CHARLES LEE—STORMY PETREL OF THE REVOLUTION.*

BY EDWARD ROBINS, M.A.

Major-General Charles Lee, about whom I have the honour to speak to you this evening, is one of the most picturesque and one of the most ill-starred figures that cross the panorama of Revolutionary history, and it is perhaps for this reason that I have chosen him for my subject. I have always thought that he would make a striking theme for an historical novel, and, although I have not the skill to treat him in that way, I shall try tonight to sketch briefly the rise, decline and fall, to show the bright lights and dark shadows, of this paradoxical man of whom it may be said, in charity, that he was his own worst enemy.

Brilliant, imperious, liberal-minded but narrow, vain to the verge of insanity, acid of tongue, talented yet unbalanced, brave yet treacherous, a lover of animals but quarrelsome with men, spirited yet meanly envious,—a strange jumble of good and evil—such was Charles Lee, who lies buried without the walls of old Christ Church in this city, his grave unmarked and forgotten, his reputation sadly blackened, and "none so poor to do him reverence."

In his entertaining "Essays Historical and Literary" the late John Fiske has said of Lee: "Wherever a war is going on, it is apt to draw from other countries a crowd of officers who come to look on and give advice, or perhaps to study the art of war under new conditions, or to carve out for themselves a career for which

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no chance seems to be offered them at home. This was amply illustrated in the war of independence. * * * A swarm of officers crossed the Atlantic in the hope of obtaining commands and not less than twenty-seven such foreigners served in the Continental army, with the rank of general, either Major or brigadier. I do not refer to such French allies as came with Rochambeau, or in company with the fleets of D’Estaing and De Grasse. I refer only to such men as obtained commissions from Congress, and were classed for the time as American officers. Some were drawn hither by a noble, disinterested enthusiasm for the cause of political liberty; some were mere selfish schemers or crack-brained vagrants in quest of adventure. * * * Among the former there were five who attained real eminence and have left a shining mark upon the pages of history.” Here Fiske alludes to De Kalb, Lafayette, Pulaski, Kosciusko and Baron Steuben. And he adds: “But in the eyes of the generation which witnessed the beginning of the Revolutionary War, none of the European officers just mentioned was anything like so conspicuous or so interesting a figure as Charles Lee. He was on the ground before any of these others; he had already been in America; he came with the greatest possible amount of noise; he laid claim to the character of a disinterested enthusiast so vehemently that people believed him.”

Personally, I think that General Lee was more sincerely interested in the American cause when he first attached himself to it than John Fiske gives him credit for being, but we all know how this tempestuous English soldier weakened in the end and finally betrayed it. It is certain, at least, that he took up the rights of the Americans with tremendous energy, by act, and word, and pen, and for a time enjoyed a prestige over here which threatened to submerge the far nobler, more efficient but less spectacular Washington.
When Lee reached New York in 1773,—he had been here before during the English campaigns against the French—everything that was known about his past career tended to foster this prestige. For he had already played an active and noisy part in European life, and bore the reputation of being a man of aristocratic lineage, a brave and experienced officer and a virile pamphleteer in the cause of ideal democracy.

Charles Lee came of an old Cheshire family, and was born at Dernhall in 1731, his father being of the British army. Part of his youthful education was received in Switzerland where he acquired a good working knowledge of French and the classics and where his environment gave him that love of free government and hatred of tyranny for which he afterwards became famous and which he sometimes vented from the housetops, figuratively speaking, with all the ardor of a modern Fourth of July orator. Later he picked up at least a smattering of Spanish, Latin and German and set himself to study the art and technique of war as it was practiced in those days before Napoleon had arisen to show that real war is something more than cut and dried science. When the time came for him to carry out the teaching of this art as a commander in the American Revolution he found, much to his surprise, that he was not half as successful as a certain colonial named George Washington, who didn’t know half as much about the art as he did. It is said, with what truth I know not, that young Lee was given a commission in the British Army at the tender age of eleven; it may be true, because in the middle of the eighteenth century there existed an abuse—we should call it now by the “short and ugly” name of graft—by which children sometimes received commissions and their adoring families drew the pay accruing therefrom. But when he was fifteen Charles was appointed an ensign in his father’s old regiment, the Fifty-fourth, and it was as a lieutenant in this regi-
ment that he later on went to America and took part in the ill-fated campaign against Fort Duquesne, under General Braddock. Poor, vain, blustering Braddock. When he told wise Benjamin Franklin how he was going to push through the forests of Pennsylvania and conquer the Indians just as if he were waging a scientific war in Europe against an open enemy, our Philadelphia philosopher smiled a pitying smile, for he knew that the Indians would fight in the stealthy way they wanted to and not according to the rules of war as laid down by the hectoring Englishman. And so Braddock lost his life for his foolishness, and the expedition came to grief; his young aide, George Washington, went home, after distinguishing himself, and young Lieutenant Lee escaped with his life, without realizing under what circumstances fate would throw Washington and himself together again—how they would meet as rebels to their King, how they would become warm friends, how they would quarrel, and how Lee would die dismal and almost alone in a Philadelphia tavern, whilst Washington, whom he had always secretly envied and tried to unhorse, was being acclaimed the saviour of his country. Life is full of such contrasts.

When Lee's regiment finally went into winter quarters in Albany, New York, he became very friendly with the neighboring Mohawk Indians, and was made a member of the Bear tribe under the appropriate name of "Onewaterika"—for when I add that that means "Boiling Water" you can see the significance of the title, for if ever there was a man who was always in hot water that man was Charles Lee. He was always making trouble, if it didn't come naturally; he had an unpleasant way of criticizing his superiors, and he could sometimes say very sharp things to and about his friends, and the fact that what he said was often true did not make his wit any the more palatable. We are often content to have truth remain at the bottom of the well.
Now it appears that Lee, seeking more boiling water, took unto himself a wife from among the Indian squaws—a lady whom he enthusiastically describes as "a very great beauty." But this encumbrance is soon lost sight of, and I am afraid the fickle soldier, who always liked the fair sex, did not take the aboriginal Mrs. Lee very seriously. Save for this Indian marriage, he remained a bachelor to the end, and it used to be whispered among the Chews, the Cadwaladers, the Willings and other fair Philadelphians, when he was visiting here, that his ugliness and untidy habits had caused more than one charmer to refuse him. For Lee was no beauty, and people made fun, behind his back, of his tall, scrawny figure and huge aquiline nose, and of his thin legs, which seemed too long for his trunk. He had piercing, restless eyes and a sarcastic expression about the mouth, and I warrant you that his friends were pretty careful what they said to his face, and tried to make the best of the dogs with which he surrounded himself. He liked nothing better, indeed, than bringing his dogs into a drawing room or, better still, having them eat at the dinner table, and if anybody objected he was apt to say that he had always found his canine friends much more attractive and faithful than his human friends.

I must pass over, in a few words, Lee's military career prior to our own Revolution. He bought a captaincy in his regiment, he commanded the Forty-fourth Grenadiers and was wounded in the desperate assault on Ticonderoga, July 1, 1758; he was at the capture of Niagara in 1759, and at the capture of Montreal, and in all the active service he saw in America he proved himself as brave as he was querulous and fault-finding. And while he loved to call people hard names he did not enjoy criticism directed against himself; he was very much like the man who said: "I have a keen sense of humor except when I am made the subject of it!" So
when he was quartered in Long Island and a medical officer lampooned him, Lee did not see the humor of it, and promptly thrashed the offender, whereupon the offender attacked Lee, who barely saved his own life.

The year 1761 found Lee back in London, where he received his appointment, in August of that year, as Major in the One Hundred and Third Foot, or "volunteer hunters" as they were called, a newly-raised light corps. He was one of the officers attached to the staff of the British Army with which he served as lieutenant-colonel in the campaign in Portugal, in 1762, and covered himself with glory under General John Burgoyne in the brilliant affair at Villa Velha (October 5, 1762). He returned home at the peace and was placed on half pay.

This did not suit the active, critical temperament of the Lieutenant-Colonel, who was as restless as he was critical, and who, furthermore, wanted to conquer in fresh fields. So he busied himself by inventing a Utopian scheme for the founding of military colonies on the Wabash and Illinois, and at intervals of leisure, he would abuse the English ministry. I think he must have had some Irish blood in his veins, for he was never so happy as when he was tilting with the existing government. He thought the ministry reactionary, and said so; he learned to look upon the young King George III as a narrow, bigoted man, and the fact that George was a paragon of domestic virtue did not appeal to him at all, for Lee himself was not unduly encumbered either with domesticity or with virtue. As a result the Ministers in power, whom he was criticizing in season and out, disliked him and refused to him the promotion and honors to which he considered himself entitled. Thus the brilliant officer went on growing in bitterness, and the more republican he became in his sympathies the more he hated the royal Houses of Hanover and of Stuart. His contempt for the Stuarts
was deep and unquenchable, and one of the finest bits of irony for which the Eighteenth Century is distinguished is his "Epistle" to David Hume, the historian, in which he subtly ridicules the latter for the way in which he has "whitewashed" the royal House of Scotland in his "History of England."

As there seemed no further chance of promotion in the British army, Lee secured letters of recommendation to the Polish government, and in 1764 was appointed a major-general in the Polish army and attached to the personal staff of Stanislaus Poniatowsky as adjutant-general. He spent several stirring years with the Poles, and on one occasion nearly lost his life by being snowed up in the Balkans. We can fancy that thereafter he had, in his highly vituperative way, some bad things to say about the Balkans.

After spending several years in Poland, where he undoubtedly acquired valuable military experience, Lee returned to England, where he intrigued with sufficient success to procure from a grateful Government letters patent for crown grants of twenty thousand acres of land in Florida. What a pity that he didn't emigrate there and raise oranges; he might have died, in due course, in the odor of sanctity, and orange blossoms, and no one could have written "traitor" against his name.

But what Lee really wanted was rapid promotion in the British army, and as he could not secure this, he did not hesitate to express his opinion of the British Ministry in no uncertain terms. The ministers retaliated by shrugging their shoulders and remarking that General Lee was a disappointed and vindictive place hunter. This was, no doubt, plain truth, but at that time most people in England were place-hunters of some kind or other, all seeking little work at large salaries. I am under the impression, indeed, that this sort of quest is not unknown in America at the present day.
Early in 1769 Lee went back to Poland, held a major-general’s command in the campaign against the Turks, and enlivened the proceedings by telling everybody, in season and out, what a poor opinion he had of the commanders above him.

Once, upon returning from Hungary, Lee nearly died of a fever; at another time he fought a duel with an Italian officer—another matter of too much talk, I suppose—lost two of his own fingers and killed the Italian, with the result that he had to fly to Gibraltar, whence he embarked for London. This was in 1770, and it was on his reappearance in England that he wrote the admirable “Epistle” to David Hume of which I have spoken. At this time he was in possession of a private income of a thousand pounds sterling a year, through the death of his brothers, and grants of land in the colonies, but his restless spirit fretted for action; he wanted to play a part in the world, and he wanted a wide stage to do it in. It so happened that the affairs of America were beginning to attract excited attention; the first cloud of the Revolution had arisen, and Englishmen were discussing the claims of the colonials and the question of taxation. Some thoughtful persons contended that the Americans should have all they wanted, others echoed the harsh sentiment of old Samuel Johnson, who said that the Americans were “a race of convicts” and ought to be thankful for anything the English allowed them “short of hanging!” Now to Lee the cause of the Americans honestly and sincerely appealed, because it exactly fitted in with his own views about personal liberty and free government. As time went on, and the troubles across the water increased, Lee became more and more interested, and when the clouds of discontent burst into the flames of open rebellion he determined to go to America and encourage the colonials in their just resistance to oppressive measures. I believe that at this time, before envy
and conceit had altogether ruined his character, he was really ingenuous in his admiration of the American cause and that he was inspired by the best of motives, although he doubtless was hoping to play a popular rôle in the new country. An experienced and well-known British officer and pamphleteer going over to espouse the rights of the Americans was no mean event in this crisis and Lee naturally expected to become a bit of a hero. Who can blame him up to this point? After all, he was, as an officer on half pay, with estates in the mother country, taking a risk in what he was about to do. His early biographer, Edward Langworthy, says: "He was of course absent (in Poland) when the stamp act was passed; but, although absent, he did not cease laboring in the cause of America. * * * He used every argument and exerted all the abilities he was master of with every correspondent he had, in either House of Parliament. * * * He gave up security for insecurity, certainty for uncertainty, he threw himself into the lap of America without any chance of winning; he staked all on the side of her fortune; if she succeeded, he could not be better; if she miscarried his whole was lost."

There is something in what Langworthy says. Lee took up the grievances of the Americans long before there was anything for him to gain by so doing; indeed, he was likely to lose by giving offence to certain influential persons in the British government, who would see to it that this half-pay British officer and general in the Polish army would not receive his promotion in a hurry. There was one gentleman, I am quite sure, who wanted to get even with Lee, and nearly succeeded later on, and that was his Majesty, King George III, who believed that Americans were a race of rebels, although he did not consider them a race of convicts. No; I think Charles Lee was really disinterested at this time; if he had only remained so after
he reached America, and had not had his head turned by adulation, all would have been well.

Lee arrived in New York in November, 1773, amidst the agitation about the tea duties, and was received with enthusiasm. He travelled through the colonies, meeting Washington and other prominent men, and the more openly he expressed his admiration for the cause of the colonials the more popular he became. Here was a great British general and statesman—for so the Americans conceived him—come to encourage them; the Americans were properly flattered, and General Lee lost his head. He began to think that he was "the whole show" as we would term it now, and to persuade himself that he would have to teach the Americans how to run things. He had a great contempt for the untrained, civilian generals whom he met, from Washington down, and slowly but surely his gnarled heart was devoured by a great canker—the thought that he, and not Washington, should be at the head of the army. But I am anticipating a bit. When Lee first reached this country, he was following the role of an orator and writer, not a fighter, and in this guise he wrote his "Strictures on a Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans," in which he severely handled the Tory arguments of the writer of the "Friendly Address" itself. This was in 1774, and in December of the same year, he sent to his friend, Edmund Burke, through Sir Joshua Reynolds, the painter, a letter in which he contended that Americans should trust no one in their affairs unless he held some property in the colonies. In order that he might qualify himself, Lee bought an estate in the Shenandoah Valley, in Berkeley County, Virginia; to pay for it he borrowed money from Robert Morris, giving bills on his agent in England and mortgaging the property as security. Later on, when he had taken up arms against the British Government, the bills were returned protested, as all his property in
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England had been confiscated, and Congress generously advanced him $30,000 as indemnity, the money to be paid back if he should ever recover his forfeited estate. Early in 1775, he had resigned his commission in the British Army, in a dignified letter which he wrote to the War Office: "The present measures (of the British Parliament) seem to me," he said, "so absolutely subversive of the rights and liberties of every individual subject, so destructive to the whole empire at large, and ultimately so ruinous to his Majesty's own person, dignity and family, that I think myself obliged, in conscience, as a citizen, Englishman, and soldier of a free state, to exert my utmost to defeat them."

Would that Lee could have lived up to this high plane. At this moment he was on the best of terms with Washington, who admired the English general exceedingly and seems to have deferred more or less to his opinions, which were always stated in no uncertain terms. When Lee went to Philadelphia his advice was eagerly sought by many members of Congress; from now until his downfall he remained a very important person, and even after his court martial, there were some patriots who believed in him.

Three days before Lee resigned from the British Army, he had been commissioned by Congress as second major-general in the Continental Army, Artemas Ward being first major-general and Washington commander-in-chief. He accepted the appointment, but with envy and much uncharitableness in his heart; he should have the commandship-in-chief, he thought, or, if not that, the first major-generalship. For Ward he professed a great contempt, and called him "a fat church warden;" for Washington he did not dare show any disrespect, but he always felt, until the day of his death, that he (Lee) should have been the leader and Washington the led. Subsequently, when Ward resigned, Lee was second in rank only to Washington, but even this did not
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satisfy his greedy soul. Indeed, there came a time when some very patriotic persons, finding that the war was not going well for the cause of liberty, began to think that perhaps Charles Lee would be a better commander-in-chief than the Virginian. Joseph Reed must have thought so, when he wrote to Lee in November, 1776: "I confess I do think that it is entirely owing to you that this army and the liberties of America so far as they are dependent on it, are not totally cut off. You have decision, a quality often wanting in minds otherwise valuable. * * * Oh, General! An indecisive mind is one of the greatest misfortunes that can befall an army; I often have lamented it this campaign." In other days Reed must have realized that the Fabian policy which he was here criticizing was the only one that Washington, hampered as he was, could have pursued with any chance of success. No doubt others wrote to Lee in the same vein, so that he must have finally become sincerely convinced that the saving of America really rested with himself. Other generals in other wars have had the same hallucination.

In analyzing Lee’s brief military career in the American forces, I do not see any warrant for the value which some of his contemporaries placed on his services. I suppose it was because of the fact, which we so often observe in this queer old world, that when he blew his own trumpet, as he was constantly doing, a good many people appraised him at his own valuation. Furthermore, his espousal of the American cause had endeared him to many, and those colonists who were frankly for separation from the mother country were wild with pleasure when he advocated independence—as he evidently did. He must have done so, for it is on record that he wrote to Edward Rutledge: "By the eternal God, if you don’t declare yourselves independent, you deserve to be slaves!" He was ever strong in his language, as when he referred to King George III as "a
tyrant,” and to the British Parliament as an “abandoned” institution. In the meantime, as the good but fatally obstinate King paced up and down Windsor, he must have given many a bitter thought to the recalcitrant Lee. For George III kept a very close tab on people, and seldom forgave an injury.

Lee accompanied Washington to Cambridge, where he was received with much deference, and where his great reputation had preceded him; he entered into a correspondence with his old friend, General Burgoyne, now in this country with an army—a conference which came to naught because the Assembly of Massachusetts disapproved of its continuance; he was employed at Newport and New York; he was nominated to the command of the American forces in Canada, but was counter-ordered to Charleston, South Carolina, where he ostensibly defeated the British attack of June 28, 1776, but the credit for which belonged to Moultrie, and when he repaired to New York, his chief business, until the time he was captured, seems to have been to thwart Washington in every conceivable way. On his arrival in New York, he took command of the right wing of Washington’s army, and through the resignation of Ward, he was now senior major-general and there was no one above him but Washington! If disaster came to the latter, it seemed probable that Lee would be put in his place, to show the Americans what a trained British soldier, skilled in the technique and strategy and tactics of war, could accomplish. I must confess that it looks very much as if Lee tried deliberately to bring this about. I need not weary my hearers with a detailed account of Washington’s campaign against Howe, or of the events preceding or following the fall of Fort Washington. Suffice it to say that General Lee, instead of bringing all his reputed skill and experience to help his chief, did everything he conceivably could to upset his plans, disobeyed his orders and wrote letters cal-
culated to increase a certain disaffection then existing against General Washington. When the latter reached Princeton, early in December, 1776, Lee, in disregard of Washington's orders, marched slowly to Morristown instead of crossing the Delaware near Alexandria, just as Gates was approaching on his way from Ticonderoga with seven regiments sent down by General Schuyler to Washington's assistance. Lee managed to have three of these regiments diverted to Morristown. Says John Fiske: "His design in thus moving independently was to operate upon the British flank from Morristown, a position of which Washington himself afterwards illustrated the great value. The selfish schemer wished to secure for himself whatever advantage might be gained from such a movement. His plan was to look on and see Washington defeated and humbled and then strike a blow on his own account.

Fiske always makes the very worst of Lee, and paints him in the blackest colors even when there is little white to be seen, but one must admit that his theory is more than plausible. Charles Lee, brave soldier, upholder of liberty, world patriot, was degenerating into a thing of meanness and a potential traitor. Just at this moment a strange thing happened to Lee. He had spent the night of December 13th at White's Tavern in Baskingridge, several miles from his camp. Early in the morning an officer (Major Wilkinson) arrived at the inn with a dispatch from General Gates, and Lee, thrusting an old flannel gown over his night-clothes, placidly got out of bed and proceeded to write a letter to Gates. He naturally did not know that a Tory busybody had given the British, in camp fifteen or twenty miles away, due notice of his presence in the tavern. As he was finishing the letter, Wilkinson, looking out of the bedroom window, saw a troop of red-coated British soldiers riding rapidly up to the house. They were men from the Sixteenth Light Dragoons, under command of Colonel
William Harcourt, some of whom, by a curious coincidence, had served with Lee in Portugal and remembered him as a brave if somewhat irascible soldier.

All sorts of stories were told in after years about Lee's conduct when he was captured. It was said that he betrayed abject terror; that he begged Harcourt to spare his life, and behaved in such a way as to disgust Wilkinson and the Britishers who had fought with him at Villa Velha. I doubt the truth of most of these stories; I think it much more likely that the American general indulged in more profanity than cowardice. It was a swearing age, and Lee, I shrewdly suspect, could follow out the adage of "swearing like a trooper." But it was undoubtedly a great shock to his nerves to be thus captured, for as the British dragoons crowded into his bedroom, and seized him, they cried out that he was a deserter from the British army and would be so treated by General Howe. Lee knew what that meant; there was more than humiliation in his being thus taken; there was the possibility of a disgraceful death!

Without being given time to dress the "Hero of Charleston," as he liked to be called, was tied on a horse, hurried off like a cattle thief to the British camp, and finally turned over to Sir William Howe in New York. In the meantime Lee's regiments were moved to the aid of Washington, in time to take part in the movement on Trenton.

Upon his arrival in New York, Lee was treated with much more courtesy than he had been by his captors at White's Tavern, but he was in a very delicate position. Howe regarded him as a deserter, and was, indeed, ordered to send him to England for trial, but just as the prisoner was about to set sail a weighty word came from General Washington. Five Hessian officers, said the American commander-in-chief, were held by him as hostages for Lee's safety. It is almost pathetic to think how faithful Washington still was to
Lee when we see how treacherously the Englishman had treated him. But Washington was a master diplomat in this matter, for he evidently knew that the British would be loath to sacrifice five Hessian officers and thus anger the German troops and the governments which had hired them out to the British. The British Ministry, after much discussion, was afraid to make way with Lee, and finally instructed Howe (this was as late as December, 1777) to treat the American major-general as a prisoner of war, "subject to exchange when convenient."

Nevertheless, it was a sad day for Lee when he entered New York as a prisoner, for from that day dates his treason to the American standard. We know much now that our ancestors never knew, and which, if they had known, would have caused them to place Lee in the same class with Benedict Arnold. It is all plain enough now. Lee, feeling that his life, as an alleged deserter, was in great danger, did everything he could to propitiate Sir William Howe. It must have been for this reason that he told Howe he disapproved of the Declaration of Independence, and believed, could he but seek an interview with a committee from Congress, that he could open the way to a satisfactory adjustment of all disagreements between Great Britain and the colonies. Howe, who was a bit of a pacifist, sanctioned such an interview, but Congress, very properly, would have none of it. The fact was that Lee was coming down from his pedestal with many Americans, a great many of whom were beginning to think that he was too erratic and temperamental (that is the word we would use to-day) to be a great general. No one suspected him of treachery, but at this very moment he was planning to deliver the Americans, whom he professed to serve so loyally, into the hands of the vindictive British. I say vindictive, because we know—such are the amenities of war—that if America had not
triumphed many of our ancestors would have been strung up on the branches of the nearest trees or lamp posts. As Franklin once remarked to Congress: "We must all hang together or assuredly we will all hang separately!"

Lee, in short, prepared for General Howe a plan of campaign against the Americans in which he "sincerely and zealously," as he expresses it, enters into the British interests and recommends an expedition to Chesapeake Bay—an expedition which was undertaken in the following summer. Of course treason could go no further than this; he had placed himself in the same abyss with Benedict Arnold, who was later to startle the world by his apostasy. But Lee's treason was unknown to the public for more than eighty years, and might never have been known, indeed, had not the document come to light among certain Howe papers in 1858, and afterwards found its way to the Lenox Library in New York. It is in Lee's handwriting, and is endorsed as "Mr. Lee's plan—29th March, 1777" in the writing of Howe's secretary, Sir Henry Strachey. There is the evidence, damning and undisputed; it is very hard for people who commit their crimes to paper and ink to "prove an alibi"! If you desire to know more of this "Plan" read George H. Moore's book, "The Treason of Charles Lee," published in 1860. Curious, when one comes to think of it, how this paper was carried to England by Sir Henry Strachey and how it remained hidden all those years in a country house in Somersetshire. There is something of romance in all this, although it is a tarnished romance, and when we think what Charles Lee might have done, and how he might have shone alongside of Washington and Wayne, Knox and Lafayette, Franklin, Morris, Jefferson, and the rest of that galaxy worthy of Rome's best days—when we think of all that, we can only lament.
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As naturally nothing was known in the American camp about Lee's treachery, he was warmly welcomed when he joined Washington's army at Valley Forge in May, 1778. Washington still believed in him, but Lee no longer had about him the glamor of a hero, and some people laughed when they told of how he had been packed off to New York on a horse, riding along hatless and clad in an old flannel wrapper, amid the jeers of his captors.

Why did Lee return to the American forces? He had proved himself, to General Howe, such a firm friend to Great Britain, by his apostasy, that one might suppose he would rather have continued with the British. It has been argued, however, that he still hoped to supplant Washington, and would finally emerge as the saviour of America; thus making another political somersault. I can hardly believe this theory, because there is evidence that whilst he was at Valley Forge, Lee was corresponding with Sir Henry Clinton, the successor to General Howe. I am under the impression that when Lee was exchanged, it was with the definite understanding between him and the British that he would do all he could to hinder the progress of the Continental army. He certainly seems to have acted on such a basis in a very short time.

In June, 1778, Sir Henry Clinton evacuated Philadelphia, hoping to cross New Jersey on his way to New York without giving battle. Washington followed, to attack him on the way. Lee professed himself as doubting the success of such an attack. Of course he did not want to see the rear forces of his correspondent, Sir Henry, come to grief! Washington's plan was to make an oblique attack on Clinton's rear division, to cut it off from the advance division, but as Lee disapproved of it, the commander-in-chief directed Lafayette to carry the movement out. It was arranged that an advance force of about 6,000 men, under Lafay-
ette, was to attack the British rear division upon its left flank and engage it until Washington could come up with the rest of the army. Then Lee changed his mind and solicited the command. Lafayette gracefully yielded.

Lee and his troops came up with Clinton's rear guard near Monmouth Court House on the morning of June 28th. His duty was clear before him; he had Washington's strict orders, and all he had to do was to go ahead and attack according to plan. But this is exactly what he did not do; he allowed his division to retreat and gave such extraordinary orders that Lafayette, dazed and worried, sent a message to Washington begging him to come up to the front. Washington hurried up and was amazed to find Lee's forces retreating in disorder, with the British close at their heels. Soon he met Lee, and then followed a scene which, painful though it was, I should dearly love to have witnessed. Washington is always depicted to us as a very placid, cold, formal sort of a person, but his intimate friends knew that he had a fiery temper, which he kept, generally, under rigid control, and that he was a very human gentleman in more ways than one. So I should have liked to have stolen a glimpse of the "Pater Patriae" when he displayed a little bit of "original sin"!

A Southern sergeant was more lucky than I and thus describes the scene: *"I saw General Washington coming from the rear of our column, riding very rapidly along the right flank, and as he came nearer my attention was fixed upon him with wonder; I never saw such a countenance before; it was like a thundercloud before the flash of lightning! Just as he reached the flank of my platoon he reined up his horse a little, and raising his right hand high above his head, he cried out with a loud voice: 'My God, General Lee, what

*Major Jacob Morton.
are you about?' General Lee began to make some explanation, but General Washington impatiently interrupted him, and with his hand still raised high up over his head, waving it angrily, exclaimed: 'Go to the rear, Sir!' Then he spurred his horse and rode rapidly forward.'” Thus it was that the commander-in-chief, by his lucky arrival, brought victory out of defeat.

Tradition has it that Washington added to his admonition several very picturesque and lurid oaths. I hope he did, although I don't advocate profanity; Lee, to whom he had always proved faithful, and who had been a thorn in his side for some time, deserved all the swearing in the vocabulary of an eighteenth century soldier!

Immediately Lee wrote to Washington in the tone of a martyr. "'From the knowledge I have of your Excellency's character,' he said, "'I must conclude that nothing but the misinformation of some very stupid or misrepresentation of some very wicked person could have occasioned your making use of such singular expressions as you did, on my coming up to the ground where you had taken post; they implied that I was guilty either of disobedience of orders, want of conduct, or want of courage.'” He brazenly claims that the ultimate success of the day was due to himself and he adds: "'——- in this instance, I must pronounce that he (Washington) has been guilty of an act of cruel injustice towards a man who had certainly some pretensions to the regard of every servant of his country and I think, Sir, I have a right to demand some reparation for the injury committed.'”

Washington's reply was brief but admirable. It was as follows:

"Sir:
I received your letter, dated, through mistake, the first of July, expressed as I conceive, in terms highly
improper. I am not conscious of having made use of any very singular expressions at the time of my meeting with you, as you intimate. What I recollect to have said was dictated by duty and warranted by the occasion. As soon as circumstances will admit, you shall have an opportunity, either of justifying yourself to the army, to Congress, to America and to the world in general, or of convincing them that you are guilty of a breach of orders and of misbehaviour before the enemy on the 28th instant, in not attacking them as you had been directed, and in making an unnecessary, disorderly and shameful retreat."

To this Lee impertinently replied: "You cannot afford me greater pleasure than in giving me the opportunity of showing to America the sufficiency of her respective servants. I trust that the temporary power of office, and the tinsel dignity attending it, will not be able, by all the mists they can raise, to obfuscate the bright rays of truth."

Lee was thereupon arrested and tried by court-martial (July 2, 1778) on three charges: 1. Disobedience of orders in not attacking the enemy; 2. Misbehaviour before the enemy in making an unnecessary, disorderly and shameful retreat; 3. Disrespect to the commander-in-chief. In August Lee was found guilty on all three charges and sentenced to be suspended from command for a year. Congress confirmed the findings.

At the court-martial the distinguished prisoner sought to vindicate himself by declaring that had he attacked as Washington ordered, he would have met disaster and that he retreated in order to lure the British across two deep ravines into a position where he could crush them. The court-martial took no stock in such a tame explanation, although there were some sincere persons of standing and probity who thought that Lee had sincerely tried to do his duty, although
throwing himself open to the charge of gross insubordination. Such an apologist was "Light Horse" Harry Lee, who says in his "Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States"; "The records of the court-martial manifest on their face the error of the sentence, and it is wonderful how men of honor and of sense could thus commit themselves to the censures of the independent and impartial. * * * The unfortunate general was only guilty of neglect in not making timely communication of his departure from orders, subject to his discretion, to the Commander-in-chief."

Of course Henry Lee could not know what we have known since the discovery of "Mr. Lee's Plan;" he would have been the last person on earth to condone the General's treason. And he would have been particularly chagrined at Charles Lee's mean treachery to Washington, for "Light Horse Harry" loved the latter, and he it was, in this very city of Philadelphia, who delivered a funeral elegy on Washington in which he called him "first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his fellow-citizens." I may add here that there was no kin between Charles Lee and the Lees of Virginia, so far as I am aware.

Charles Lee subsequently published what he called a "Vindication to the Public," which was an able bit of special pleading and convinced some readers that he was a martyr, but which otherwise fell flat. One result of his court-martial was that he was challenged to fight a duel by Steuben, who testified against him and whom Lee seems to have slandered; the challenge was refused, but in a few days Lee fought a duel with Colonel Laurens, Washington's aide-de-camp, for whom Alexander Hamilton (himself to be killed in a duel many years later) acted as second. Lee was slightly wounded. He bore generous testimony to the bravery of his adversary. "The young man," he said, "behaved splendidly; I could have hugged him!"
Lee was finally dropped from the army, after he had addressed one of his characteristic letters to Congress; I hardly think it is correct to say that he was dismissed in disgrace. He retired to his estate in the Shenandoah in the summer of 1779, where, in company with his dogs and a few favorite books, he lived pretty much as a recluse. Langworthy, his admiring biographer, naively remarks: "He lived in a style peculiar to himself, in a house more like a barn than a palace. Glass windows and plastering would have been luxurious extravagance * * * indeed, he was now so rusticated that he could live in a tub with Diogenes." This reference to Diogenes, whom Lee never suggested, is hardly appropriate, nor does Lee, in his untidy habits, suggest any connection with a tub.

Lee bred horses and dogs, and tried to play the farmer, but he was an unhappy, soured, discontented man and his farm was operated at a loss. What thoughts must have been his. He had come to America almost as a conquering hero and finally thought, in his vanity, that to him would be the task of saving her, and that his name would go echoing down the ages with the names of Alexander, and Augustus and Julius Cæsar, not to mention Cromwell, and Marlborough and a few lesser lights. And here he was a discredited commander, alone and neglected!

Lee grew more and more weary of his farm and of inaction. He wanted to get away from it and settle in some seaport town, where he could learn better what was going on in the great world in which he was now but a cipher. In June, 1782, he wrote to England to his sister, Sidney Lee, how much he admired the English as compared with any other nation. After denying to the Americans the possession of "truth, honesty, sincerity and good understanding," he says: "The New England men excepted, the rest of the Americans, though they fancy and call themselves Republicans,
have not a single Republican qualification or idea. They have always a god of the day, whose infallibility is not to be disputed; to him all the people must bow down and sing Hosannas!"

How the popularity of George Washington did rankle within him—Washington, whom he, in his English pride, had looked down upon as a raw colonial only created to be patronized and led by the great and infallible Major-General Charles Lee!

"To be sure," Lee goes on to assure his sister, "there are many exceptions to the general character of Americans," and among these exceptions he instances Robert Morris, Richard Henry Lee, of Virginia, John Adams, and Dr. Rush, as well as Generals Schuyler, Mifflin, Sullivan, Muhlenberg, Wayne, Greene and Knox. And he adds: "I have been peculiarly fortunate in my aides-de-camp, all young gentlemen of the best families, fortunes and education of this continent, but above all I should remain young Colonel Henry Lee."

While we are on the subject of General Lee's letters, permit me to recall one which made a great stir in Philadelphia society, written during a visit to Philadelphia in December, 1778, to the beautiful Miss Franks. The General, as I may have indicated, was not a stylish dresser, and it would appear that the young lady had accused him of wearing publicly a pair of shabby green breeches adorned with a large leather patch. When Lee heard the accusation, he wrote her an epistle in a sprightly vein. "Madame," he said, "when an officer of the respectable rank I bear is grossly traduced and calumniated, it is incumbent on him to clear up the affair to the world, with as little delay as possible. The spirit of defamation and calumny (I am sorry to say) is grown to a prodigious and intolerable height on this continent. If you had accused me of a design to procrastinate the war, or of holding a trea-
sonable correspondence with the enemy, I could have borne it; this I am used to; and this happened to the great Fabius Maximus. If you had accused me of getting drunk as often as I could get liquor, as two Alexander the Greats have been charged with the vice, I should perhaps have sat patient under the imputation, or even if you had given the plainest hints that I had stolen the soldier’s shirts, this I could have put up with, as the great Duke of Marlborough would have been an example, or if you had contented yourself with asserting that I was so abominable a sloven as never to part with my shirt until my shirt parted with me, the anecdote of my illustrious namesake (Charles XII) of Sweden would have administered some comfort to me. But the calumny you have, in the fertility of your malicious wit, chosen to invent is of so new, so unprecedented and so hellish a kind as would make Job himself swear like a Virginia colonel. * * * Is it possible that Miss Franks should assert in the presence of these respectable personages, that I wore green breeches patched with leather? To convict you, therefore of the falsehood of this most diabolical slander, to put you to eternal silence (if you are not past all grace) and to cover you with a much larger patch of infamy than you have wantonly endeavored to fix on my breeches, I have thought proper, by the advice of three very grave friends (lawyers and members of Congress, of course excellent judges in delicate points of honor) to send you the said breeches, and with the consciousness of truth on my side to submit them to the most severe inspection and scrutiny.’’

It is plain, from this jeu d’esprit, of which I only quote a small part, that General Lee sent the offending breeches to Miss Franks. As for that lady, her sense of humour was at first equal to that of Lee; she looked upon the whole affair as a bit of witty fooling. But finally, it would appear, some one persuaded her that
the General's letter and the documentary evidence accompanying it were an insult. When Lee heard of this he wrote her a proper apology in which he graciously said: "Upon the honor of an honest man, if I had thought a single sentence of this trash could have given you uneasiness, I would sooner have put my hand into the fire than have written it."

I am sure Philadelphia was thrilled by this correspondence and by the brashness of Charles Lee, and that many were the stories about it that went the rounds of the tea tables and caused some of the matrons to shake their heads and declare that "the General was a sad wag, and no one ever knew, forsooth, what he would say or do next!"

In the fall of 1782, late September, General Lee came up to Philadelphia for a visit, and put up at an humble little inn, "The Sign of the Conestoga Wagon," which Joseph Jackson tells us, in his valuable history of "Market Street," was on the site of the present 410 Market Street. Philadelphia did not flock to his doors; he must have looked a rather pathetic figure in his downfall, as he walked up and down High Street (as Market Street was then called) and was doubtless pointed out by happy fathers to their sons as the man who caused the serene Washington to lose his temper at Monmouth Court House. There was one old friend who was still faithful, however, and that was Colonel Eleazar Oswald, who had served under him in more glorious times. When Lee was taken down with a high fever, as he was two or three days after his arrival, it was Oswald who attended upon him and who heard the last words he uttered in his delirium. "Stand by me, my brave grenadiers!" Like Benedict Arnold, his last thoughts were of the army, to which he had once been an adornment.

He died on October 2, 1782, at the age of fifty-one, and while he died under a cloud, it can hardly be said, as
Charles Lee.

has been said, that he died literally without one friend. *The Pennsylvania Gazette* for the ninth of October has the following notice: "On Wednesday evening last, departed this life, after a short illness, * * * Charles Lee, Esq., Major-General in the Polish service, and formerly a major-general in the service of the United States. His remains were conducted on Friday morning, with military honors, from the City Tavern, attended by a large concourse of gentlemen of distinction and deposited in Christ Church yard."

There is no question but that Lee was buried with honors, and that many eminent persons went to the funeral services, among them the President of Congress and all the French visitors then in Philadelphia.

You may notice an apparent discrepancy in the record that the General died in the "Sign of the Conestoga Wagon" but was buried from the City Tavern. Joseph Jackson has a theory which probably clears up the matter. The City Tavern, he tells me, "was on the site of the United States Bonded Stores, on Second Street, west side, north of Walnut. It was at this time (1782) the principal public house in the city, the scenes of banquets and musicales, the headquarters of the political, business and other interests of the city. It very well might have been regarded a more fitting place for the funeral of a distinguished character than the very modest tavern on Market, where it is said Lee died."

As Lee’s grave is unmarked, and I had no idea as to exactly where it was in the old yard of Christ Church, I wrote to the Rector, the Reverend Doctor Louis C. Washburn, who very kindly referred me to the book entitled "*A Record of Inscriptions,*" etc., compiled by Edward L. Clark in 1864. On Page 13 is this entry: "The remains of Major General Charles Lee are supposed to rest beneath this spot."
indicated is just outside the church building on the south, by the west door) * * * "No stone marked his grave, but tradition placed it next to the grave of General Mercer near the old wall adjoining Church Alley. In 1861 Church Alley was ordered to be widened by action of our courts, thus cutting off about eight feet of the church yard, which is now occupied by the outer sidewalk. All the remains of those who had been interred in this strip of ground were carefully removed and deposited in new coffins immediately next to the Church building. The remains of General Lee were removed and re-interred at the spot designated." That is, between the first and second windows east of the southwest door of the church.

Perhaps you will think it rather curious and paradoxical that Charles Lee ended his earthly career in consecrated ground when I read you this clause from his last will and testament: "I desire most earnestly that I may not be buried in any church or church yard, or within a mile of any Presbyterian or Anabaptist meeting house, for since I have resided in this country I have kept so much bad company when living, that I do not choose to continue it when dead."

But for my part I deem General Lee very fortunate to have been buried among all those worthies of Christ Church whose ashes are reposing in the picturesque old yard, and I think he got a "good burying" (as Sir Lucius O'Trigger would call it) that he didn't deserve. I suppose if Lee had had his way, he would have been planted beside his dogs and horses down on his Berkeley estate in Virginia. One third of this estate, I may add, he left to Jacob Morris, of Philadelphia, one third to Evans Edwards, both his former aides, and one third between William Goddard of Baltimore and Colonel Oswald. The rest of his property went to his sister, Sidney Lee.

Before I finish my attempt to sketch Charles Lee's
stormy career, let me remind you that he once claimed to be the real author of the "Letters of Junius," and that his claims were given very grave consideration. To the present generation, the name of "Junius"—that mysterious master of political invective who once startled the world—to the present generation the name of "Junius" means little or nothing. The interest in his identity is purely academic. But it was not thus in the past, and hundreds of books or pamphlets were written to prove that this, that or some other person was the inscrutable "Junius." The older generation will understand that the "Letters" of "Junius" had a definite object—to discredit the ministry of the Duke of Grafton, which had been formed in October, 1768, when the great Lord Chatham was compelled by ill health to retire from office. "Junius" fought for the return to power of Chatham, who had recovered and was not on good terms with his successors. The letters are of interest to the student for three reasons: their political significance, their style and the mystery which still envelops their authorship—although the generally accepted theory now is that they were written by Sir Philip Francis. Nevertheless, it is worth noting, if only for a moment, that there lie mouldering by the walls of old Christ Church the remains of a man who once said, in effect: "I, Major-General Charles Lee, am Junius!"

The friend to whom he said this was Colonel Thomas Rodney, of Delaware. Now Lee was what we would nowadays call a highly picturesque bluffer, but Rodney was of a different type and his story, as far as it goes, is entitled to absolute credence. So when he published a letter on the subject in the Wilmington Mirror, dated Dover, February 1st, 1803, people believed the writer, however much they might distrust what Lee told him, for they knew Rodney as a gallant officer in the Revolution, an intimate friend of Washington, a delegate
to the Continental Congress in 1781 and later, and a brother of Cæsar Rodney, the signer of the Declaration who took the famous ride from Delaware to Philadelphia in order that he might arrive in time to make his colony safe for Independency.

"In the fall of 1773," writes Rodney, "not long after General Lee had arrived in America, I had the pleasure of spending an afternoon in his company, when there were no other persons present. Our conversation chiefly turned on politics, and was mutually free and open. Among other things, the letters of 'Junius' were mentioned, and General Lee asked me, who was conjectured to be the author of these letters? I replied, our conjectures here generally followed those started in England, but, for myself, I concluded, from the spirit, style, patriotism, and political information which they displayed, that Lord Chatham was the author; and yet there were some sentiments there that indicated his not being the author. General Lee immediately replied, with considerable animation, affirming that to his certain knowledge, Lord Chatham was not the author; neither did he know who the author was, any more than I did; that there was not a man in the world, no, not even Woodfall, the publisher, that knew who the author was; that the secret rested solely with himself, and forever would remain with him.

"Feeling in some degree surprised at this unexpected declaration, after pausing a little, I replied: 'No, General Lee, if you certainly know what you have affirmed, it can no longer remain solely with him; for certainly no one could know what you have affirmed but the author himself. Recollecting himself, he replied: 'I have unguardedly committed myself, and it would be but folly to deny to you that I am the author; but I must request that you will not reveal it during my life; for it never was nor never will be revealed by me to any other!'

Soon after the publication of this letter, Thomas
Rodney obtained a Federal judgeship and went to Mississippi, where the town of Rodney was named in his honor, and it is a tradition in my family that he died quite convinced that Lee and "Junius" were one and the same. His letter was republished in the *St. James Chronicle*, of London, and created a very respectable commotion. Indeed, a certain Dr. Thomas Girdlestone, of Yarmouth, England, published in 1813 a book entitled: "Facts Tending to Show That General Lee was never Absent from This Country for Any Length of Time during the Years 1767, 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, and That He was the Author of Junius." It has for a frontispiece a copper plate portrait of Lee which is said to have been the best likeness of him extant, and which depicts him as a very scrawny, long-legged man, dressed in full uniform, with a huge nose and sardonic expression of countenance, and in front of him one of his favorite dogs—an animal that suggests a cross breed between a pomeranian and a black pig.

After trying to prove great similarity between the handwriting of Lee and "Junius," Dr. Girdlestone observes that the General was often in England when he was supposed to be on the continent, at the time that the Letters of "Junius" were appearing, and he says: "Lee supported an alibi not only by a series of fictitiously dated letters from different parts of the continent, but by occasional trips to Paris, and to other parts, where he could mix with the English, and pretend to be on his return from his Polish campaigns, or from such parts of Italy or France, as his health might have required him to visit."

In the course of a detailed argument, with which I shall not bore you, the author gives us an amusing glimpse of Lee which I may venture to quote. Girdlestone merely mentions it to prove that Lee was frequently in England during the summer of 1770. He says: "A person who is still living * * * perfectly recollects to have accompanied General Lee, Colonel
Butler and Sir Charles Davers to Rushbrooke Church, about May, 1770, as sponsors to his eldest son, Captain Charles Sydney Davers, * * * and that just as the baptism was finished, an ass came from the churchyard up to the font, which circumstance occasioned General Lee to make such ludicrous observations as could never be forgotten by those who had been present. * * * The person who was at the baptism declares that General Lee was moving from and to Rushbrooke the greatest part of the summer, that when at Rushbrooke he was constantly writing with books and papers before him, and that he was a terrible nuisance to the cook, for he had chosen the kitchen for his place to write in, and that his night cap and dressing gown were only taken off a few minutes before the dinner was ready to be served upon the table."

No wonder that Charles Lee was not a favorite with the ladies when he had such untidy habits. I am compelled to believe that Miss Franks spoke truth when she accused the General of having a patch on those green breeches.

As for Dr. Girdlestone, I have gone over his arguments very carefully, and find them far-fetched and inconclusive. I am inclined to share the popular opinion that Sir Philip Francis was "Junius."

Lee's faults, and particularly that vanity which was his undoing, brought their own punishment. He had hoped to supplant Washington and go down to the ages in the army of conquering heroes. Had he been content to be Washington's faithful lieutenant his name would have been inscribed on an imperishable roll of honor. But how different was the outcome. A disgrace by court-martial, treason, bitter disappointment, and now obscurity. If, perchance, his spirit ever revisits the glimpses of the moon, and looks in some night upon Christ Church yard, let him be thankful that he lies there in such good company, despite that sneering command in his last will and testament.