



CHATHAM, OPPOSITE FREDERICKSBURG, ALSO KNOWN AS THE "LACY HOUSE." (FROM A WAR-TIME PHOTOGRAPH.)

LEE AT FREDERICKSBURG.

AS a general staff-officer thrown into relations confidential and intimate with our Confederate leaders, I had exceptional advantages for observation from behind the scenes of the incidents and actors in what was certainly one of the grandest dramas ever enacted upon the trembling stage of human affairs.

On the 10th of December, 1862, I was sent by Major-General Gustavus W. Smith, upon whose staff I was serving, as bearer of dispatches to General Robert E. Lee. I informed General Lee that I had leave of absence for several days, and he kindly invited me to remain as his guest at his headquarters. I felt highly honored by the invitation, but the experience of one meal was enough. Rye coffee, heavy biscuits, and poor, tough beef I thought would hardly compensate for the honor of dining with the commander-in-chief. The night of the 10th I spent in Fredericksburg with my brother, the Rev. B. T. Lacy, D. D. (afterwards corps chaplain for General Stonewall Jackson), at the house of a dear friend and connection, where a company of young ladies had gathered to listen to my brother, a noted *raconteur*. It was very late before we retired.

Before daylight I was awakened by the sound of three unshotted guns, which I had been informed at headquarters was the battle signal. "I gat up and gat" without much regard to the order of my going. As I left the house the heavy roar of the cannonade and the rattle of musketry told that the fight had begun and the Federals were laying down their pontoons. Barksdale's Mississippi Brigade was intrenched along the banks of the Rappahannock. A terrible artillery fire was opened from the Stafford Heights, to protect and cover the parties who were laying down

the bridges. Taking only a bird's-eye view of the situation, I double-quickened it out of the doomed town. The streets were swept by a hail-storm of grape and shrapnel. Chimneys came toppling down. Houses were in flames—a plank fence behind which I was retreating was suddenly swept away, and then, as the soldier said, "the first thing I knew, I didn't know nothing."

When I returned to consciousness I found myself lying prone on the frozen earth in a little gully. The crepuscular dawn of that cold gray morning was then more illumined by flashes fitfully bursting through sulphurous smoke than by that morning radiance which poets love to sing. Closely hugging the ground, I at length proceeded deliberately to investigate my condition. I felt certain that I was desperately wounded. Putting my hands upon my throbbing temples, I saw even in the dim light that they were red with blood. I soon found, however, that my head was about in its normal condition, and the thought occurred that I had probably been knocked down by the wind from a solid shot and that the blood was from my hands, torn by contact with the ice and splinters when I fell. Perceiving a lull in the storm, I arose and made a bee-line for the western hills and the Army of Northern Virginia.

I first came upon a Georgia regiment. Their camp-fires were still burning brightly, and the men had just finished breakfast. Recognizing my uniform, they kindly invited me to the fire. A dispute was evidently going on as to whether Burnside would attack Lee in that position. Finally a lieutenant was called up to hold the stakes, and two very dirty soldiers, clad in the Georgia butternut

home-spun, wagered fifty dollars in "Confed" or, as they stated it, whether "Burnside would be such a — fool as to make a real sure-enough attack on 'Mas Bob,' when anybody must know he had the dead wood on him."

Just then the long roll sounded for five miles around the semicircle of hills that look down on Fredericksburg. Sauntering up slowly, and with deliberate and indifferent talk about the small commonplaces of their monotonous camp life, the butternuts took their muskets from where they were stacked and lazily formed the line of battle. At that moment a woman young and pretty, with two little girls clinging to her skirts and a baby pressed to her bosom, suddenly met that serried line. With streaming eyes and impassioned utterance she cried, "Southern soldiers, my husband is somewhere in your army, my home is in flames down there; will you let those people follow me as I pass your lines to find shelter for myself and little children with a friend?" Then with erect front, the response, as the ranks parted to let her pass, was the wild battle-cry of the Army of Northern Virginia, which, caught up by each regiment, brigade, and division, rose high above the roll of drums, and sweeping around that semicircle of hills, was not heard with indifference by the distant foe.

Ascending the heights, I soon reached what was called the headquarters battery of General Lee. Afar across the valley and river in the gray light of the early morning could be seen the white porches of my home, Chatham, made historic by Federal army correspondents, as the "Lacy House." The porches were filled with officers and gayly dressed women, and from half a score of brass bands rang out across the valley "Yankee Doodle" and "Hail, Columbia!" The commanding officer of the battery asked me if I would permit him to scatter the unbidden guests at my home. At his request I asked General Lee to authorize the fire of the heavy guns, which would have laid Chatham in the dust. With a smile he refused, and asking me to walk with him, we withdrew a short distance. He then motioned me to sit by him on the trunk of a large tree.

Looking across at Chatham through his field-glass he said, "Major, I never permit the unnecessary effusion of blood. War is terrible enough, at its best, to a Christian man; I hope yet to see you and your dear family happy in your old home. Do you know I love Chatham better than any place in the world except Arlington! I courted and won my dear wife under the shade of those trees. By the way, not long since I was riding out with my staff, and observing how your grand old trees had been cut down by those people,

I saw that a magnificent tulip poplar at the head of the ravine, north of the house, was still standing, and, with somewhat of your rhetoric, I said to Venable and Taylor: 'There is nothing in vegetable nature so grand as a tree. Grappling with its roots the granite foundations of the everlasting hills, it reaches its sturdy and gnarled trunk on high, spreads its branches to the heavens, casts its shadow on the sward, and the birds build their nests and sing amid its umbrageous foliage. Behold, the monarch stripped of attendants and guards awes the vandal by the simple majesty of his sublime isolation.' Pocketing my field-glass, and riding on, I heard mingled with laughter a request from the young gentlemen that I would bring my glass to bear once more on the monarch of the forest. I looked, and even while I had been talking the axe of the vandal was laid to the root, and the monarch had fallen."

Then, moved by emotion unusual to his calm and equable nature, he continued, "I had three hundred acres of woodland at Arlington. Serving the United States Government for many years on the frontier, I marked with my own hand each tree that was to be used for timber or fuel. They tell me all my trees are gone — yours are all gone"; then rising from the log, with a fire and a passion rarely witnessed in him, and with all the majesty of his sublime presence, he said: "Major, they have our *trees*; they shall never have the *land*!"

Three years after the close of the war I was a visitor at the home of General Lee, then president of Washington and Lee University. After dinner the general retired, and I was invited to see Mrs. Lee in her chamber. She was a great sufferer and confirmed invalid, incapable of motion save in a roller-chair, which it was the chief delight of him who had so long directed great armies to move from room to room, bending over her with the grace of a Sidney and the devotion of a youthful lover. I told Mrs. Lee the story which I have so imperfectly attempted to reproduce. Need I tell any woman who reads these pages that tears streamed down that patient, furrowed face, or that a light and joy from beyond the stars beamed through those tears, as she knew that the thoughts of her great husband wandered far away from the clash of arms to the memories of their youthful love and courtship under the shade of her ancestral oaks, for Chatham was originally the property of a near relative. As I concluded the sentence, "They shall never have the land," hearing a slight noise, I turned and saw the general, who had silently entered, in dressing-gown and slippers. The great buck-shot drops slowly rolled down that face, whose calm

was never broken by the earthquake shock of battle. Slowly and silently he retired, and I could but feel the deepest compunction that words of mine should have sent another pang through that great heart. For then, looking up from the hell of Carpet-bag reconstruction, we verily thought that trees, land, country, liberty, all had gone forever.

That entire day at Fredericksburg was passed by me on the commanding height to which I have already alluded. Nearly one hundred and fifty guns poured a continuous cannonade upon the city. Yet Barksdale's gallant Mississippians for hours held the river bank, inflicting terrible loss upon those engaged in laying down the bridge. Nine times the enemy were driven back; a heavy detachment of infantry crossing in boats under protection of the cannonade at length forced them to fall back, which they did, fighting from house to house and street to street, and late at night were with difficulty recalled, like dogs that have tasted blood and are forced to quit the quarry.

The next day, the 12th, passed without anything I need dwell upon. That night I spent at the tent of my friend Colonel H. Coalter Cabell, and slept between Lieutenant Tom Tucker, son of my father's classmate and dearest friend, Judge Beverley Tucker of William and Mary College, and Captain King. The next day Tucker received a wound which lamed him for life, and of King, the record was written in blood: "Dead on the field of glory." Such is war.

The morning of the 13th of December opened warm and sultry. With the first flash of dawn I was again at the headquarters battery. A white fog covered the valley, through which the spires and chimneys of the town and the more distant Stafford Heights loomed vague and indistinct.

About nine A. M. this curtain of mist was suddenly lifted by a freshening western breeze. Then to the thousands of spectators along those heights was revealed probably as splendid a spectacle as ever greeted mortal vision. Just then I again heard a cheer, which swept around the semicircle of hills. A horseman came riding up at full speed, with cap in hand and bowed head, and a youth in a gray roundabout followed hard after. That horseman was "Stonewall Jackson," and that youth I have since come to know as his aide-de-camp, Captain (now the Reverend) J. P. Smith, the husband of my eldest daughter.

Soon after, a courier brought me an order from General Gustavus W. Smith to return immediately to Richmond. I had to walk along our lines six miles to the nearest point to which the railroad came. I well remem-

ber the sole came entirely off one boot. Just in front of me along that whole line came the roar of the great battle. Above the thunder of the artillery and rattle of musketry, I could hear the deep huzzas of the Federals, the shrill battle-cry of the Confederates, and the "shouting of the captains." Weared and exhausted, I reached the train which was being rapidly crowded with the wounded.

When the train reached Richmond, I was met by a member of our staff who informed me that my servant, baggage, and horses were on another train; and in two minutes I was speeding southward. When we reached Goldsboro, North Carolina, our ears were saluted with the familiar sound of battle in which it was my duty immediately to take part. Then was forced upon me the solemn reflection: How far-reaching were the issues of the great sectional contest! How wide, wasting, ruthless, and devastating was this war!

Let me give one more anecdote of our great chieftain. My authority is Colonel Carter M. Braxton, in command of a regiment of artillery at Appomattox. He had heard of the surrender, and riding across the field, just as he passed over a hill he saw a crowd of soldiers, and thought it probable they had gathered around some wounded officer. Riding up, to his great surprise he saw that General Lee was the center of the group. The general at once recognized him and motioned him to advance; giving his horse in charge of a soldier he pressed through the throng. General Lee said, "Colonel, will you be so kind,—" and Braxton says the words almost broke his heart; no command, only a request,— "will you be so kind as to see General Alexander or Pendleton, and have the artillery parked in accordance with the terms of my surrender?" Then, in the crowd who pressed around like children in the dark clinging to the hand or skirts of the father, a man he took for a negro pressed so close that he held him back with outstretched arm. When General Lee used the word surrender, the man cried with impassioned utterance, "General, take back that word; it is unworthy of you and of us. I have a wife and five children in Georgia; I have made up my mind to die, but not to surrender." Braxton looked, and "something on the soldier's cheek had washed off the stain of powder." General Lee placed his arm around the neck of that dirty but brave and magnanimous soldier, and with tears streaming down his face he said, "We have done all brave men can do. If I permitted another man to be slain, I would be a murderer. Go home to your wife and children; whatever may be my fate, you will be safe by the terms of your parole. God bless you all.

Farewell." Leaving the crowd slowly and sadly with bowed head and breaking heart, he sought the shelter of his tent.

Let me now relieve this tragedy, which deeply moves me, if it does not my readers, by an anecdote which gives a comic touch to the strange, eventful scene. The gallant soldier, the genial gentleman, and the now honored governor of Virginia will enjoy a good joke as much as any living man, even if the laugh is against him. My authority is General Jubal A. Early. General Lee gave to "Fitz," as we love to name him, the command of three brigades of infantry in addition to his division of cavalry, and assigned to him the post of honor and danger as the rear-guard of the army on the retreat from Richmond. Sheridan pressed remorselessly on the rear. There was continuous fighting. There were no commissary trains, and the army which preceded them had stripped the country of all supplies for man or beast. Yet the cavalry of Fitz knew pretty well how to take care of themselves under the most adverse circumstances, and spreading out, they made out to live, and to do a great deal of hard fighting. An abnormal thing, unknown to naturalists through the ages, occurred during the closing scenes of our Civil War. The animal creation seemed infected by the madness of the hour. The sheep, usually the most innocent and inoffensive of animals, would rush upon a Confederate soldier, and it is established by the testimony of thousands of credible witnesses that many a sheep had to be slain by the soldiers in self-defense. The same strange malady had attacked pigs, geese, turkeys, and chickens long before. A portion of Fitz's cavalry, being thus assailed, slew and eat six or eight sheep belonging to an Amelia farmer, broke into his corn-crib, and, parching the corn on the cob, so strengthened the inner man that they were able to fight next day like their old baronial ancestors, whose mouths had once been filled with boar's meat and red wine. A small company returning not long after, the old man left his plow in the furrow, and, shuffling up to his worm-fence, inquired if General Lee had gained another victory. They replied, "No, no, old man, all is lost; the Yankees have whipped us at last, and General Lee has surrendered." "I don't believe a word of it," replied the old Virginia farmer. "General R. E. Lee never surrenders. You must mean that man, Fitz Lee, they call a general; I am glad he and his thieving cavalry have surrendered, but the real General Lee never surrenders"; and returning to his old Watts plow, the last they heard was, addressing an old wall-eyed, switch-tail bag of bones, "Well, Skewball, you are all the Yankees left me, but we'll

tickle our good Amelia ground and make bread for Kitty and the children. We'll win the fight yet. General Lee hasn't surrendered; it's only that bummer Fitz!"

I am the more moved to send you these reminiscences, as in the providence of God your magazine occupies the foremost place as the great pacificator between the North and the South, holding the even scales of equal and exact justice, and pouring light on every act and incident of the great Civil War. You have not raked amid the deceitful ashes of the past, to bring together upon the altar of sectional hate the live coals of that fire which once burnt all too fiercely, but ever by kind, fair, and impartial utterances, giving both sides an equal show, you have poured oil upon the troubled waters and deserve that benediction which rests upon the peacemaker. It will not be long, as time is counted in the life of a nation, before the question will not be asked, Did he wear the blue or gray? or fight under Grant or Lee? but rather, Did he obey the convictions of conscience and sternly follow the dictates of duty? was he willing to sacrifice life for principle? Did he illustrate American character and valor, and add to the proud heritage of his country's glory?

My friend and classmate, General James L. Kemper, the gallant soldier who, leading his division up the rugged steep of Gettysburg, fell shot nigh to death, lived afterward to utter as Governor of the Commonwealth these words at the inauguration of the statue of Stonewall Jackson:

"Sooner shall the sun reverse his course in the heavens, than his comrades and his compatriot people prove recreant to the parole and contract of honor which binds them in the fealty of freedom to the Constitution and union of the States. We have buried the strifes and passions of the past, we now perpetuate impartial honor to whom honor is due, and, stooping to resent no criticism, we stand, with composure and trust, ready to greet every token of just and constitutional pacification. While calmly differing as to the past, neither will defile its record; each will assert its manhood, its rectitude and honor, and both will equally and jointly strive to consolidate the liberty and the peace, the strength and the glory, of a common and indissoluble country."

Oh, brothers and compatriots in this Republic, let us all echo in the silent chambers of the soul the still, small voice which speaks from the grave of the old hero who sleeps on the heights of Riverside Park: "Let us have peace."

J. Horace Lacy.