correspondence and memoirs of those who had been with him in Texas. His own unpublished military papers had never been assembled. Of his labors as a military administrator, and of the perplexities he faced in the perennial reorganization of an army that suffered ceaselessly from attrition, virtually nothing was known. Thousands of pages there were on the details of his battles, but surprisingly little concerning the development of his strategy. The wealth of illustrative incident had not been sifted from the lesser-known personal narratives of the War between the States. Even the files of Washington and Lee University, covering the years when he was laboring to save the South from becoming a second Poland, had been in great measure neglected by biographers.

For these reasons it became necessary to conduct a long research. As this brought new facts to light, a work projected for one volume grew to four. Had not the world war demonstrated the importance of the careful study of the campaigns of great strategists, I should feel disposed to apologize for such elaborate presentation. It is, however, indisputable that the British in that struggle certainly were the gainers for their close reading of Henderson's *Jackson*, and Foch for his familiarity with Napoleon. The professional soldier who will follow, step by step, the unfolding of Lee's strategic plans, will, I think, learn much and perhaps equally from the leader of the Army of Northern Virginia. p. viii Should this biography facilitate that study, I shall not feel that I have trespassed too much on the time of military men. I hope the general reader, especially if he already has some knowledge of Lee, will find in this book enough of fresh incident to justify his labor in turning so many pages.

Prolonged as my investigation has been, and puzzling as some of its problems have appeared to be, I have been fully repaid by being privileged to live, as it were, for more than a decade in the company of a great gentleman. A biographer can ask no richer compensation. Second only to that has been the satisfaction of meeting many grateful inheritors of the Lee tradition. In the dark period after the War between the States, the most glamorous memory of the South was the Confederate cause, whose finest figure was Lee. In his military achievement, Southern people saw the flowering of their racial stock; in his social graces they beheld their ideals embodied; in the honors paid his memory, every one of Lee's former soldiers felt that he himself had received the accolade. An old veteran, after meeting "Marse Robert" only once on the road, in the midst of some hurried military movement, would speak of him with a reverence no less marked than that of Colonel Talcott or Colonel Taylor, who had seen Lee daily and in all the revealing cross-lights of victory and of disaster. Nearly all those who gave me their personal recollections of General Lee are dead now, but their sons and their daughters have like devotion to his name. It has been profoundly gratifying to search out these men and women, to gather their family stories of Lee, and to copy those of his letters that they have saved from destruction. These individuals form a company so numerous and so helpful that I have thought it proper to list them, and others to whom I am indebted, in a special appendix of acknowledgments, which will be found at the end of the last volume of this work. I should like to add that in all my research I encountered only three individuals, one historical society, and one private library possessing Lee papers that did not cheerfully permit their use.

For the periods of Lee's life before and subsequent to the War between the States, my principal task was the interesting but comparatively easy one of bringing material together from many p. ixscattered sources. Once these documents revealed Lee as in all respects a man of normal impulses and of simple soul, presentation was not difficult. There were no "secrets" and no scandals to be exposed or explained. His quiet life, as engineer and as educator, did not lend itself to the "new" biography which is already becoming conventionalized. Neither was there any occasion to attempt an "interpretation" of a man who was his own clear interpreter.

Portrayal of Lee the soldier was, from the very nature of war, a more complex undertaking. For military biography, like military history in general, may fail to be instructive because, paradoxically, it is too informative. On occasion I have tried to master some narrative of a campaign, written by an author who manifestly knew the facts, but I have found my guide hustling me from one opposing line to the other and back again so often that he hopelessly confused me and wholly dissipated the "fog of war." The existence of that "fog" is, however, in military history as in actual hostilities, one of the prime realities. Every soldier's strategy must be judged, *inter alia*, by the efforts he makes to get information, by the nature and extent of the information he collects, and by the skill with which he analyzes it. Military biography written without regard for the scope and limitations of this intelligence cannot be accurate. To avoid an unscientific method, which is more often recognized than remedied, I have endeavored to give the reader no information beyond that which Lee possessed at a particular moment regarding the strength, movements and plans of his adversary. Except in one or two instances, as when he follows Pickett's charge at Gettysburg, the reader remains at Confederate G. H. Q. throughout the war and receives the intelligence reports only as they arrive. Even happenings in the Army of Northern Virginia are not mentioned until they are announced to Lee, though this sometimes has necessitated the lengthy employment of the awkward past-perfect tense. When explanation must be made of Federal operations that were unknown to the Confederate high command, this has usually been done in footnotes.

Whether to include or to exclude military matters not directly p. xrelated to Lee's strategy and battles was a second puzzling question. He was constantly hampered because the authority of the Richmond administration was restricted and because the individualism of many of its supporters could not be bent, even in the fire of war, to reasonable co-operation. A revolutionary government was daily brought nearer to death by striving to live constitutionally. Professional soldiers, accustomed to the co-operation of a trained staff, shared responsible command with lawyers, planters, and politicians. Certain men whose names are now forgotten and whose generalship did not rise above mediocrity were figures so powerful at the moment that Lee had to take their peculiarities into account and sometimes had to entrust them with important operations. The necessities of war required the imposition of a strict discipline on an army which, in the words of one of its brilliant survivors, regarded itself at the outset as a "voluntary association of gentlemen, organized to drive out the enemy." There could be no cold impersonality in directing such a force. Moreover, from the late summer of 1862, the subsistence of the army was a major factor in determining when and where Lee could give battle. The decline in the horse supply progressively decreased the mobility of his forces.

Were these things properly to be explained in a biography of Lee or should they be dismissed with mere mention? And if they were to be treated extensively, how were they to be kept from encumbering and perhaps obscuring the account of field-operations? All these factors, I concluded, were as truly a part of a biography of Lee as his defense of Richmond in 1862 or his march into Pennsylvania. I decided that the simplest way to discuss subjects of a collateral character was to place them in the chapters devoted to winter quarters or in those covering the occasional long pauses in the fighting. This method, I hope, saves the narrative from being loaded with extraneous detail.

The continuity and close relationship of the campaigns on all the Confederate fronts had likewise to be made plain. Never was the government at Richmond able to consider the supply or the reinforcement of the Army of Northern Virginia in the absolute terms of that army's requirements. Always Lee's operations were

bound up with those in Tennessee, in the Gulf States or along the seaboard. Similarly, the times were very few when Lee could regard any campaign on his front as definitely ended. After June 1, 1862, a new operation was dictated, in almost every instance, by the one that had preceded it. The losses in one limited the possibilities of the next. From Mechanicsville to Appomattox, Lee's strategy formed a continuous whole not readily broken into chapters or divided into periods. Looking backwards, it is obvious, of course, that the reduction of the food supply, the death of Jackson, the defeat at Gettysburg, the virtual starvation of the horses in the winter of 1863-64, the inability of Lee to force Grant back across the Rappahannock after the battle of the Wilderness, and the failure of conscription in the summer of 1864 marked definite stages in the approach of defeat that may have been inevitable from the first. None of this was plain at the time, and even if it had been apparent to the rest of the world, it would not have been admitted by the majority of Southerners. Lee saw clearly and without illusions, but most men hoped the experience of Washington's Continentals would be repeated and that a final Yorktown would redeem disaster. This state of mind was a ponderable factor in the war in Virginia. Any formal grouping of campaigns might, therefore, dispose the reader to attribute to the Confederates a sense of approaching defeat that was never theirs until the winter of 1864-65. I consequently have not essayed to divide Lee's operations into periods.

In respect to military terminology, I have applied that of Hardee's *Tactics* to all manoeuvres covered by that standard work, which both armies used. For strategical description, I have, as a rule, adhered to the terms used in the reports of the period I have treated; but where those terms have a different meaning today, or where force and clarity seemed to require it, I have not hesitated to adopt the language of modern war. I have, for example, often referred to a "sector," and I have changed the familiar phrase "corps of observation" to "column of observation," because "corps" had at that time another and a more generally employed meaning.

Direct quotation, always a vexing question in historical writing, is doubly so in the case of Lee, who wrote thousands of letters over a period of nearly forty years. There is opportunity, of course, of presenting the "man entire" by the liberal use of his correspondence, but the advantage of this is more than offset, I think, by the fact that a letter which begins with one subject may cover a dozen others and thereby divert attention from the main theme. Those who wish to see Lee as his own biographer, in his writings to his family and friends, will do well to consult Captain Robert E. Lee's delightful *Recollections and Letters of General Lee* and the two works on Lee by Reverend J. William Jones. It has seemed to me desirable to avoid long quotations and, instead, to weave into the narrative those brief sentences in which, with characteristic directness, General Lee epitomized his opinions. It has been necessary, however, to publish many letters hitherto unknown and to reprint *in extenso* a few that have heretofore appeared. In some of these latter cases, the failings of Doctor Jones as a copyist have prompted me to refer directly to the originals. Instances will be given where sharp and critical passages in some of the best-known letters of General Lee were deleted by Jones without any notice to the reader of an omission.

It will be found that I have retained many direct quotations of Lee's conversation. As these often are embodied in reminiscences written after the occurrence, they present possibilities of misinterpretation at the same time that they may help to create an atmosphere of reality. The canons of criticism that I have applied in accepting or rejecting direct quotation of this character are familiar and simple. I can only hope they have been rigidly applied. The nearer the quotation is to the event, of course, the more reliable it is apt to be. Remarks made by Lee to young soldiers or students, and to those who met him infrequently were, as a rule, more accurately remembered than those addressed to old generals or to staff officers who saw him often and might easily confuse two or more interviews. Exchanges of small moment, thought typical of the man, are less overdrawn than those cited by partisans in historical disputes. Several cases are mentioned in the footnotes where Lee's plain words have been expanded and glossed until he is made to deliver orations — which he never did. The alleged quotations that are most justly subject to suspicion are those that occur in publications prepared late in life by professional lecturers or *raconteurs*. In the very few instances where I have accepted direct quotations of this sort I have given in footnotes my reasons for doing so.

*A propos* of footnotes, it should perhaps be explained that while this biography has been written from the primary sources, some of the early works on Lee are in a classification midway between first and second-hand testimony. A very good illustration is the *Life of General Robert E. Lee* by John Esten Cooke. Its author was one of General Jeb Stuart's staff officers and was frequently with Lee. When he and others who enjoyed a like advantage are cited, it will be understood that, unless otherwise indicated, the references are to their direct evidence on events they witnessed. If secondary sources are quoted on incidents in the career of Lee or of his army, it is because the authors of those works appear to have had access to valid material which, in the<sup>o</sup> absence of specific reference on their part, it is impossible to identify. For the general background of the narrative, I have not attempted to duplicate work of reliable historians but have freely and gratefully availed myself of their findings.

It may be that I shall irritate some readers by restraint and disappoint others by failing to answer some of Lee's detractors. On the one point, it seems to me that the fame of no man is promoted by extravagant utterance. Truth is not furthered thereby. Seventy years after the event, assertive rhetoric has no place in historical narrative. Comparison of Lee with other great soldiers falls, I think, into much the same category, for, as I have stated in the general review of his achievements as a soldier, in Volume IV, military circumstance is incommensurable. Lee, like every other leader, is to be judged by what he accomplished, where he was, with what he had at his command. Except to call attention to divergent opinion or to conflicts of testimony, I have purposely avoided historical controversy. I have tried to state the facts and to interpret them when it has seemed proper to do so. p. xivIf other writers have a different interpretation, it is for the reader, and not for me, to sit in judgment.

A biographer, like a dramatist, has no place on the stage. When he has made his bow to his audience and has spoken his prologue, telling what he will try to exhibit, it is his duty to retire to the wings, to raise the curtain and to leave the play to the actors. Before I do this, I have one confession to make. For more than twenty years the study of military history has been my chief avocation. Whether the operations have been those of 1914-18, on which I happened to be a daily commentator, or those of the conflict between the states, each new inquiry has made the monstrous horror of war more unintelligible to me. It has seemed incredible that human beings, endowed with any of the powers of reason, should hypnotize themselves with doctrines of "national honor" or "sacred right" and pursue mass murder to exhaustion or to ruin. I subscribe with my whole heart to the view of General Lee that had "forbearance and wisdom been practised on both sides," the great national tragedy of 1861 might have been prevented. If, in this opinion, I have let my abhorrence of war appear in my description of Malvern Hill after the battle, and in a few indignant adjectives elsewhere, I trust the reader will understand that in these instances I have momentarily stepped back on the stage only because I am not willing to have this study of an American who loved peace interpreted as glorification of war.

D. S. F.

William Byrd Park,  
Richmond, Virginia.  
Aug. 7, 1934.

## Chapter I

### A Carriage Goes to Alexandria

They had come so often, those sombre men from the sheriff. Always they were polite and always they seemed embarrassed, but they asked so insistently of the General's whereabouts and they talked of court papers with strange Latin names. Sometimes they lingered about as if they believed Henry Lee were in hiding, and more than once they had tried to force their way into the house. That was why Ann Carter Lee's husband had placed those chains there on the doors in the great hall at Stratford. The horses had been taken, the furniture had been "attached" — whatever that meant — and tract after tract had been sold off to cancel obligations. Faithful friends still visited, of course, and whenever the General rode to Montross or to Fredericksburg the old soldiers saluted him and told their children that he was "Light-Horse Harry" Lee, but she knew that people whispered that he had twice been in jail because he could not pay his debts. Of course, he wanted to pay, but how could he? She could not help him, because her father had put her inheritance in trust. Robert Morris, poor man, had died without returning a penny of the \$40,000 he owed Mr. Lee, and that fine plan for building a town at the Great Falls of the Potomac had never been carried out, because they could not settle the quitrents. If General Lee had been able to do that or to get the money on that claim he had bought in east, all would be well. As it was, they could not go on there at Stratford, where the house was falling to pieces and everything was in confusion. Besides, Stratford was not theirs. Matilda Lee had owned it and she had left it to young Henry and he was now of age. So, the only thing to do was to leave and go to Alexandria, where they could live in a simple home and send Charles Carter to the free school and find a doctor for the baby that was to come in February.

That was why they had Smith and three-year-old Robert in the p2 carriage, with their few belongings, and were driving away from the ancestral home of the Lees. Perhaps it was well that Robert was so young: he would have no memories of those hard, wretched years that had passed since the General had started speculating — would not know, perhaps, that the long drive up the Northern Neck, that summer day in 1810, marked the dénouement in the life drama of his brilliant, lovable, and unfortunate father.<sup>1</sup>

Fairer prospects than those of Henry Lee in 1781 no young American revolutionary had. Born in 1756, at Leesylvania, Prince William County, Va., he was the eldest son of Henry Lee and his wife, Lucy Grymes. From boyhood he had the high intelligence of his father's distinguished forebears and the physical charm of his beautiful mother. He won a great name at Princeton, where he had been graduated in 1773. But for the coming of the war he would have gone to England to study law. Instead, before he was twenty-one, he entered the army as a captain in the cavalry regiment commanded by his kinsman, Theodoric Bland. Behind him had been all the influence of a family which included at that time three of the outstanding men of the Revolution, his cousins Richard Henry Lee, Arthur Lee, and William Lee.

His achievements thereafter were in keeping with his opportunities, for he seemed, as General Charles Lee put it, "to have come out of his mother's womb a soldier." A vigorous man, •five feet nine inches in height,<sup>2</sup> he had strength and endurance for most arduous of Washington's campaigns. He made himself the talk of the army by beating off a surprise attack at Spread Eagle Tavern in January, 1778. Offered a post as aide to Washington, he was promoted major when he expressed a preference for field service; he stormed Paulus Hook on the lower Hudson with so much skill and valor that Washington praised him in unstinted terms and Congress voted him thanks and a medal; he was privileged to address his dispatches directly and privately to Washington, whose admiring confidence he possessed; he was given a mixed command of infantry and cavalry which was p3 officially designated as Lee's partisan corps; when he wearied of inaction in

the North he was transferred to the Southern department in October, 1780, with the rank of lieutenant colonel. Although he was just twenty-five when he joined General Nathanael Greene in January, 1781, "Light-Horse Harry" Lee was already one of the most renowned of American soldiers.

With not more than 280 men, Lee took the field in the Carolinas. The stalwart, dependable Greene was friendly and ready to take counsel. His theatre of operations was wide, the British posts were scattered. Surprises and forays invited the adventuresome commander. Marion and Sumter were worthy rivals. In Wade Hampton and Peter Johnston, father of Joseph E. Johnston, Lee found loyal comrades. Dazzling months opened before him. He was in the raid of Georgetown and won new honors at Guilford Courthouse. At least as much as any other officer, he was responsible for the decision of General Greene to abandon the march after Cornwallis and to turn southward instead, a decision that changed the whole course of the war in that area and brought about the liberation of Georgia and the Carolinas. Rejoining Marion on April 14, 1781, Lee co-operated with him in capturing Fort Watson and Fort Motte, and then advanced with only his own command to Fort Granby, which he bluffed into surrender, though not without starting some murmurs that he allowed overgenerous terms in order that he might receive the capitulation before the arrival of General Sumter. From Fort Granby, Lee swung again to the south. Marching more than seventy-five miles in three days, he reduced Fort Galphin, and had a large part in the capture of Fort Cornwallis at Augusta. His was the most spectacular part in the most successful campaign the American army fought, and his reputation rose accordingly. In the remaining operations of the year he was less successful, though he had the good fortune to be sent with dispatches from Greene to Washington in time to witness the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown.<sup>3</sup>

Then something happened to Lee. In a strange change of mental outlook, the tragedy of his life began. As soon as the fighting was over he became sensitive, resentful, and imperious. He felt that Greene had slighted him, and that his brother officers were envious and hostile. A curious conflict took place in his mind between two obscure impulses. One apparently was a desire to be master of himself and to remain in the profession for which he seems to have known he was best fitted. The other impulse was to quit the camps of contention for the quiet of civil life, there to win riches and the eminence he felt had been unjustly denied him in the army.

This inward battle may have had its origin in the restlessness of a soldier whose campaigning was over. Exhaustion and ill-health may have caused a temporary warp of mind. Resentment may have been at the bottom of it, the resentment that is so easily aroused in the heart of a young man whom praise has spoiled. More particularly, a love-affair then developing doubtless made Henry Lee discontented with his life. The mental conflict, in any case, was one that Lee felt himself unable to win by the exercise of will or of judgment, though he looked upon it as objectively as if it had been the struggle of another man. "I wish from motives of self," he wrote General Greene, "to make my way easy and comfortable. This, if ever attainable, is to be got only in an obscure retreat." And again: "I am candid to acknowledge my imbecility of mind, and hope time and absence may alter my feelings. At present, my fervent wish is, for the most hidden obscurity; I want not private or public applause. My happiness will depend on myself; and if I have but fortitude to persevere in my intention, it will not be in the power of malice, outrage or envy to affect me. Heaven knows the issue. I wish I could bend my mind to other decisions. I have tried much, but the sores of my wounds are only irritated afresh by my efforts."<sup>4</sup>

In this spirit Henry Lee debated — and chose wrongly. Early in 1782 he resigned from the army. He took with him Greene's acknowledgment that he was "more indebted to this officer than to any other for the advantages gained over the enemy, in the operations of the last campaign,"<sup>5</sup> but he left behind him the one vocation that ever held his sustained interest.

For a while all appeared to go well with him. He seemed to make his way "easy and comfortable," as he had planned, by a prompt marriage with his cousin, Matilda Lee, who had been left mistress of the great estate of Stratford, on the Potomac, by the death of her father, Philip Ludwell Lee, eldest of the famous, brilliant sons of Thomas Lee. Their marriage was a happy one, and within five years, four children were born. Two of them survived the ills of early life, the daughter, Lucy Grymes, and the third son, Henry Lee, fourth of that name.<sup>6</sup>

Following the custom of his family, Henry Lee became a candidate in 1785 for the house of delegates of Virginia. He was duly chosen and was promptly named by his colleagues to the Continental Congress, which he entered under the favorable introduction of his powerful kinsman, Richard Henry Lee. In that office he continued, with one interruption and sundry leaves of absence, almost until the dissolution of the Congress of the Confederation.<sup>7</sup> To the ratification of the new Constitution he gave his warmest support as spokesman for Westmoreland in the p6 Virginia convention of 1788, where he challenged the thunders of Patrick Henry, leader of the opposition.<sup>8</sup> Quick to urge Washington to accept the presidency, he it was who composed the farewell address on behalf of his neighbors when Washington started to New York to be inaugurated.<sup>9</sup> The next year Lee was again a member of the house of delegates, and in 1791 he was chosen Governor of Virginia, which honorific position he held for three terms of one year each. Laws were passed during his administration for reorganizing the militia, for reforming the courts, and for adjusting the state's public policy in many ways. Some dreams of improved internal navigation were cherished but could not be attained.<sup>10</sup>

In the achievements of these years Lee was distinguished but not zealous. His public service was all too plainly the by-product of a mind preoccupied. For the chief weakness of his character now showed itself, and the curious impulse with which he had battled before he resigned from the army took form in a wild mania for speculation. No dealer he in idle farm lands, no petty gambler in crossroads ordinaries. His every scheme was grandiose, and his profits ran to millions in his mind.

He plunged deeply, and always unprofitably. Financially distressed as early as 1783-85, he put £8000 of hard money into some magnificent and foolish venture in the Mississippi country.<sup>11</sup> Losing there, he sought to recoup by purchasing •500 acres of land at the Great Falls of the Potomac, where he hoped to sell off innumerable lots to those who were to build a great city at the turning-basins of the canal. This project must have had real possibilities, for it won Washington's approval and it interested James Madison. Despite an attempt to finance it in Europe, the enterprise fell through.<sup>12</sup> Before Lee had abandoned all hope of p7 succeeding with this scheme, he had pondered the possibilities of getting inside information on the financial plans of the new Federal Government, presumably in order that he might buy up the old currency and make a fortune by exchanging it for the new issues. In November, 1789, he presumed on his friendship with Alexander Hamilton to attempt to procure from the Secretary of the Treasury a confidential statement of the administration's policy. Hamilton affectionately but firmly refused to tell him anything, whereupon this, also, had to be added to Henry Lee's futile dreams.<sup>13</sup> A little later Lee was involved in transactions that prompted Washington to declare downrightly that Lee had not paid him what was due.<sup>14</sup>

By this time, though there never was anything vicious in his character or dishonest in his purposes, Henry Lee had impaired his reputation as a man of business and was beginning to draw heavy drafts on the confidence of his friends. His own father, who died in 1789, passed over him in choosing an executor, while leaving him large landed property.<sup>15</sup> Matilda Lee who had been in bad health since 1788, put her estate in trust for her children in 1790, probably to protect their rights against her husband's creditors. Soon afterwards she died, followed quickly by her oldest son, Philip Ludwell Lee, a lad of about seven.

Desperate in his grief, and conscious at last that he had made the wrong decision when he had left the army, Lee now wanted to return to a military life. He sought to get command of the forces that were to be sent to the Northwest to redeem the Saint Clair disaster. When he was passed over for reasons that he did not understand, he was more than disappointed. "It is better," he wrote Madison, "to till the soil with your own hands than to serve a government which distrusts your due attachment — even in the higher stations."<sup>16</sup> For a time, he became antagonistic to the fiscal policy of his old commander and was sympathetic with the bitterest foe of the Federalists in the American press, Philip Freneau. He might formally have gone over to the opposition had he not been rebuffed when he made overtures to Jefferson, who seems instinctively to have distrusted him.<sup>17</sup>

If he could not wear again the uniform of his own country there was an alternative, to which Lee turned in the wildest of all his dreams. He was head of an American state, but he would resign, go to France and get a commission in the army of the revolutionaries! First inquiries led him to believe he would be accepted and be given the rank of major-general, but he had some misgivings about the ability of the French to victual and maintain their troops. Before setting out for Paris he decided to take counsel with Washington. "Bred to arms," he confided to his old commander, then President, "I have always since my domestic calamity wished for a return to my profession, as the best resort for my mind in its affliction." Washington, of course, warned him to stay away from a conflict that was leading to chaos. The veteran diplomatist, William Lee, his cousin, volunteered like counsel.<sup>18</sup>

Despite his reverence for Washington, Henry Lee might have placed his sword at the disposal of the French terrorists had not his mind been turned to a softer subject: Like many another widower he found consolation for a lost love in a new. Visiting Shirley, the James River plantation of Charles Carter, who was then probably the richest man in Virginia except George Washington, he became attached to Ann Hill Carter, then twenty, Charles Carter's daughter by his second wife, Anne Moore.<sup>19</sup> Lee was seventeen years her senior but he must have appealed to her from the first. Was he not a Revolutionary hero, a gentleman of impeccable manners and flashing conversation, and was he not Governor of Virginia withal? Besides, there was the romance of his chivalrous purpose to offer his sword to republican France, the distressed land of his comrade Lafayette.

Charles Carter did not look at Lee through his daughter's eyes. As a father and a man of affairs, he would not permit Ann to marry a Virginian foolish enough to throw in his lot with the madmen of Paris. There were parleys and exchanges that ended finally in Lee's decision to abandon his French adventure. Carter at once softened and gave his consent to a union which he was considerate enough to say he had opposed on no other grounds. So, on June 30, 1793, when Robespierre was filling the tumbrels with the victims of the law of 22d Prairial, the two were joined in the marriage of which Robert E. Lee was born.<sup>20</sup>

For a time after his second marriage, Henry Lee seemed to be stabilized. Returning to his former political support of his adored Washington, he received the confidences of the President in the delicate matter of French neutrality, and he supported the executive in a much-applauded proclamation.<sup>21</sup> When the "Whiskey Boys' Rebellion" broke out the next year he forgot his former grievance and gladly led the expedition sent to crush the rising, though his absence almost cost him his office as governor.<sup>22</sup> Meantime, he became vehemently critical of Jefferson.<sup>23</sup>

Retiring, as was then customary in Virginia, on the expiration of his third term as governor, Lee was enough in the public eye to be mentioned as a possible successor to Washington.<sup>24</sup> Instead of climbing onward to that office, however, all that remained to him were a few years of service in the general assembly, a temporary commission as major-general at the time of the threatened war with France, and a single term in Congress, where he eulogized his dead chieftain, as "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."<sup>25</sup> Thereafter he held no political office of importance and probably could have gained none.



The reason was that his old passion for wild speculation returned. Already it had entailed grief, loss, and the estrangement of friends. Now, everything was subordinated to his desperate efforts to make a fortune — his peace of mind, his family's comfort, his standing in the eyes of old comrades. His own son, Henry, who idolized his father, had to write of him: "He entered into a course of sanguine and visionary speculations, endeavoring to acquire wealth, not by rational and productive industry, but by a combination of bargains which could hardly benefit one party without injury to the other, and which were often mutually detrimental. To the task of making one yield what others failed to return, he devoted no little of misapplied talent and activity — in bearing the weight of distress and ruin which they finally entailed, he wasted a degree of fortitude which, however inglorious the struggle, could not be witnessed without admiration.<sup>26</sup>

Lee became involved with the Marshalls in the purchase of a part of the vast Fairfax estates in the Northern Neck and endeavored to finance it through Robert Morris, but, in the end, advanced Morris \$40,000, which the old Philadelphian could not repay. Next Lee, it would seem, was entrusted by some of his friends with the sale of Western lands in 1797. In expectation of early payment, certain of these men made loans or assumed obligations they were unable to meet when the settlement was delayed. Lee worked feverishly to raise the funds through his attorney and agent, William Sullivan of Boston. He was harassed "by those distressed individuals who are all about me now," as he wrote Sullivan, and he had the humiliation of having one of his creditors, "poor Glassel," thrown into jail, presumably for debt.<sup>27</sup>

Undeterred, he was lured by the mysterious Western adventure of Aaron Burr, for whom he voted in 1801. He was not in Burr's p11 counsels, but his interest in the attempt to create a new empire was so great that it was reported he had left Staunton, Va., to join Burr.<sup>28</sup> It was at this stage of his speculative mania, when he was dreaming of a fortune that was to be won by the conquest of a new frontier, that his son Robert was conceived. At the time when the expectancy of the mother kept Henry Lee at home, in January, 1807, he was busy on a scheme to wipe out all his debts and to enjoy affluence once more by prevailing upon the British Lord Chancellor to order a final distribution of an estate which had been contested for sixty years. Lee had no claim to the property through kinship, but he and two others had bought up certain claims to it as a speculation. The letter that bears a closer date to that of Robert's birth than any of Henry Lee's extant correspondence is one in which he asked the help of James Monroe, then minister to England, in this chimerical enterprise.<sup>29</sup>

Ann Lee's pregnancy was not happy. Too many shadows hung over it. During the early years at Stratford, though her husband had forever been spurring restlessly about, she had been content. In the year when Henry Lee had been thundering against the Virginia resolutions, she had written the wife of her brother-in-law: "I do not find [my life] in the slightest degree tiresome: my hours pass too nimbly away. When in company, if agreeable company, I greatly enjoy it: when alone my husband and Child excepted, I am not sensible of the want of society. In them I have enough to make me cheerful and happy." She had then been from home for only one night in seven months.<sup>30</sup> But sickness after 1800 had brought suffering and many weeks of invalidism.<sup>31</sup> Henry Lee had been more and more frequently absent for long periods; the pinch of poverty had taken from her the comforts she had known in girlhood; she had lost even her carriage;<sup>32</sup> life had grown gray on the narrowed, untilled acres of Stratford. While the child was in her womb, she had gone to Shirley after p12 the death of her father and had found it a house of mourning.<sup>33</sup> On her return home at the end of December, 1806, she had been forced to ride in an open carriage and had caught a cold from which she was suffering as the time for the delivery of her child approached. Eight days before the pains of labor came upon her she wrote Mrs. Richard Bland Lee, who also was *enceinte*, "You have my best wishes for your success[,] my dear, and *truest assurances*, that I do not envy your prospects nor wish to *share in* them."<sup>34</sup>

On January 19, 1807, Ann Carter Lee's fourth child was born, an unblemished boy, who was named Robert Edward, after two of his mother's brothers, Robert and Edward Carter. His first cry was in the east chamber on the main floor of the old house,<sup>35</sup> the room nearest the garden, the very chamber in which, according to tradition, Richard Henry and Francis Lightfoot Lee, signers of the Declaration of Independence, had seen the light.

When Robert was sixteen months old, his half-brother Henry passed out of his minority and came into possession of Stratford. After that "Light-Horse Harry" and his family by his second marriage could only remain on the estate as the guests of the young master. With this prospect before him and his financial plight daily worse, the old soldier could see no alternative to beating a retreat. He must leave the country, if he could, and find shelter in some foreign land, where his creditors could not pursue him. Contemplating this, and presenting Mrs. Lee's ill-health as a reason, he solicited a government appointment to Brazil or to the West Indies.<sup>36</sup>

For the time, it was all to no purpose. There were no vacancies to be filled, and no new appointments to be made. Credit was gone, reputation was almost gone, civil judgments against him multiplied with the months. During the spring of 1809, when Robert was receiving his first impressions of Stratford as a place p13 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.<sup>37</sup> 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;<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> There were now five p14 children, ranging from the new-born infant to a boy of thirteen, and one of the quintet, Ann, was sickly. Before the infant had ceased to be an hourly charge, and when Robert was five and a half, the final blow came.

Henry Lee's strong Federalism had led him to oppose a second war with Great Britain. Seeing no grievance that he did not believe could be corrected in amity, he had written repeatedly to Madison, over a period of five years, in the interest of peace.<sup>40</sup> When hostilities opened in June, 1812, Lee was unreconciled to the conflict and quick to sympathize with those who became the victims of war's passions. Among these sufferers was the young editor of *The Baltimore Federal Republican*, Alexander C. Hanson, whose plant, press and building were wrecked by a mob which an antiwar editorial in his paper had inflamed. Hanson was no