Author: Gary Scott at NP-NCRO-FIN
Date: 6/15/1999 8:33 AM
Normal
TO: Kay Fanning at NP-NCRO-DS
Subject: Re: question
---------- Message Contents

"Old Arlington" The Story of the Lee Mansion National Memorial
by Murray H. Nelligan

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service, National Capital Parks
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---------- Reply Separator ----------
Subject: question
Author: Kay Fanning at NP-NCRO-DS
Date: 6/14/1999 4:58 PM

Gary, in the small library we've started here at 800 North Capitol, I've come across a 500-page history of Arlington House, in a looseleaf binder, lacking a title page. Do you have any idea of who wrote it and when, and what the title is? and what the purpose was?

Kay

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FOREWORD

In order to preserve, maintain and interpret the important historic sites and structures embraced in the National Park System, the most complete, accurate and reliable information obtainable by thorough research is needed.

Arlington House--now the Lee Mansion National Memorial--has long been one of the most conspicious buildings in the Washington scene, directly associated with some of the most important figures and events in our national history. Yet, surprisingly little was definitely known about it, its former occupants, or the events that transpired there. Information concerning its origins and construction was meager, to say the least; there was some question as to whether the mansion could be rightfully considered the former home of Robert E. Lee; and there was considerable doubt as to the character and achievements of its builder, Lee's father-in-law, George Washington Parke Custis. Also many of the less important aspects of the mansion's history were confused or lost in a tangle of myths, conjectures, and assumptions. To settle these questions and incidentally obtain authentic information upon which to base preservation and restoration policies, this study was undertaken.

Though undoubtedly many family letters, and pertinent legal documents were dispersed or lost during the Civil War, more than enough survive to give a reasonably accurate and complete picture of Arlington in its heyday. As one might expect, the largest and most important collection of Custis and Lee family documents are in the Virginia Historical Society, the Virginia State Library, the University of

Virginia, and the Library of Congress, with less voluminous, but also important collections at the Huntington Library and Duke University. Smaller collections are owned by the New York Historical Society, the New York Public Library, Harvard University, Boston Public Library, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and William and Mary College. The large and especially well-organized collection of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association deserves special mention, and much useful information was found in that of the Robert E. Lee Memorial Foundation, as well as in a number of smaller ones, such as the records of the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Shop, Alexandria, Va. Voluminous official government records, mostly in the National Archives, throw much light on the Civil War and post-war history of Arlington, as do contemporary photographs and maps there and at the Library of Congress. And since the Custises and the Lees were related to, or associated with many of the most prominent people of their times the letters and diaries of these contain many references to Arlington.

A great deal of information was found in published sources--biographies, guidebooks, newspaper and magazine articles, and travel accounts. Fortunately, Arlington House was of great interest to travellers from an early date, so descriptions of it are fairly numerous; and since G. W. P. Custis was a person of considerable local, and to a lesser extent national importance, as well as an inveterate contributor on a variety of subjects to the newspapers, a search of their files proved richly rewarding, especially those of the National Intelligencer in the Library of Congress and of course the Alexandria Gazette. In many ways, this part of the research was the most fascinating, akin to treasure-hunting, for one never knew what might be found on the next

page--or the next.

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Murray H. Nelligan

Washington, D. C.
January 1, 1955

CHAPTER I

"A FARMER, EXCEPT WHEN A SOLDIER."

The young man rose in his stirrups for a better look at the land he intended for his family seat, a handsome picture as he gazed about. Warm sunshine made his deep-set eyes even bluer, while his healthily tanned, almost olive complexion showed him accustomed to the outdoors. A thin, high-arched nose gave an aristocratic cast to his fine features and the cut and quality of his riding clothes denoted a gentleman. His air was one of being pleased with the world and assured of its being pleased with him, an attitude justified by the fact that few young men in Virginia had more possessions or better prospects than he, John Parke Custis, in this year 1778.[1]

Like most Virginians of his class, Jackey Custis-as he was familiarly known-had a sound knowledge of land and land use, and it was with a practiced eye that he surveyed the woods and fields about him-"a farmer, except when a soldier," his grand-daughter's husband would term him many years later.[2]

It would be a good plantation, he thought. The wide Potomac behind him teemed with fish waiting to be caught and sold or used as food for his host of slaves. On it, he could ship his corn and wheat to markets in the colonies or overseas. The land itself was almost flat for about

[1]From two contemporary miniatures described in William Armstrong and Edmund Law Rogers, "Some New Washington Relics," Century Magazine, XL (May, 1890), 15, 25.

[2]Robert E. Lee to Mrs. Emily Miller, June 19, 1868, DeButts-Ely MSS, Library of Congress.

a half mile inland, rising almost imperceptibly to a range of steep hills. These, too, were now his and the level land on top of them for a half mile to the west. Most of it was covered by a virgin forest of great oaks, chestnuts, walnuts and beeches; near the river were a few small fields, cleared by tenants of the former owners. Even the extensive marshes along the river could be reclaimed by ditching and draining. Though the soil was not as fertile as elsewhere in Virginia, it could be highly productive when wisely used.

Naturally, he would build his house on one of the hilltops, well above the fever-ridden lowlands. One hill in particular, extending out a little beyond the others, promised the best view. The road down to the ferry would cross the primitive road that ran along the Virginia shore to Alexandria and thence to Mount Vernon, the home of his mother and stepfather. The property was exactly what he had long desired. Nor was there any use in quibbling about price and terms in these times, when the currency was steadily depreciating as the war against the mother country wore on.

After all, his guardian, General George Washington, had approved his purchase, though at first reluctant. He knew that his guardian wanted him to continue living at Mount Vernon; but now that children were coming along, the young man felt it was time to establish his own home.

Jack Custis could not recall his own father, Daniel Parke Custis. But he had heard enough about him from one person or another to know that he had been a handsome, mild-mannered man, well thought of in the neighborhood of Williamsburg, the capital of the colony of Virginia. He knew, too, that his father had had a deep affection for his family

one the more remarkable because his own childhood and youth were so deficient in that respect. Daniel's father, the fourth John Custis, had been a gifted man but choleric and eccentric, governing his only son with an iron hand even when he was a grown man. Daniel had been educated in England and was well versed in horticulture and botany; still, his father refused for years to trust even one of his plantations to his son's management.[3] Yet Daniel could manage an estate as well as the next man.

37 John Parke Custis 1749

John Custis was inordinately proud of his wealth and name--so much so, it looked as if Daniel would remain a bachelor forever because his father fancied no young lady good enough to carry on the Custis name. It occasioned no little comment, when in 1749, at the age of thirty-seven, Daniel began to court lovely eighteen-year old Martha Dandridge, daughter of a well-to-do New Kent County family.[4] Having had some experience with his father's proclivity for altering his will when piqued--on one occasion he had made a favorite Negro boy his heir, recanting only when the neighbors threatened to ostracize him--Daniel was afraid to approach his father directly for permission to marry, and instead sent a friend as an emissary. However, the crusty old gentleman seems to have been already won over by Martha's well-known charm and prudence. Nevertheless, Daniel thought it wise to heed his emissary's advice: "Hurry down Immediately for Fear he shou'd change the strong inclination he has to you Marrying directly."[5]

[3]For an excellent short biography of Daniel Parke Custis, see Douglas Southall Freeman, George Washington A Biography (4 vols. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948-1951), II, 298f, cited hereafter as Freeman, Washington. See also E. G. Swem, Brothers of the Spade (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1949), p. 28.

[4]Freeman, Washington, II, 292f.; George Washington Parke Custis, Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1860), p. 495, cited hereafter as Custis, Recollections.

[5]John Power to D. P. Custis, n. d., Custis MSS, Mount Vernon.

A few months later, John Custis died, and in the spring of 1750, Martha and Daniel were married.[6] They established their home at the White House plantation on the Pamunkey River, where during seven years of married life four children were born to them. According to family tradition, it was the loss of the two eldest that caused the father to sicken and die in 1757.[7]

Daniel having died intestate, the management of his large estate devolved upon the young widow who demonstrated a surprising amount of business ability despite her youth. The responsibility was heavy for she was now one of the wealthiest women in the colony, and had the task of raising two small children, Jack and Martha.

Most of her fortune consisted of land and slaves, though several thousand pounds in Virginia currency in her iron treasure chest represented cash returns from the sale of tobacco and timber, rents paid by tenant farmers, and profits from fisheries, grist-mills and a number of other enterprises.[8] Like his ancestors, her husband believed that the amount of land he owned determined his position in society and provided the solid basis for the perpetuation of his name. Like them, he had carefully husbanded his inherited holdings, and added to them by judicious purchases, trades, and patents. Just how much Daniel owned at the time of his death is not known, but it is certain that he possessed more than 17,000 acres of the most valuable land in Virginia.[9]

One can be sure that the neighbors speculated as to whom the comely young widow would choose for her second husband, for no one expected her

[6]Custis, Recollections, p. 496, gives 1749 as the marriage date, as does Freeman, Washington, II, 294n. The date given here, 1750, is from the Custis Family Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[7]Eliza Parke Custis to David Baillie Warden, Apr. 20, 1808, quoted in William D. Hoyt, "Self-Portrait: Eliza Custis, 1808," Va. Mag. of His. and Bio., LIII (Apr., 1945), 91.

[8]Freeman, Washington, II, 294, 297, and 301.

[9]Eugene E. Prussing, The Estate of George Washington, Deceased (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1927), pp. 93-97; Swem, op. cit., 137. For the other Custis ancestors, see Appendix I.

to remain single. There could have been little surprise, therefore, when Colonel George Washington began paying his respects after a decorous interval.

How long the young officer had known Mrs. Custis is not clear, but so closely-knit was the society of their time, an acquaintance of long-standing may be assumed. At any rate, they became engaged in the spring of 1758 and were married a few months later in a small chapel not far from the White House plantation. Little John Parke Custis was not quite four when he arrived at his new home, Mount Vernon, a few weeks later; his sister Martha was only three. Too young to remember their own father, their hearts soon opened to the kindly man who was now their stepfather.

When he married the mother, Washington accepted her children without reservation, especially after it became apparent that he was not to have any children of his own. Never did he refer to them as "stepchildren"; instead they were simply "the children". Having already lost two little ones, his wife was inclined to be overly-concerned about John and Martha, especially when she left them at home while she and George went visiting. Thus she wrote to her sister, Nancy Bassett, in 1762:

> I had the pleasure to receive your Kind letter of the 25 of July just as I was setting out on a visit to Mr. Washington in Westmoreland where I spent a weak very agreabley I carred my little patt with me and left Jackey at home...though we ware gone but won fortnight I was quite impatiant to get home. If I at ancy time heard the dogge barke or a noise out, I thought thair was a person sent for me. I often fancied he was sick or some accident had happened to him so that I think it is impossible for me to leave him aslong as Mr. Washington must stay when he comes down...I think patty seems to be quite well now, Jackey is very thin but in good health, and learn thaire books very fast.[11]

[11] Aug. 28, 1762, quoted in Anne Hollingworth Wharton, Martha Washington (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), pp.56f.

Since one day Jackey would be a gentleman of considerable fortune, he was reared accordingly. His clothes were made in London, whence came also his toys, and later on his school books. A knowledge of classical literature was considered the basis of a gentleman's education at that time, and Washington's letters show that Jackey's tutor, Walter Magowan, had taught him to read by the time he was six and two years later had introduced him to the wisdom and grammatical complexities of such classical authors as Eutropius.[12] Magowan is said to have been a competent teacher, but grammar books and Latin dictionary could have held little appeal for an active little boy surrounded by the fascinating activities of a Virginia plantation. Wisely, the tutor did not press his pupil too hard, perhaps realizing that in effect the boy was getting a practical education in breeding, raising, and selling fine sheep, cattle and horses; raising wheat and corn and transforming it into flour and meal; learning how to turn trees into lumber, and how to manage the slave force.

Although Washington was to be perennially disappointed by his ward's indifference to his studies, he, too, may have realized how much he himself was instructing the lad who tagged along with him at every opportunity. Though well-read, Washington was eminently a practical man, and it is safe to say that both of them found the pocket-knives, the silver-mounted fowling piece, and the surveyor's instruments bought for Jackey in England more appealing than classical literature. Washington enjoyed hunting, and so did his ward, who also liked to accompany his guardian to Williamsburg when the General Assembly was

[12]Washington to Robert Cary & Co., Sept. 20, 1759, Oct. 12, 1761, Mar. 10, 1766, John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., The Writings of George Washington (39 vols. Washington, D. C.: Govt Printing Office, 1931-1940), II, 354, 369, 371, 482 respectively. This work is cited hereafter as Fitzpatrick, Writings.

in session, or go with him to inspect some of the Custis properties in that section--interruptions that could hardly have helped his studies.[13] Considering everything, it is rather remarkable that the boy was reading Virgil at the age of thirteen and the Greek Testament a year later.[14]

Jackey Custis was nearing thirteen when his tutor left for England, there to be ordained in the Episcopal Church. No suitable substitute being available, Washington decided to enroll him in a boy's school conducted by the Reverand Jonathan Boucher near Port Royal, Virginia. "He is a boy of good genius, about 14 yr. of age, untainted in his morals, and of excellent manners," wrote Washington. "He is a promising boy; the last of his family and will possess a very large Fortune; add to this my Anxiety to make him fit for more usefull purposes, than a horse Racer."

Jackey joined the Reverand Mr. Boucher's "little Flock"--as the minister called it--in the summer of 1768, only to be sent home a few weeks later with a "Pain in his Stomach." The schoolmaster's letter of explaination to the anxious parents not only reveals an extroadinary complacency to his pupil's well-being, but an even more remarkable educational philosophy; had they been wiser at the moment, the Washingtons might well have taken it as a storm warning and removed Jackey from the school. Jackie's ailment, stated the dominie, could only be attributed to worms, a craving for cucumbers, or a touch of the prevailing "Ague & Fever"; no doctor had been consulted because the boy was prone to expect medical assistance

[13] Same to same, July 20, 1767, ibid., II, 463f; and John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., The Diaries of George Washington (4 vols. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1925), I, 266. This work is cited hereafter as Fitzpatrick, Diaries.

[14] Washington to Jonathan Boucher, May 30, 1768, Fitzpatrick, Writings, II, 466-468.

[15] Ibid.

for "trifling" ailments, a weakness resulting from Jackey having been reared too carefully. Good manners, lack of guile, and a mild disposition were not enough for a rough world; what the boy needed was "some of ye. Wisdom of ye. Serpent."[16]

The day would come when the Reverand Mr. Boucher would be dismayed by how well the pupil had mastered the wisdom prescribed. But for some months all went well. Because of the isolated location of the school, distractions were few, and for a time it appeared that Jackey was losing his aversion to study. Of course, the teacher took credit for the improvement, but on what grounds it is difficult to say, for Boucher's concept of a gentleman's education was that held by the English upper classes of the time--that a gentleman should be well-read, but never to the point of being a mere scholar. He should also have travelled, and to that end Boucher advocated that Jackey attend King's College in New York City, or make a tour of Europe in the English manner--accompanied by his teacher.[17]

Jackey's guardian took his suggestions under consideration, but refused to make a quick decision. He was inclined to agree that a tour of the continent would indeed be a beneficial experience for his stepson; on the other hand, the trip would be very expensive and might subject the lad to serious temptations and dangers. Besides, he knew that his wife would be very reluctant to consent to such a long separation from the son she idolized.

While Washington pondered the question, Boucher accepted the rectorship of St. Anne's Parish at Annapolis, an opportunity he had long

[16]Jonathan Boucher to Washington, June 16, Aug. 2, Sept. 5, 1768, quoted in Stanislaus M. Hamilton, ed., Letters to Washington (5 vols. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1901), III, 316-318, 324-329.

[17]Same to same, July 20, 1769, and May 9, 1770, ibid., 359-361, and IV, 18f.

awaited. Since conducting a country boarding school was hardly to the taste of a "literary man" like himself, Boucher lost no time in dismissing all of his pupils except Jackey Custis, with whom he set out for his new post.[18] Annapolis, which he later described as "the gentoelist town in North America," was perfectly suited to his cultivated tastes, and he lost no time joining the social whirl of the bustling little town. He was soon intimate with "great officers of state, lawyers, physicians, and families of opulence and note;" frequented the theatre; wrote verses in honor of one of the actresses, and a prologue or two; and he helped to organize the Homony Club, a literary group devoted to "mirth and ingenious humor."[19] He also had his church and his duties as chaplain of the Lower House of the Legislature to keep him pleasantly on the run.

The pupil hastened to catch up with the teacher. Books were almost forgotten as Jackey savored the delights of the town--much to his stepfather's concern. "His mind [is] a good deal released from Study & more than ever turned to Dogs Horses and Guns; indeed upon Dress and Equipage, which till of late, he has discovered little inclination," Washington complained to Boucher, in December, 1770, after a visit home by Jackey.[20]

He was more perturbed at the rumors he heard of the remarkable progress his ward was making with the opposite sex. Boucher, too, professed astonishment. "I must confess to you," he explained to the lad's guardian, "I did not in my Life know a Youth so exceedingly indolent, or so surprisingly Voluptuous: one wd. suppose Nature had intended him for

[18] "Autobiography of Rev. J. Boucher," in Worthington C. Ford, ed., Letters of Jonathan Boucher to George Washington (Brooklyn, N. Y.: Historical Printing Club, 1899), 5.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Dec. 16, 1770, Fitzpatrick, Writings, III, 35f.

some Asiatic Prince." He attributed Jackey's transgressions to the sheltered life he had formerly led: never having experienced temptations, he had never learned to resist them, with the result that he was now learning all manner of dissipation from the towns-people. "One inspires him with a Passion for Dress--Another for Racing, Foxhunting &c," he wrote Washington. "Even the grave Coll: Sharpe, You see, led Him to Talk of Guns & Rifles, with much more Satisfaction than I can persuade him to talk of Books or literary Subjects." Fortunately, he had been able to break off a romantic affair with Sam Galloway's young and pretty daughter.[21]

Jack may have mended his ways somewhat, for there were no more such alarming reports during the following year. In the spring, he braved a small-pox epedemic at Baltimore to have himself innoculated, and fortunately had only a mild case from which he recovered quickly and without blemish--"this dreaded affair," as Boucher termed it, being kept from his mother until he was entirely well. His teacher was also happy to report that his studies were going well: "his improvements tho' not equal to what they might have been, are, I believe, not inferior to Those of any other Young Man so circumstanced. Nay, I will venture to say, He is a better Scholar than most of his Years & Standing."[22] Jackey was of the same opinion. "I can certainly write as good English, & spell, as well as most people...," he wrote home.[23]

Still, Washington was dissatisfied with his ward's studies. He thought again of sending him to tour Europe with his teacher, and as was his custom, canvassed family friends for their opinions, but could get no agreement. Not only would the trip be very expensive, but Jack's

[21] Dec. 18, 1770, Hamilton, op. cit., IV, 41-44.
[22] Boucher to Washington, Apr. 11, 19, and July 4, 1771, ibid., IV, 50ff., 54f., 75.
[23] J. P. Custis to Washington, Aug. 18, 1771, ibid., 80f.

sister Martha was showing symptoms of being seriously affected by epilepsy, making Mrs. Washington the more reluctant to expose her son to the risks entailed by a long voyage and an extended tour of the continent. Jack himself showed little interest in the project, so Washington decided to drop it for the moment, and consider Boucher's alternate proposal, that Jack attend King's College or the College of William and Mary at Williamsburg, to the end that he "be Educated a little in the World, as well as in Books..."

From their correspondance on this question, it is obvious that the two men were far from agreed on educational methods and objectives. Washington believed that disciplined, closely-supervised study would best develop a young man's character and abilities; Boucher that a worldly education after the English fashion was essential for a gentleman.[24] In the long run his philosophy would prevail, with the result, that Jackey would become a typical young gentleman of his class and section, with much the same interests as his guardian, but minus his strong character and driving ambition. With too many opportunities for diversion and too few for developing a character like that of his stepfather, Jack Custis could hardly have been otherwise--an extremely likeable, personable young gentleman with an unquenchable zest for the pleasant things of life.

At least posterity can be grateful to Jack's teacher for one thing--that he arranged for the American artist, Charles Wilson Peale, ~~to make~~ the first known portrait of George Washington, in the uniform of a colonel of the Virginia militia. Peale was a member of the Homony Club, and Boucher induced him to pass on some of Jack's efforts at painting, after

[24]Boucher to Washington, Nov. 19, 1771, Jan. 19, 1773, ibid., IV, 83-86, 175-180; and in Washington to Boucher, June 5, July 9, 1771, Fitzpatrick, Writings, III, 42-48, 48-53.

which it was easy to arrange for the artist to accompany him to Mount Vernon in June, 1772, when he painted the famous portrait.[25]

Boucher and Washington should not have been surprised--though they were--when Jack blithely announced the following spring that he intended to marry an Annapolis girl, Eleanor Calvert, and had already gained the consent of her parents. Her father, Benedict Calvert, was the natural son of the sixth Lord Baltimore, but this does not seem to have lessened the family's social position, for it was highly-respected in the neighborhood.[26] Nelly, as her friends called her, had grown up at Annapolis and "Mount Airy", her father's summer home near Upper Marlborough, Maryland, and the tradition of her loveliness is confirmed by a portrait made about this time. It shows a handsome young lady of slight figure wearing an open jacket over a riding habit, a boy's hat on her head. Nelly's gaze is direct and warm, and her expression bright and hopeful--qualities she is said to have retained all her life.[27]

The Washingtons were acquainted with the Calverts, so it was not as a stranger that Nelly's father, accompanied by Jack and Governor Eden of Maryland, journeyed to Mount Vernon to discuss the marriage prior to a formal exchange of letters.[28] Though piqued at Jack's failure to take him into his confidence, Boucher heartily endorsed his choice.

> Miss Nelly Calvert has Merit enough to fix Him, if any Woman can [he wrote to the lad's parents]. And I do, from the Fullness of a warm Heart, most Cordially congratulate his Mother & Yourself, as well as Him, on the Happiness of his

[25]Charles Coleman Sellers, The Artist of the Revolution: The Early Life of Charles Wilson Peale (Hebron, Conn.: Feather & Good, 1939), p. 108.

[26]Eleanor Calvert is usually described as the granddaughter of the sixth Lord Baltimore regardless of the ambiguous status of her father. For example, Douglas Southall Freeman, Robert E. Lee A Biography (4 vols. New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934-1935), I, 93n., thus describes her. This work is cited hereafter as Freeman, Lee. See also, Alice C. Torbert, Eleanor Calvert and Her Circle (New York: The William-Frederick Press, 1950), p. 4f.

[27]Mrs. R. E. Lee, in Custis, Recollections, 33.

[28]Fitzpatrick, Diaries, II, 105.

> having made this most pleasing of all Connexions with this the most Amiable young Woman I have almost ever known. I know Her well and can truly say, She is all that the Fondest Parent can wish for a darling Child. [29]

Aside from their youth, Washington had no serious objection to the engagement.[30] Though not a rich man, Nelly's father was a man of importance in his section and an able, upstanding farmer. He frankly admitted that he thought his daughter was making a good match, and was confidant she would make a good wife. "It has ever been the Endeavour of her Mother and me to bring her up in such a manner, as to insure the happiness of her future Husband." However, he agreed that it might be wise to test the strength of the attachment by sending Jack for a time to King's College in New York City.[31] Jack is said to have refused at first to be parted from his fiancee, consenting only when she, too, urged him to complete his education before getting married.[32]

To see that Jack got a good start at King's College, Washington went with him to New York, where he saw him enrolled and settled in comfortable quarters before returning home.[33] College life was a new experience for Jack, who for the first time found his days ordered by a strict academic discipline. His room was neat and plainly furnished, and somewhat to his surprise he quickly grew accustomed to rising at six, studying throughout the day and going to bed at an early hour.[34] So rapid was his progress, he could truthfully boast to his parents that he had learned more there in two months than in the preceeding eight. His

[29] Boucher to Washington, Apr. 8, 1774, Hamilton, op. cit., IV, 191, 194.

[30] Washington to B. Calvert, Apr. 3, 1774, Fitzpatrick, Writings, III, 129f.

[31] B. Calvert to G. Washington, Apr. 8, 1774, Hamilton, op. cit., IV, 188.

[32] Hoyt, op. cit., Va. Mag. of His. & Bio., LIII, 91.

[33] Washington to Earl Dunmore, Aug. 13, 1773, Fitzpatrick, Writings, III, 132f; Diaries, II, 110-113.

[34] Rev. M. Cooper to Washington, July 2, 1773, Hamilton, op. cit., IV, 226f.

teachers confirmed glowing accounts. According to Dr. Cooper, President of the College, Jack's "Assiduity hath been equal to his Rectitude of Principle; and it is hoped his Improvements in Learning have not been inferior to either."[35]

Meanwhile, Nelly Calvert was frequently visiting Mount Vernon. She was there when Patsy died suddenly, in fact, was the one to find the unfortunate girl dying in her room, to which she had gone to get a letter from Jack.[36] Her death put the quietus to Jack's studies, for he had been extremely fond of his sister. When he arrived home, in September, he announced that he would not return to school, and since his mother sided with him, Washington perforce gave in.[37] It was a regrettable decision, inasmuch as he had done well at King's College, demonstrating a steadiness and degree of application hitherto missing in his character. Had he returned and continued to develop along this new pattern, the course of his life might have been decidedly different.

Once it had been definitely decided that Jack's schooling was finished, his guardian sought to prepare him for the responsibilities he would have when he reached his majority and came into his share of the Custis properties and the £8000 he had coming from the estate of his deceased sister. It was for this reason that Washington took Jack and Nelly with him to Williamsburg in the fall, so that they could visit the Custis properties thereabouts.[38]

[35]Same to same, Sept. 20, 1773, and J. P. Custis to Washington, July 5, 1773, and to Martha Washington, same date, ibid., IV, 230-235, 262.

[36]Hoyt, op. cit., Va. Mag. of His. & Bio., LIII, 92; Fitzpatrick, Diaries, II, 114ff.; Washington to Burwell Bassett, June 19, 1773, Fitzpatrick, Writings, III, 139.

[37]Washington to M. Cooper, Dec. 15, 1773, Apr. 15, 1774, Fitzpatrick, Writings, III, 167f., 207.

[38]Same to R. Cary & Co., Nov. 10, 1773, ibid., III, 164f. Also, Fitzpatrick, Diaries, II, 128 and n.

Upon their return home, the young couple set a date for the wedding, and on the evening of the appointed day, February 3, 1774, the Calverts and their friends gathered in the great hall of Mount Airy for the ceremony. Dressed in white, as was the fashion, the bride and groom must have looked like two handsome children as they took their vows.[39] Jack's mother was still in mourning and did not attend the ceremony, but she welcomed the bride into her family with a letter which still glows with kindl warmth after almost two centuries:

> My Dear Nelly:
>
> God took from Me a Daughter when June Roses were blooming-He has now given me another daughter, about her Age when Winter Winds are blowing, to warm my Heart again. I am as Happy as One so Afflicted and so Blest can be. Pray receive my Benediction and a Wish that You may long live the Loving Wife of my happy Son, and a Loving Daughter of
>
> Your Affectionate Mother,
> M. Washington. [40]

A week or two later, Jack brought his bride home to Mount Vernon, where they planned to stay for the time being.[41] Naturally, their parents wanted them to settle near home; but unfortunately most of Jack's lands, or rather those he would inherit, were some miles southeast of Richmond, and to manage them efficiently he would have to live in that vicinity. To maintain his fortune, and if possible increase it, worn-out lands would have to be sold, new and fertile lands acquired, and scattered tracts grouped together for economy of operation. That his

[39] No contemporary account of the wedding is known to exist. Hoyt, op. cit., Va. Mag. of His. & Bio., LIII, 92, is the source for the dress of the bride and groom.

[40] Quoted in Benson J. Lossing, Mary and Martha, The Mother and the Wife of George Washington (New York: Harper & Bros., 1886), 127f., from "the original at Arlington." Freeman, Washington, II, 344n., on the basis of internal evidence, concludes that the letter is a forgery; however, it seems more likely that Lossing "improved" the grammar and spelling out of respect for Mrs. Washington.

[41] Fitzpatrick, Diaries, II, 145.

guardian bought a large plantation in King William County for him about this time indicates there was some expectation that the young couple would live near Williamsburg.[42]

Washington was in Williamsburg, in May, when word came that the port of Boston was to be closed to commerce as punishment for the famous "Tea Party." Like most of his friends he strongly resented this latest example of British high-handedness, and therefore approved the action of the House of Burgesses in joining the other colonies to protest it. Likewise, he deplored the Governor's action in summarily dissolving the legislature.

He had long been aware of the storm brewing. Like most of the conservative members of his class, he hopsd that the differences between the American colonies and the mother country would be settled peaceably, but at the same time was determined that the colonies should not accept the principle that Parliament had the power to tax them regardless of their long asserted right of voting their own taxes. The French no longer menaced the frontiers; why, then, should large British forces be maintained in the colonies? Nor had his own experiences with the overbearing and patronizing attitude assumed by many British officials and regular army officers endeared them to him.

Upon his return home, he attended a meeting in Alexandria at which he and his neighbor, George Mason of "Gunston Hall," were chosen to draft a set of resolutions on the state of affairs. "The Fairfax Resolves," as they were called, conveyed the sympathy and support of the citizens of that county for the people of Massachusetts and set forth a plan for collecting funds for the relief of beleaguered Boston. Jack

[42]A deed dated Aug. 3, 1795, and recorded in Register of Deeds, Richmond, Va., conveys the property bought by John P. Custis, Apr. 20, 1774, from George and Martha Washington to George W. P. Custis, photostat in Misc. MSS, U. of Va.

J P Custis

accompanied his guardian when the "resolves" were presented to the convention that met in Williamsburg early in August, but stayed home when his guardian, along with Patrick Henry and Edmund Pendleton set off for Philadelphia to attend the session of the First Continental Congress, later in the month.[43]

Doubtless Jack and Nelly found these events exciting, rather than foreboding, as they visited between Mount Vernon and Mount Airy that fall and winter.[44] Then, in the spring, news came of the battles fought at Lexington and Concord, and soon afterwards the Continental Congress summoned Washington to take command of the American forces at Cambridge. Not knowing how long he would be away, Washington urged Jack to remain at home and look after his mother, also to take charge of his own affairs. "It will no longer be in my power to assist you," he wrote from Philadelphia. "Nor is there any occasion for it, as you have never discovered a disposition to put it to bad use."[45]

Jack wanted to join his stepfather, but under the circumstances had no choice but to remain at Mount Vernon. By now, Nelly was expecting a baby, so the least he could do was to stay there until it arrived. The event took place at Mount Airy in August; to their sorrow, the infant died a short time later. To help Nelly recover her spirits, Jack decided to take her, with Mrs. Washington, to Cambridge for the winter. Setting out in November, the three reached Cambridge a few weeks later, where Jack delivered the money raised in Fairfax County for the relief of the citizens of Boston.[46]

Their presence meant much to the General at a time when he was faced with many difficulties in maintaining and ever tightening his lines

[43] Fitzpatrick, Diaries, II, 158f.
[44] For these visits, see ibid., II, 173, 181, 188 and 191.
[45] June 19, 1775, Fitzpatrick, Writings, III, 296.
[46] Hoyt, op. cit., Va. Mag. of His. & Bio., LIII, 92.

about the beleaguered British. Now he would have his wife's cheerful presence to lighten his cares, and even some minor social activity to relieve the monotony of military life. Nelly improved gradually, though Mercy Warren noted that she was still in poor spirits when she called on Mrs. Washington in April:

> ...I was received with that politeness and respect shown in a first interview among the well bred.../ wrote Mrs. Warren/ Mr. Custis is...a sensible, modest, agreeable young man. His lady...appears to be of an engaging disposition, but of so extremely delicate a constitution, that it deprives her as well as her friends of part of the pleasure which I am sure would result from her conversation did she enjoy a more perfect share of health. She is pretty, genteel, easy and agreeable...but a kind of languor about her prevents her being sociable as some ladies. 47

According to family tradition, Jack served his stepfather as an aide-de-camp at this time.[48] Generous by nature, he one day did some favor for a captured British officer, who repaid him with an uncommon gift--a case of willow slips from a tree Alexander Pope had grown at his home in Twickham, England, from a Symrna fig basket, and underneath which, he had later been buried.[49] Jack was present when, in March, the Americans seized the Heights of Dorchester and forced the British to evacuate the city. Doubtless they, too, were in the triumphal procession that entered the battered city amid the huzzas of its liberated inhabitants.

After Washington had put his army on the road for New York, a few weeks later, his family left for home. Nelly was expecting again, so

[47]Martha Washington to Mrs. Burwell Bassett, Jan. 31, 1778, Wharton, op. cit., 103. The quotation is from Elizabeth F. Ellet, The Women of the Revolution (3 vols. New York: Baker & Scribner, 1850), III, 388.

[48]Jack Custis' name is found on no existing official military rolls. For the family tradition, see George W. P. Custis, "A Pilgrim's Progress Among the Relics of the Revolution," National Intelligencer (Washington, D. C.), February 23, 1848.

[49]George W. P. Custis gives the history of the Pope's Willow in ibid., March 24, 1840.

they stopped only for a brief visit with the General in New York on their journey.[50] It is said that Jack wished to continue serving with his stepfather, but that Nelly and his mother persuaded him to wait until he had a son to carry on his family line.[51] In any case, it was imperative that he assume the management of his properties and arrange a final settlement with his guardian, since the latter would be away indefinitely.

To accomplish this in the General's absence was no easy matter. The property in question consisted of thousands of acres of land in widely separated parts of Virginia, hundreds of slaves, and a considerable amount of money invested in mortgages, stocks and bonds. To arrange the settlement, Washington chose his close friend, George Mason, of Gunston Hall, to whom he made it clear that he wanted nothing for his services as guardian. "I have never charged him or his Sister, from the day of my connexion with them to this Hour, one Farthing, for all the trouble I have had in managing their Estates, nor for any expense they have been to me..," he wrote.[52]

Still unsettled was the question of where Jack should live. According to his guardian, "middling land under a man's own eye is more profitable than rich land at a distance." Evidently Jack was inclined to heed his advice, for he began to take steps to consolidate his holdings in King and Queen Counties by exchanging miscellaneous holdings in Hanover County for land there.[53] Washington also approved Jack's plan to rent some of his mother's land in the vicinity.[54] Grateful for this further

[50] Washington to John A. Washington, Apr. 29, 1776, Fitzpatrick, Writings, IV, 531.

[51] Torbert, op. cit., 31.

[52] Washington to George Mason, May 10, 1776, Fitzpatrick, Writings, V, 28ff. The accounts were not settled entirely until after the war.

[53] Washington to J. P. Custis, July 24, 1776, ibid., V, 331.

[54] Mrs. Washington consented to rent her land to Jack in October, 1778, for which, see Washington to James Hill, Oct. 27, 1778, ibid., XIII, 160-1; see also same to J. P. Custis, Oct. 30, 1778, ibid., XIII, 202f.

proof of his guardian's affection, Jack sought to express his appreciation:

> I am extremely desireous [sic] (but I am at a Loss for Words sufficiently expressive) to return you Thanks for your parental Care which on all Occasions you have shewn Me.-It pleased the Almighty to Deprive me at a very early Period of Life of my Father, but I can not sufficiently adore His Goodness in sending Me so good a Guardian as You Sir; Few have experienced such Care and attention from real Parents as I have done. He best deserves the Name of Father who acts the Part of one. I first was taught to call you by that Name....Your Goodness (if others had not told Me) would always have prevented Me from knowing I had lost a Parent. I shall always look upon you in this light... [55]

The Custises second child, a girl, was born at Mount Airy August 21. Christened Elizabeth Parke, she was to be the "Betsey" of Washington's diaries and letters, though later on commonly called "Eliza."[56] When Nelly had regained her strength, Jack took her and the baby to Mount Vernon, and from there to New Kent County, the following spring, with the evident intention of staying there indefinitely. In the fall, he was elected to represent New Kent in the General Assembly.[57]

But, hardly a year had elapsed when Jack paid a visit to his stepfather at his headquarters at Morristown, New Jersey, and upon his return brought his family back to Mount Vernon. There, on the last day of the year, 1777, a third child was born and christened Martha Parke, after its grandmother.[58] "Mrs. Custis has lately had a fine girl, which makes the second since she left Cambridge,"[59] the latter announced to a relative.

[55] June 10, 1776, Custis Family MSS, Mt. Vernon.

[56] Custis Family Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS; Torbert, op. cit., 31.

[57] J. P. Custis to Martha Washington, June 9, 1776, Custis Family MSS, Mt. Vernon; same to Washington, Sept. 17, 1777, Custis, Recollections, 542; same to same, July 15, 1778, typescript copy in Custis Family MSS, Library of Congress. Also Swem, op. cit., 134.

[58] For Jack's visits to Washington, see Washington to Maj.-Gen. John Sullivan, May 29, 1777, Fitzpatrick, Writings, VIII, 137. Torbert, op. cit., 31, cites Armistead Peter, great grandson of Martha Parke Custis, as an authority that she was born at Mount Vernon. The Custis Family Bible gives the date of the event.

[59] Martha Washington to unknown, Mar. 7, 1778, Harvard College Library, photostat in Custis Family MSS, Mt. Vernon.

For some reason, perhaps because life in New Kent was too dull, the young couple stayed on at Mount Vernon when Mrs. Washington left to join her husband at Valley Forge. Towards the end of the year, Jack began to look about for land in Fairfax County conveniently located in respect to Mount Vernon and Mount Airy, and to raise money, sold some of his scattered holdings a few months later.[60] Concerned that Jack might hold on to the money too long, at a time when the currency was depreciating steadily because of the war, Washington urged his ward to put it into land at once.[61] Accordingly, Jack set out to buy a large tract of land on the Potomac, a few miles above Alexandria. About 3000 acres in all, the tract was owned by three brothers, Robert, Phillip and Gerard Alexander, each of whom had roughly equal portions. Conveniently located, well-timbered, and embracing both flat riverland and rolling hills, the Alexander tract promised to make a magnificent estate.

Originally, the land Jack wanted had been part of a 6000 acre tract Governor Berkeley of Virginia granted, in 1669, to Robert Howsing, a sea-captain, for transporting 120 persons to the colony in his ship.[62] Of Howsing nothing is known except that, by coincidence, he apparently was a close friend of John Custis III, since he witnessed the latter's will and received a minor bequest.[63]

At that time, the Howsing Tract, as it came to be called, was a

[60] R. E. Lee gives the family tradition in a letter to Mrs. E. Miller, June 19, 1868, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[61] Washington to J. P. Custis, Feb.1, 1778, Fitzpatrick, Writings, X, 413f.

[62] Charles W. Stetson, Four Mile Run Land Grants (Washington: Mimeoform Press, 1935), is a detailed, accurate study of the title history of the land in the area which includes Arlington. His version of Robert Howsing's name, from the original grant, is used here. It is also spelled "Howson" and "Houson."

[63] Hamilton, op. cit., 379f.

While it was potentially of great value because of its location at the head of navigation on the Potomac, Captain Howsing lost no time in selling the tract for six hogsheads of tobacco to John Alexander,[64] a surveyor and planter long familiar with that section of the colony.

Only a few Algonquin Indians, in two small villages--one at the mouth of a small stream, the other at a large spring that would one day be famous--[65] lived on the tract during Alexander's lifetime. During that of his son, Robert, who inherited the property, most of the Indians moved away, and by the time he died, in 1704, two tenant farmers occupied the two islands included in the tract.[66] Settlement proceeded rapidly during the lifetime of Robert Alexander II, whose sons, John and Gerard, occupied the two islands, while several other tenants lived elsewhere on the tract. There was also a mill and a warehouse.[67] Most of the tract then passed to two sons, John and Gerard, the former having all the land south of a small stream named Four Mile Run, the latter that to the north. Gerard, a man of consideration, built a fair-sized house on his portion about 1741, which [illegible], with "904 acres adjoining it" to his son, Robert. Another son, Phillip, received a tract of the same size, while the [illegible] the tract, "900 acres of the upper part of the tract [illegible]now live",[68] went to still another son, Gerard. These, then, were the men whose lands Jack hoped to buy and combine into one large estate.

[64]The deed was recorded in Stafford County, Va., for which, see Stetson, op. cit., 1.

[65]James Mooney, "Indian Tribes of the District of Columbia," and S. V. Proudfit, "Ancient Village Sites and Aboriginal Workshops in the District of Columbia," both in American Anthropologist, II, (July, 1889), 243, 258, and map, 265.

[66]Stetson, op. cit., 6.

[67]The names and sites occupied by the several tenants are shown on a survey made by Joseph Berry in April, 1741. It reprinted in ibid., 9f.

[68]Ibid., 13 and n. The deed is recorded in Records of Fairfax Co., Will Book VII, 327.

When he learned of Jack's project, Washington had some misgivings about it, but approved his selling his lots in Williamsburg and James City and his lands in Hanover and New Kent Counties if he could get a good price. He much feared that Robert Alexander might back out of the deal if Jack appeared too anxious to buy, exposing Jack's funds to the grave danger of depreciation. Still, he gave his reluctant approval. "The price you have offered...is a very great one," he wrote, in May, 1778, "but as you want it to live at; as it answers your's and Nelly's views; and is a pleasant Seat and capable of improvement, I do not think the price ought to be a capital object with you..."[69]

Washington was much alarmed a few weeks later when he learned that Jack had agreed to pay Gerard £11,000 pounds for his tract by the end of the year and Robert Alexander £12 an acre for his, payable at compound interest at the end of twenty-four years. "Nothing could have induced Me to give such Terms," wrote Jack, "but the unconquerable Desire I had to live in the Neighborhood of Mt. Vernon, and in the County of Fairfax." Also, he would have "the advantage of having my Estate under My own eye, and the Probability of getting Phil's, which I understand he wants to sell. If I should get his, My Tract would be very complete, and good in Quality." Such an estate was certain to become more valuable in time, whereas his land about Williamsburg would decline in value when the state capital was moved to Richmond, as planned. Therefore, he intended to consolidate his holdings in King William and New Kent and put them under a competent manager. The Alexander property

[69] May 26, 1778, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XI, 456ff.

he would manage himself, "building Me a House Whenever I can do it conveniently."[70]

Though he deplored the fact that Jack would owe Robert Alexander the enormous sum of £48,000, twenty-four years hence, Washington accepted the young man's pledge to set aside sufficient funds to meet the debt when it came due. "As you seem so desirous of living in Fairfax, as I know it will be an agreeable measure to your mother, and a very pleasing one to me," he wrote, "I am very glad to find that you have purchased Robt. and Gerard Alexanders Lands as they are pleasantly situated, and capable of improvement." Going a step further, he urged Jack to sell all his inland plantations and buy land along the Potomac which he could supervise himself, for "whilst you live in Fairfax you will get very little benefit from an estate in New Kent or King William, unless you have much better luck than most who have Plantations at a distance..."[71]

For some reason Jack failed to get Phillip Alexander's tract, but this did not deter him from going ahead with his plans. In September, he put his Queen's Creek plantation up for sale, and paid a visit to his guardian's headquarters, presumably to get his advice in the matter, for a month later, he received his guardian's permission to sell or trade all his inland property.[72] Washington was still worried that Jack's arrangement with the Alexanders might fall through and leave him with a large sum of steadily depreciating paper money. As he explained to his agent at Mount Vernon:

[70] J. P. Custis to Washington, July 15, 1778, typescript copy in Custis & Lee Family MSS, Library of Congress.

[71] Aug. 3, 1778, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XII, 266-269.

[72] Swem, op. cit., 159n.; Washington to Richard Henry Lee, Sept. 23, 1778; and same to J. P. Custis, Oct. 10, 1778, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XII, 485; and XIII, 56-59. Also, R. H. Lee to Washington, Oct. 5, 1778, quoted in James C. Ballagh, ed., The Letters of Richard Henry Lee (2 vols. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1911), I, 441.

> ...said Jack Custis, in spite of all admonition and advice ...ave him against selling faster than he bought, is making a ruinous hand of his Estate; and if he hasnt closed his bargains beyond the possibility of a caval, I shall not be surprised to hear of his having trouble with the Alexanders; notwithstanding your opinion of Bobs disposition to fulfill engagements....I see so many instances of the rascality of Mankind, that I am almost out of conceit with my own species... [73]

For once, his pessimism was unwarranted. In December, Robert and Gerard Alexander deeded their tracts to Jack, who at once took possession.[74] He and Nelly moved into the frame house which stood on Robert's tract, and there their fourth child, Eleanor Parke, was born March 31, 1779.[75]

Though it had little architectural merit, their new home, which they named "Abingdon," was of fairly large size and attractively situated in a grove overlooking the Potomac. To Jack, the number of vessels moving on the river showed that the country was developing rapidly despite the war in progress. Some, bound for France and Holland, carried cargoes in which Jack owned a share, as witness the entry Lund Washington made in his account b...er Jack's name in July, 1779: "By your profits of the nett proceeds of the Voyage of the ship G.[eorge] W.[ashington] to Nantz £5191."[76]

However welcome, the large profits realized on such ventures were but a minor part of Jack's income, the bulk of which came from the sale of produce raised on his estates. On account of the war, wheat was especially profitable, so much so, in fact, he was able to afford a few well-bred horses, and some exceptionally fine livestock.[77] Unfortunately,

[73] Washington to Lund Washington, Dec. 17, 1778, ibid., XIII, 407-410.
[74] The deeds were recorded in Records of Fairfax County, Liber M, 225, 226, though Stetson, op. cit., 28, reports this volume is now missing.
[75] Custis Family Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[76] Photostat in Washington Papers, Library of Congress.
[77] For the horses, see The Virginia Gazette (Richmond, Va.,), May 4, 1782; and for the cattle, see Washington to Burwell Bassett, Oct. 30, 1778, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XIII, 183.

the rapidity with which paper money continued to depreciate forced him to curtail the reorganization of his estates. One of the plantations for which he received £20,000 in 1778, for example, was estimated to be worth £100,000 a year later.[78] Consequently, he decided to sell no more of his lands on the Eastern Shore for the time being and to keep one or two large plantations in New Kent County.[79]

In the meantime, he had begun to take a more active part in politics. From his letters, it is evident that he considered himself an "independent," rather than an adherent of either the conservative landed gentry on the one hand or the radicals on the other, who were then battling over such reforms as the disestablishment of the Episcopal Church. He favored all measures for the prosecution of the war, regardless of their effect on his pocketbook, and unlike some of his friends, wanted all trade strictly regulated in order to halt the widespread profiteering in army supplies. Indeed, he went so far as to advocate that money to carry on the war be raised by levying a direct land tax on the wealthy, instead of printing more and more paper money to aggravate the already serious inflation. He was also against the politicians who fomented dissension between class and section in order to advance themselves.[80] 17 81 / 17 84 3 years

As a delegate to the General Assembly from 1778 to 1781, his record on the whole was commendable, though he was too young to be very influential. He voted to draft men for the army, approved measures designed to stabilize the currency, and voted with the conservatives only to restrict the franchise.[81] Thus in 1780, when his own illness and the birth of twin girls who lived but three weeks kept him away from the first part of

[78] Same to J. P. Custis, Aug. 24, 1779, ibid., XVI, 164-169.
[79] J. P. Custis to Washington, Oct. 26, 1779, Custis, Recollections, 562ff.
[80] J. P. Custis to Washington, Aug. 8, 1776, Aug. 8, Sept. 11, 1777, all in Custis, Recollections, 537, 541f.
[81] Same to same, June 17, 1778, ibid., 546f.

the spring session, he voted for measures to requisition supplies and raise troops, taxes to be applied to the enormous state debt, and laws to increase the power of the governor to defend the state from invasion. He also joined the "Association," the organization which sought to eliminate profiteering and hoarding by strictly enforcing the laws regulating trade.[82] However, he like many others was disgusted with Governor Thomas Jefferson's failure to defend the state from a small British expedition which captured Richmond in the winter of 1780, and therefore, against his guardian's wishes, joined the conservatives in a plan to discredit Jefferson's administration by boycotting the session of the General Assembly the Governor had called for March 1, 1781.[83] Nevertheless, he decided that henceforth he would devote himself to his own affairs and announced publicly that he would not be a delegate again.[84]

That Nelly was at Mount Airy, awaiting the birth of her seventh child, may have influenced his decision. The baby, a boy, was born there on the last day of April, 1781, and inevitably named after his grandfather.[85] In June, he may have travelled to New Windsor, New York, in order to escort his mother to Mount Vernon.[86] A month later he wrote what was to be his last letter to the General. In it, he asked his stepfather's opinion as to whether or not he should renegotiate his contract with

[82]Hoyt, op. cit., Va. Mag. of His. & Bio., LIII, 92; J. P. Custis to Washington, July 26, 1780, typescript copy in Custis and Lee Family MSS, Library of Congress; and Washington to J. P. Custis, Aug. 6, 1780, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XIX, 354f.

[83]Ibid., 276, Washington to J. P. Custis, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXI, 318-321.

[84]J. P. Custis to "Freeholders of Fairfax County", n. d., but evidently after the end of the spring session of 1781; Custis Family MSS, Mt. Vernon. See also, Swem, op. cit., 134.

[85]Custis Family Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[86]May 31, 1781, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXII, 142f. However, Washington does not mention his being there when Mrs. Washington departed for Virginia; Fitzpatrick, Diaries, II, 229.

Robert Alexander, who stood to lose heavily by the continuing depreciation of the currency. In all fairness, Jack wrote, he ought to buy the property outright for £48,000. Washington's reply was characteristic. Jack's proposal was fair and "liberal," he said; but Alexander should be held to the contract if his original price had been speculative. By coincidence, the last letter the General is known to have written Jack Custis, was the first in which little Washington Custis is mentioned. "It gave me pain to hear you had been so much afflicted with sickness among your People and that you thought your Son in danger," wrote the General. "It would give me equal pleasure to learn that he, and the rest of your family, were restored to perfect health."[87]

The renegotiation was still pending when, in September, the General stopped briefly at Mount Vernon on his way to Yorktown, where Lafayette had jockeyed Lord Cornwallis' army, the largest British force in America, into a trap. After an absence of six years, Washington had much to talk over with his agent, Lund Washington, besides seeing and admiring his grandchildren, especially his little namesake.[88] Then he left to rejoin his army.

Jack was not feeling well, but nevertheless decided to join the General at Williamsburg and serve as an aide without rank or pay. Before when he had gone away on some journey, he had always departed in high spirits. But this time he seemed strangely averse to leaving, making his farewells several times, especially to little Betsey, who was sick in bed.[89]

[87] July 25, 1781, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXII, 413-416.

[88] Washington was at Mount Vernon from Sept. 9-12, 1781, for which see William S. Baker, Itinerary of General Washington, 1755-1783 (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippencott Co., 1892), 239f.

[89] Hoyt, op. cit., Va. Mag. of His. & Bio., LIII, 95.

Perhaps his depression vanished when he reached Williamsburg and found it packed with French and American troops excited at the prospect of a great victory. Thrilled, he saw the allied armies move on the little city of Yorktown where Cornwallis waited vainly for rescue from the sea. He watched as the allied lines tightened about the British forces. Then, when a British fleet failed to force its way into the Chesapeake Bay to rescue the beleaguered army, the end was inevitable. Many slaves had run off with the British, and as Jack rode about he watched for runaways from his of the General's plantations, though he came across none. "I fear that those who left us are not existing," he wrote his mother. "The Mortality that has taken place among the wretches is really incredible. I have seen numbers lying dead in the Woods, and many so exhausted that they cannot walk."[90]

His own days were numbered when he wrote, for less than a week later he himself came down with camp fever. He lived to witness the surrender of the British Army, on October 19, 1781, though so ill he had to be assisted to the surrender field. Then he was taken to his Uncle Bassett's home at "Eltham," thirty miles away, where his mother and Nelly found him critically ill when they arrived a few days later. There was no hope, Washington's personal physician, Dr. James Craik, sadly told them.[91]

Washington himself arrived at Eltham just as dawn was breaking on November 5th. Sitting in an adjoining room through Jack's last hours, he must have thought back over Jack's short life and reflected on

[90] Ibid.

[91] Custis, Recollections, 254f., 504f. These two accounts of the death of Jack Custis were based on information given G. W. P. Custis by several persons, one of whom was "Nurse", a family servant who accompanied Mrs. Washington to Eltham. According to a contemporary report, Jack contracted camp fever while visiting a British hospital after the surrender, for which see the letter by Mrs. Ann Dulany, c. Nov., 1781, quoted in Kate Mason Rowland, "Maryland Women and French Officers," Atlantic Monthly, LXVI (Nov., 1890), 654. See also Hoyt, op. cit., Va. Mag. of His. & Bio., LIII, 95f.

how much living his stepson had crowded into his brief span. If so, he must have reflected how his stepson had grown into manhood, youthful responsibility had been supplanted by an ever-increasing steadiness and industry. Jack's marriage had endured; his participation in the General Assembly had been respectable, if not distinguished; and his management of his property creditable considering his inexperience and the instability of the times.[92] As he pondered, evening came and with it Jack's last hours. He died in Nelly's arms, and according to family tradition, it was then, while comforting the bereaved women, that the General said: "From this moment I adopt his two youngest children as my own."[95]

Congress was waiting in Philadelphia to heap honors on Washington for the magnificent victory so recently won, but the General delayed his departure until after his stepson's funeral.[94] Near the end of the month, when his wife joined him in Philadelphia, the following notice appeared in the Pennsylvania Gazette:

> A few days ago died at Abingdon [sic], near Alexandria, shortly after his return from the seige of York and Gloucester, John Parke Custis, Esq. stepson of his Excellency General Washington. The death of this amiable and accomplished gentleman, in the bloom of life, hath involved his relations and numerous friends in the deepest affliction. 95

The saddened mother must have wondered, as she received the condolences of her friends, whether little Washington and Nelly Custis would ever take the place of her beloved Jackey.

[92] Swem, op. cit., 134, gives an objective and fair analysis of John Parke Custis' character, as does D. S. Freeman, in his Washington. Accounts by other historians have been either sentimental or humorous, depending upon whether they were struck by the romantic aspects of his life or desired a foil to offset the too-serious character of his guardian. It is to be regretted that this handsome and affectionate young man, who loved Washington and was loved by him, should be remembered now only for the adolescent indiscretions reported by his not especially puritanical teacher.

[93] Custis, Recollections, 254f.

[94] Washington to the President of Congress, Nov. 6, 1781, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXIII, 338; same to Marquis de Lafayette, Nov. 15, 1781, XXIII, 340.

[95] Nov. 28, 1781. The notice, under a Baltimore dateline, incorrectly gives the place of death as Abingdon.

A year before the
war ended Custis
married Dr Stuart
Custis was 3

CHAPTER II

"LITTLE WASHINGTON"

> ...the horse for little Washington came safe...He finds beauty in every part, and tho' shy at first, he begins now to ride with a degree of boldness which will soon do honor to his horsemanship. 1

The war was over and Washington back home at Mount Vernon when he wrote the above. His namesake was three and a half years old, an active and affectionate little boy whose every whim delighted his grandmother and his two nurses--Mrs. Anderson, the wife of the steward, and "Mammy Molly", his father's old colored nurse.[2]

Since the close of the war, Washington had been working hard at the task of restoring his fortune and estates, both of which had seriously declined during his long absence. Still, he always found time to play with, or otherwise better his acquaintance with his two little step-grandchildren, Washington and Nelly Custis.

The year before, their mother had remarried; she now lived at Abingdon with her husband, Doctor David Stuart, a planter of good education and small fortune. The Washingtons had a high regard for Dr. Stuart, whom they had known for some years, so the Stuarts were often at Mount Vernon and little Washington and Nelly at Abingdon. Yet it was natural that the two should look to their grandparents for attention and affection, especially after the Stuarts began to have children of their own.

[1]Washington to Jean Pierre Le Mayeur, Aug. 30, 1784, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXVII, 465.

[2]Custis, Recollections, 39; Hoyt, op. cit., 96.

Washington was far from austere in his relations with his little wards, and his kindness had long since captured their affections. Both loved and respected him. "Tub"--that being the boy's nickname--thought his guardian the greatest hero of all time, though this did not prevent him from imposing on his guardian's good nature, as grand-children have done from time immemorial.

It was indeed a remarkable experience for an impressionable little boy to grow up on terms of intimacy with one of the greatest men of his age. To Mount Vernon came all the distinguished men of the day and many lesser ones--statesmen, sculptors, painters, writers, travellers from all over the world, and ordinary sightseers. Years later, Lafayette would recall how little "Tub," clutching one of the General's long fingers, would tag along when the General was showing visitors the view of the river from the portico, or about the estate.[3] The respect, verging on awe, shown his guardian by those important men made a deep impression on the little boy, and on his part, the General had a deep affection for his step-grandson and was much amused by his lively interest in everything about him. "Your young friend," he wrote about him to a friend, "is in high health, and as full of spirits as an egg shell is of meat."[4]

But the numerous guests were never allowed to interfere with the orderly routine set for the household by the master of the estate. Usually he rose before dawn to inspect his stables; breakfasted with his household and whatever guests were present; then passed most of the day supervising the work going on on the various farms which made up the estate. Promptly at quarter to three, he would sit down to dinner,

[3]Clayton Torrence, ed., "Arlington and Mount Vernon, 1856: As described in a Letter of Blanche Berard," Va. Mag. of His. & Bio., LVII (April, 1949), 162.

[4]Washington to Rev. William Gordon, Mar. 8, 1785, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXVIII, 98.

which was always plentiful and well-cooked, but never elaborate, after which he would retire to his study to go over his accounts or tend to his extensive correspondance. This was the one time at which the children were strictly forbidden to disturb him, but they would see him again in the evening, at tea, when the General would read aloud from newspapers or books until nine o'clock, if there were guests, after which everyone would retire.[5] Seldom did this routine vary, and it, too, made its impress on Washington Custis.

Both the grandparents were extremely conscientious in raising the children they had adopted, though naturally Mrs. Washington had the chief responsibility because of their age and her husband being so occupied with his affairs.[6] Anything concerning their welfare was always discussed with the Stuarts, for Dr. Stuart was not only a close friend, but also the administrator of the children's estate.[7] As a foster-mother, Mrs. Washington had only one serious failing-she was inclined to be over-indulgent to the little grandson, though she was more strict with his sister. "Tub is the same clever boy you left him," she told a relative about this time.[8] Her husband, too, had a high opinion of his diminutive namesake. "The two

[5]There are many accounts of the daily routine followed by the Washingtons household; one of the best is Custis, Recollections, 156-174.

[6]Swem, op. cit., 138. "Adoption" was used at this time in a general or sentimental, rather than a legal sense. Washington himself used the term "adopted" in reference to his step-grandson, for which, see his letter to Jonathan Trumbull, Jr., Nov. 6, 1781; and to Lawrence Lewis, Sept. 20, 1799, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXVII, 366, 554f. Likewise the term was used by Mrs. Robert E. Lee and her husband, for an example of which, see Lee to Mrs. E. Miller, June 19, 1868, DeButts-Ely MSS. Well-informed contemporaries of Custis also accepted this usage, as for example, Edward Everett, Life of George Washington (New York, Sheldon & Co., 1860) p. vi; likewise such present-day authorities as Douglas S. Freeman, Lee, I, 92. The point merits explanation only because of the frequency with which it is raised to disparage Custis.

[7]Bartholomew Dandridge served until Nelly remarried. Calendar of Virginia State Papers (11 vols. Richmond: J. E. Goode, 1875-1893), III, 616. For an inventory of John Parke Custis' personal property, see Records of Fairfax County, Va., Will Book D, No. 1, pp. 274, 279, 280-285.

[8]To Fanny Bassett, Aug. 7, 1784, Custis Family Papers, Mount Vernon.

children of Mr. Custis: the oldest a girl of six years, the other boy a little turned of four, live with me," he wrote in 1785. "They are both promising children; but the latter is a remarkable fine one and my intention is to give him a liberal education; the rudiments of which, shall, if I live, be in my own family."[9]

Certainly "little Washington" had a most unusual boyhood. Adored and ...ed by his grandmother, loved and admired by the General, meeting famous men--and playing with their children--and above all, learning much from his guardian every step of the way. Tutored first by Gideon Snow of Boston and then by one of the General's secretaries, Tobias Lear, the boy early learned to conduct himself properly in the most distinguished company. As a result, his manners, which combined old-world courtliness with an easy affability, were to charm all who met him in later years. "Dear Snow: I should be very happy to see you here if you can find time to come down," he wrote, when six years old, to his tutor. "When will you send my waggon to me? For my old one is almost worn out, and I shall have none to get in my harvest with."[10]

No way of life appealed more to the General than that of a country gentleman. To him, it was the more satisfying because of the warm affection, cheerful industry, and unostentatious hospitality of his domestic life. Doubtless he would have been content to thus live out his days had he not been elected first president of the United States under the Constitution adopted in 1789.

But however reluctantly, he prepared to leave for New York, and since

[9] Washington to G. W. Fairfax, Nov. 10, 1785, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXVIII, 310ff.

[10] To Gideon Snow, May 12, 1787, quoted in Custis, Recollections, 41n.

his journey was bound to be something of a triumphal procession, decided that Mrs. Washington and the children should come on a few days later. When the time came, in May, they found it hard to leave Mount Vernon, but the real wrench came next morning, when they left Bushrod Washington's house in Alexandria. According to one of their escorts, "the family /was/ in tears-the children a-bawling-& everything in the most lamentable situation."[11]

But soon excitement dispelled their sadness. Towns turned out en masse to cheer them, and wherever they stopped they were feted by the prominent families in the neighborhood. The President met them at Elizabethtown, New Jersey, to escort them to their new home. "We had a very agreeable journey," Mrs. Washington wrote home. "The children were very well and cheerful all the way...Dear little Washington seemed to be lost in a mase at the great parade that was made for us all the way we come."[12]

If somewhat small, their house on Franklin Square was one of the most elegant in the city, and soon Mrs. Washington had her household running smoothly. The grandchildren were entered in a good school, leaving her free to give her attention to the social affairs that must necessarily take up much of her time. Deciding what type of social functions would be appropriate for the presidential mansion was not easy, but with characteristic good taste, she and the General decided to limit themselves to periodic receptions which would be dignified and elegant, but minus the ostentatious ceremony advocated by some of the President's advisors. Thus they set the pattern for Presidential social functions which has persisted down to the present.[13]

[11]Robert Lewis, quoted in Wharton, op. cit., 185.

[12]To Francis Bassett Washington, May 28, 1789, quoted in StephenDecatur, Private Affairs of Washington (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1933), 20f.

[13]G. W. P. Custis gives an entertaining account of the President's establishment in New York in his Recollections, 506-508; as does Wharton, op. cit., 194-217.

"Tub" was now eight and Nelly ten, old enough to receive a lasting impression of the dignity and graciousness with which their grandparents conducted themselves on such occasions. Both found their life in New York exciting: attending services at St. Paul's chapel or Trinity; entering their theatre box to the cheers of the audience and the strains of the "President's March"; viewing the "natural curiosities" at Pintard's Museum; inspecting the battleships building at the Navy Yard, where they met such naval heroes as Captain Joshua Barney; and, best of all, driving all the way around Manhattan Island--a distance of fourteen miles--each Saturday morning with the President.[14] "Tub" was especially thrilled with the theatre, and often he and his young friends would re-enact a favorite drama, such as "Julius Caesar", for the President and his friends in the garret of their house.[15]

He found his studies, first under the direction of a tutor, and later at a private school, less beguiling.[16] However, he acquired a lasting enthusiasm for ~~painting~~ from William Dunlap, Nelly's painting instructor, and the numerous artists who flocked to put the first President's features on canvas.[17] He also seems to have acquired a taste for poetry from David Humphreys, one of Washington's secretaries, for in later years he would recall with amusement how Humphreys had kept his fellow secretaries awake nights by reciting his verses in a loud voice.[18] That he had the interests common to most boys his age is shown by an entry in Tobias Lear's account

[14]Decatur, op. cit., 27; G. W. P. Custis to Col. David Humphreys, Nov. 18, 1844, quoted in Henry H. Humphreys, "Who Built the First U. S. Navy?," Pa. Mag. of His. & Bio., XL (1916), 390f; Joshua Barney to Robert Lewis, Aug. 9, 1789, Misc. MSS, Boston Public Library; and Fitzpatrick, Diaries, IV, 56, 58, 68, 71, 83, 92ff.

[15]William A. Duer, quoted in Rufus W. Griswold, The Republican Court; or, American Society in the Days of Washington (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1864), 218n.

[16]Tobias Lear's Account Books, printed in Decatur, op. cit., 63, 102.

[17]Ibid., 87.

[18]Custis, Recollections, 599.

book "for a Ball & Marbles for Master G. W. P. Custis."[19]

Life was much the same in Philadelphia, where Congress had decided to meet until a permanent national capital was established on the Potomac River. The presidential mansion on Market Street was one of the largest and handsomest in the city, and as in New York, social functions were simple and dignified, and limited to weekly receptions and dinners.[20] Mrs. Washington continued to supervise Nelly's studies, assisted by tutors in such special subjects as French and painting, but by now it was apparent that "Tub" had too much opportunity for diversion and too little for systematic study at home. Therefore, Washington decided to send him to the College of Philadelphia, originally a charity school, but now largely attended by the sons of the wealthy.[21]

Washington Custis entered the school early in 1791, but before long his guardian concluded that the school was lax in discipline and its teachers too easy on their pupils. Convinced that the lad would never acquire good study habits, punctuality, and submission to discipline while living at home, the General thought seriously of sending him away to school.[22] Washington knew that his wife would object to this, just as she had years before in the case of the boy's father. "Grandmother always spoiled Washington," his sister Nelly would say years later, but that was at best only a partial explanation.[23] Actually, the pattern of his life, like that of his father in his time, was established by his social position, the fortune he would inherit at his majority, and above

[19] Decatur, op. cit., 29.

[20] A good description of Washington's house in Philadelphia, by Rev. Ashbel Greene, is printed in ibid., 435. For presidential social functions see Custis, Recollections, 425f.

[21] Washington to T. Lear, Oct. 3, 1790, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXI, 129. The College is described in Decatur, op. cit., 219.

[22] Washington to Lear, Apr. 12, 1791, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXVII, 59.

[23] Quoted by Mrs. R. E. Lee in Custis, Recollections, 58.

all, his association with the Washingtons-a situation in which there was no stimulus to drive and ambition. And again, instead of doing as he thought best, Washington hired a tutor for the boy and continued him in the College of Philadelphia for another three years.[24]

Disappointment with his ward's scholastic performance did not lessen Washington's affection for him. His and Nelly's playmates were welcome in the executive mansion; one would always remember how they had watched wide-eyed while the President solemnly smoked a pipe of peace with a delegation of Indians in the drawing-room.[25] Often the President would take the children and their friends for a drive, or to an exciting event, such as a balloon ascension.[26] And, as in New York, he usually took his grandchildren with him to the theatre.[27]

Occasionally Washington Custis witnessed dramatic scenes he never forgot. One occurred in December, 1791, when Washington learned that the army of General St. Clair had been surprised and destroyed by Indians in Ohio. He always remembered how his guardian, though angry that his orders to take all precaution had been ignored, magnanimously offered his hand to the unfortunate commander when he came to report the disaster.[28] Such incidents made it easier for the lad to visualize the stirring Revolutionary War events related to him by Washington's friends and the older servants. He became aware of the hopes and plans

[24]For the tutor, see Washington to Lear, Sept. 21, 1792, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXII, 156; also Custis, Recollections, 435n.

[25]Charles J. Ingersoll, History of the Second War Between the United States and Great Britain (2 vols. Philadelphia: Lippencott, Grambo & Co., 1852), II, 267.

[26]"Reminiscences of Washington," N. Y. Daily Tribune, Aug. 27, 1893.

[27]Decatur, op. cit., 278; Lucius Cary to his mother, Mar. 10, 1797, printed in Caroline G. Curtis, ed., The Cary Letters (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1891), 141.

[28]Custis, Recollections, 416-420. Custis witnessed the first meeting of the defeated General and Washington.

of those who envisioned a great nation knit together by roads and canals and made economically independent of Europe by the development of American agriculture and industry. None was more confident of America's future greatness than the President.

Washington Custis was not quite fourteen when he watched his guardian lay the cornerstone of the Capitol. To his vivid imagination, the salvoes of artillery that punctuated the ceremonies seemed thunderous echoes from old battlefields, the barbecued ox served to the crowd afterwards the meal eaten in triumphant satisfaction after a hard-won victory.[29] At home, he heard projects of all sorts discussed--from a canal around the Great Falls of the Potomac to unlock the resources of the vast West, to a breed of sheep whose wool would be fine and heavy enough to enable Americans to make their own woolens. Washington's experiments in breeding made the lad dream of the day when he, too, might accomplish something along that line.

Books were boring in comparison to such exhilerating thoughts, and the lad's studies suffered accordingly. His guardian grew ever more concerned, but not his grandmother, who was content that he was healthy. "My grandchildren are very much grown," she wrote. "Nelly is a woman in size--and Washington begins to be a sturdy Boy."[30] Washington still blamed the Philadelphia school for Tub's lack of progress, and again thought of sending him to a northern school such as Andover, where diversions were few and "order, regularity and a proper regard for morals" were stressed.[31]

[29]William Spohn Baker, Washington After the Revolution (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippencott, 1898), 264; and G. W. P. Custis in National Intelligencer (Washington, D. C.), Mar. 14, 1829.

[30]Aug. 24, 1794, quoted in Decatur, op. cit., 306.

[31]Washington to William A. Washington, Nov. 23, 1794; Feb. 18, Mar. 31, Apr. 21, 1795; Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXIV, 44f., 119f, 164f and 178, respectively.

But again his wife's objection to her grandson being so far away influenced him to send the lad, in the fall of 1796, to the College of New Jersey, at Princeton, which was conveniently located between Philadelphia and Mount Vernon.

There he started on his studies with considerable zeal, and for a time did well. Pleased, his guardian wrote:

> It gives me pleasure to hear that you are agreeably fixed. I receive still more from the assurance you give of attending closely to your studies. It is you yourself who is to derive immediate benefit from these. Your country may do it hereafter. [32]

The letters that passed between the two tell something, but not all, of how the lad fared and what ideas influenced him. One of his teachers was the Reverand Stanhope Smith, a distinguished scholar and eloquent preacher with somewhat unusual religious and social ideas, for instance that all races had a common genetic origin and equal capabilities. He advocated that slaves be freed, then aided to become self-supporting, which may have influenced his pupil to experiment along similar lines with his slaves, later on.[33]

Too much of the correspondance, however, was confined on the one hand to family news and exhortations to study, and assurances and promises to do so on the other. Modern educational doctrine holds that education is a continuous process and maturity the end product of experience. Viewed in this light, Washington was too inclined to point out the boy's immaturity and insist that he accept the opinions of his instructors instead of using them as a basis for formulating his own. As a result, an unfortunate pattern was established. Whenever Washington Custis differed

[32]Nov. 15, 1796, ibid., XXXV, 281ff.

[33]Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., Dictionary of American Biography (22 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928-1936), XVII, 344f.

with his instructors or guardian on some question, he would defend his position for a time, until overwhelmed by his guardian's irrefutable logic, he would finally give way and become indifferent to the whole matter.

That the older man was usually right made their arguments the more stultifying. "I hasten to...express the sincere pleasure I feel in finding that I had interpreted some parts of your letter erroneously," the President wrote in January, 1797, in a typical letter to his ward. "Be assured, that while you give me reasons to expect a ready submission to my councils, and while I hear that you are diligent in pursuing the means which are to acquire these advantages, it will afford me infinite gratification."[34] A wise teacher welcomes evidences of growing maturity in the young people in his charge and seeks to aid them tactfully, recognizing that if they are over-directed, they will invariably balk, grow indifferent and passively resist--which seems to have been the effect of Washington's well-intentioned exhortations on his namesake.

It is not known whether the lad witnessed the moving ceremony in which Washington's successor, John Adams, became President in March, 1797.[35] If he did, the interruption did not adversely affect his studies, for later in the month he reported that he had become proficient in translating French, had read many good authors, and was doing well in geography. He was having difficulty with his arithmetic, he admitted, "because of the superficial manner in which I imbibed first principles."[36] Later on, this deficiency would prove a considerable handicap in the management of his affairs.

[34]Jan. 11, 1797; Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXV, 340ff.; 362f.

[35]Washington Custis never mentioned being there in any of his writings; but Griswold, op. cit., 430f., says he was; while Benson J. Lossing, Life of Washington (3 vols. New York: Virtue & Co., 1860), III, 478, says that he remained at Princeton.

[36]Custis to Washington, Mar. 25, 1797, Custis, Recollections, 81f.

But apparently he had over-estimated his progress or was vainly trying to please his guardian, for he did poorly in the spring examinations, much to the latter's disgust. "From his infancy I have discovered an almost unconquerable disposition to indolence in everything that did not tend to his amusements...," he complained to the president of the college.[37]

As he had done so many times before, the lad promised to do better. "I will make a grand exertion, and show you that your grandson shall once more deserve your favor," he wrote to Mount Vernon. "Could you but see how happy I now am, you would soon forget all that is past, and let my future conduct prove the truth of my assertions."[38] To others, he expressed himself more frankly. "Washington [Custis] wrote me a letter since his return to Prince Town telling me is very much dissatisfied with his situation," a cousin wrote to Thomas Law, a wealthy Englishman who had recently married Eliza Custis.[39]

For some months the lad did work hard to redeem himself, even to using his spring vacation to study geography with Doctor Smith. A new room and a congenial, studious room-mate, Cassius Lee, son of Richard Henry Lee, may have helped his application.[40] Unfortunately, he seems to have withdrawn himself from his fellow-students, perhaps heeding Washington's council not to make friends too readily.[41] Instead of participating in campus events such as the celebration of the Fourth of July, he carried on extensive correspondance, not only with his guardian and his immediate family, but also with more distant relations and friends.[42] Informed of this

[37]Washington to Rev. S. S. Smith, May 24, 1797, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXV, 450f.
[38]May 29, 1797, Custis, Recollections, 84f.
[39]Eliza Wescot to Thomas Law, June 1, 1797, Law MSS, Library of Congress.
[40]Custis to Washington, June 8, 1797, Custis, Recollections, 87ff.
[41]Washington to Custis, Nov. 28, 1796; Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXV, 294ff.
[42]Same to same, July 1, 1797, ibid., 89f.

development, Washington admitted that it had some educational merit, but advised that it be curtailed lest it interfere with the lad's studies.[43]

As the summer vacation grew near, it appeared that Washington Custis would enter the junior class at the end of the session. Because of the yellow fever in Philadelphia, his guardian cautioned him to avoid that city on his return home. He also thought a return by sea too dangerous--an illuminating example of how Washington with the best intentions deprived his ward of the experience he himself had had as a boy on a voyage to the West Indies.[44]

But something occurred about this time the boy was to come home which abruptly ended his stay at Princeton. "Mr. George W. Custis having been guilty of various acts of meaness [sic] & irregularity, & having endeavoured in various ways to lessen the authority & influence of the faculty was suspended & ordered to leave the college," states the Faculty minutes.[45] The "various acts" are not referred to in the letters exchanged by Washington and the Reverand Mr. Smith relating to the affair, but it is clear that the President considered his ward at fault.[46] Perhaps the discipline of the school was too strict, or perhaps the lad had imbibed some of the "Gallic notions" which five years later caused the students to burn Nassau Hall as a protest against what they termed the "oppression" of the school authorities.[47]

[43]Same to same, July 10, 23, 1797, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXV, 494f 510f.

[44]Same to same, Aug. 29, 1797, ibid., XXXVI, 20ff.

[45]Entry for Sept. 7, 1797, quoted in Donald D. Egbert, Princeton Portraits (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1947), 325. For once family tradition is at a loss for an explanation: Mrs. R. E. Lee confesses: "We know not why Mr. Custis was removed from Princeton," Custis, Recollections, 93.

[46]Washington to Rev. S. S. Smith, Oct. 9, 1797, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXVI, 42-43.

[47]In 1807, half the student body was expelled for insubordination. See D. A. B., XVII, 544f.

For the first time, Washington began to realize the gulf that lay between his way of thinking and that of his ward. In his opinion, only the boy's mother, Mrs. Stuart, might be able to draw him out. "If I was to propose to him, to go to the University of Cambridge...," he wrote her [illegible] "he might, as has been usual for him on like occasions, say he [illegible] whereever I chose to send him; but if he should go contrary to his inclination...an expense without any benefit would result...He would not, I am sure, make a candid disclosure of his sentiments to me on this or any other plan I might propose for the completion of his education..." He regretted not having sent the boy to Harvard, and could suggest nothing except to have him study at home.[48]

His expulsion from college had at least one happy aftermath for Washington Custis, in that he was able to renew his acquaintance with George Washington Lafayette, who had fled to America after his father was imprisoned during the French Revolution and had been living at Mount Vernon for some time. The Marquis' son had a sunny disposition, and being only a little older than Washington Custis, had much the same interests. The two lads were fast friends, which made their parting the harder when word came that the elder Lafayette had been released from prison and his son could now return home. Twenty-six years would elapse before they saw each other again.[49]

That fall, Washington Custis lived according to a strict schedule prescribed by his guardian. He was required to rise at an early hour, appear on time at the breakfast table, and afterwards study until one hour before dinner. Then he was free to do as he wished until time for

[48]Jan. 22, 1798, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXVI, 135f.

[49]For news of Lafayette's release from prison and his son sailing for home, see Alexandria (Va.) Gazette, Oct. 3, Nov. 2, 1797.

late tea, after which he went back to his books until bedtime. Saturdays he was free to hunt, ride, or otherwise amuse himself. He could also attend social events such as the ball held in Alexandria in February, 1798, to celebrate Washington's birthday.[50]

But order and regularity failed to have the effect Washington had anticipated. The object of his concern still showed no interest in his studies. "He will forget what he does know, so inert is his mind," the General wrote in despair to Dr. Stuart. He considered sending him to an academy in Alexandria, but did not because of reports that its' students were given to loitering in taverns. In contrast, he heard that St. John's College at Annapolis, Maryland, had achieved an excellent reputation under the direction of the Reverand Mr. John McDowell, an Episcopal minister and former lawyer, who was also an authority on classical literature and natural philosophy.[51] Therefore, he entered his namesake at this school in February, 1798.

The Rev. Mr. McDowell could have had no illusions about his new pupil after reading the letter Washington sent with him. "Mr. Custis possesses competent talents to fit him for any studies, but they are counteracted by an indolence of mind which renders it difficult to draw them into action... the letter read in part. "As his family, fortune and talents (if the latte can be improved) give him just pretensions to become a useful member of Society, in the Councils of his Country, his friends (and none more than myself) are extremely desirous that his education should be liberal, polished, and adapted to this end."[52] By this time, Washington should have realized that the "indolence" of which he complained was largely due to the

[50] Washington to Custis, Jan. 7, 1798, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXVI, 1
[51] Same to Dr. David Stuart, Feb. 26, 1798, ibid., XXXVI, 169f.
[52] Fitzpatrick, Diaries, IV, 273; and Washington to Rev. John McDowell Mar. 5, 1798, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXVI, 180f.

unfortunate combination of sporadic rigid discipline and general laxity which had characterized his upbringing.

Like his father, Washington Custis was warmly received by the people of Annapolis. He, too, was handsome, likeable and well-mannered, and the fact that one day he would come into a large fortune did not lessen his popularity. "I visited the principal inhabitants while the doctor was here," he wrote to Washington, shortly after his arrival, "and found them all very kind." He liked his boarding-house, his fellowOstudents, and was already well started on his studies.[53]

Washington was less pleased to hear that he needed more pocket money, despite his avowal that "far from being addicted to dress and extravagance, I am not fond of such things....[and] never dine out except on Sunday."[54] This was certainly an understatement, judging from what he had written only a few days earlier to someone else: "I am charmed with Annapolis and all its inhabitants and have received every attention from them. What you said respecting a brace of takers-in is but too true, however you know I've travelled and am not easily caught."[55]

Still, it was not long before he had fallen in love with one of the young ladies of the town. As usual, his guardian soon heard of the affair, and wrote to sketch it. "This is not a time for a boy of your age to enter into hasty engagements which might end in sorrow and repentance," he wrote indignantly. He also wrote to the Reverend Mr. McDowell, directing him to keep his pupil closer to his studies.[56] A family council was also held, and Mrs. Stuart was delegated to go talk to her son and if possible forestall the marriage--a somewhat ironic choice, considering the circumstances of her own marriage to John Parke Custis. She must have been

[53] Custis to Washington, Custis, Recollections, 99.
[54] Custis to Washington, May 26, 1798, Custis, Recollections, 105.
[55] To Lawrence Lewis, May 21, 1798, Custis MSS, N. Y. Public Library.
[56] June 18, 1798, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXVI, 106ff, 288f.

greatly relieved to learn, when she met her son at Upper Marlborough, that he had only told the young lady in question that he hoped to marry her when he was old enough. "Thus the matter ended," Washington Custis wrote to his guardian. "However rash and imprudent I may be, I have always remembered my duty and obligation to you."[57] When this letter went unanswered, he wrote again: "I...assure you, that though urged by imprudence, I was by duty governed--that duty which I shall hold in all my various walks of life, and let the goodness of my heart but cover the imprudence of my actions and I am contented."[58]

This letter got a favorable response, but the incident rankled, as the spring term was nearing its end, the lad wrote him to inquire whether he was expected to return to Annapolis when school resumed. The indifference, if not impertinence, implied in the query greatly provoked Washington, who hotly replied: "The question, 'I would thank you to inform me whether I leave it entirely, or not, so that I may pack up accordingly,' really astonishes me! For it would seem as if nothing I could say to you made more than a momentary impression."[59]

He could not have been very cordially received when he went home for his summer vacation, but his guardian had to admit defeat by the time school resumed in the fall. "Mr. Custis, I expected would have left here...for St. John's College," Washington explained to the Rever- and Mr. McDowell, "but although he professed his readiness to do whatever was required of him, his unwillingness to return was too apparent to afford any hope that good would result from it..." He would therefore keep him at Mount Vernon.[60]

[57]June 17, 1798, Custis, Recollections, 105ff.

[58]July 12, 1798, Custis Papers, Va. His. Soc., printed with some editing in ibid., 105.

[59]Same to same, July 21, 1798, ibid., 109; and Washington to Custis, July 24, 1798, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXVI, 363.

[60]Sept. 16, 1798, ibid., XXXVI, 449.

So ended the last attempt to give young Custis a formal education. If all had failed must be attributed to the unusual circumstances under which he had been reared. Had Washington been able to act according to his best judgment and send his grandson by adoption to school at an early age, he might have turned out far differently. Given a chance in a more normal environment, Washington Custis might have made a place for himself more in keeping with the hopes of his guardian. On the other hand, it is likely that he would not have developed the unique personality that made him such an interesting and distinctive figure later on.

Washington had a sincere liking for the young boy. Otherwise, he would hardly have named him as an executor in the will he drew up about this time. He also helped him to get a commission in the large army Congress had recently authorized to meet the threat of war with France.

So critical was the situation, the little city of Alexandria bustled with preparations for war. Militia companies drilled regularly on the courthouse square; a gunnery and fortification school was organized; and George's sister, Nelly, and her grandmother made and presented colors to two of the local units.[61]

The General, who had been appointed to command the new army, knew that his ward was anxious to serve, he told Dr. Stuart. Of course the boy was an only son, indeed the only male of his line, he explained; but was sure that "the same providence that wd watch over and protect him in domestic walks can extend the same protection to him in a Camp,

[61] Alexandria (Va.) Gazette, May 5, 31, June 12, Oct. 27, and Nov. , 1797. The colors presented by Nelly Custis and Mrs. Washington are described in ibid., XXXVI Oct. 30, Nov. 5, 1795.

or the field of battle, if he should ever be in one." Aware that Mrs. Washington might object, the General planned to say nothing to the young man until he had her approval, and that of the boy's mother.[62] But the secret got out, and the lad's enthusiasm, and the fact that he would serve, if called on active duty, in a troop of cavalry commanded by Washington's nephew, Lawrence Lewis, sufficed to overcome any domestic opposition.[63]

After Washington Custis had participated in company drills and classes for three months, his guardian applied for his promotion to the rank of lieutenant, on the grounds that his "ample fortune, good Education, more than common abilities and good disposition, free from Vice of any kind..." qualified him for an advancement; and when the commission arrived, presented him with the single epaulette to which he was entitled.[64] For some reason, the "handsome but not expensive" uniform and the silver-mounted sword he had ordered for his ward had failed to show up, and one can almost see the smile on the General's face as he wrote to the Secretary of War:

> The young Cornet (in my family) is anxious to receive his military equipments. Daily fruitless inquiries are made of me to know when they may be expected. Perhaps if you were to jog Mr. Francis, the Purveyor, then they might be Purveyed, and the young gentleman gratified. 65

The coveted uniform arrived eventually, but not the war, so that after serving a short time at Harper's Ferry, Maryland, the young man

[62] Dec. 30, 1798, and same to Sec. of War, Dec. 14, 1798, ibid., XXXVI, 76ff, and XXXVII, 59f.

[63] The letter of appointment, dated Jan. 10, 1799, is quoted in Custis, Recollections, 51.

[64] Mar. 25, 1799, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXVII, 157-164. Custis was appointed 2nd lieutenant Mar. 3, 1799, according to Carlos E. Godfrey, "Organization of the Provisional Army...1798-1800," Pa. Mag. of His. & Bio., XXXVIII (1914), 136. See also, Custis, Recollections, 63.

[65] Washington to Clement Biddle, June 7, 1799; same to Sec. of War, July 14, 1799; both in Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXVII, 231, 305.

was discharged from the service with the brevet rank of major.[66]

By now, Washington had given up hunting because of his age, sixty-seven, but otherwise he was as vigorous as ever, often riding as much as twelve to fourteen miles about his estates in a day. He still liked the occupation of his youth, surveying, and himself ran the boundaries of the 1200 acre tract on Four Mile Run which he intended to leave to his ward. He had also resumed some of his earlier projects, such as the breeding of fine sheep and developing a race of hardy mules, which being hardier and therefore less susceptible to neglect by indifferent slaves, would be more useful than horses in the South. His interest infected all about him, especially Washington Custis, who hoped someday to emulate him. On the General's birthday, 1799, Nelly Custis married the General's favorite nephew, Lawrence Lewis, at Mount Vernon, in a most beautiful and impressive ceremony, made gay by the host of friends and relatives who showed up in spite of a downpour.[67]

Somewhere about this time, too, another interesting event occurred. Washington had long maintained a deer park after the English fashion at Mount Vernon, and up to this time had rarely allowed one to be hunted for sport, let alone by his grandson. But finally, the lad's importunities overcame the General's reluctance. As Washington Custis later on recalled

[66]Godfrey, op. cit., 136. There is no evidence to corroborate Mrs. Lee's statement that her father was a colonel (Custis, Recollections, 52), and she is in error in stating that he was never on active service, for which see the voucher he submitted to the Secretary of War, Dec. 27, 1799. U. S. Misc. Am. Letters and Documents, Independence Hall, Philadelphia, photostat in L. C. See also Lee to G. W. C. Lee, Sept. 14, 1851, in J. William Jones, Life and Letters of Robert Edward Lee (New York: Neale Publishing Co., 1904), 74f., cited hereafter as Jones, Life and Letters.

[67]Custis, Recollections, 450.

the incident, Washington sternly ordered him "to fire with ball, use no hounds, and on no account kill any but an old buck!"

Fearing that his guardian might change his mind, the would-be nimrod lost no time in setting out, armed with an old Dutch musket, for a nearby wood where he had several times seen a fine old buck. Luck was with him, for he found the stag where he had expected and shot him as he burst from cover. Some field hands dragged the prize to the mansion, where punctually at quarter to three, the General appeared to inspect it. Noting the obvious age of the antlered patriarch, he nodded approval. The splendid antlers of the "Washington Stag," as the lad named it, were mounted to commemorate the event, and from this time on he was often called upon to get venison for the dinner table.[68] "It is really an enjoyment to be here to witness the tranquil happiness that reigns throughout the house," wrote a guest, in 1799. "Now and then a little bustle is occasioned by the young Squire Custis when he returns from hunting, bringing in a 'valiant deer,' as he terms it."[69]

In November, Nelly's first child, a daughter, was born at Mount Vernon--the Washington's first great grand-child.[70] The new mother and baby were doing well when early the following month, Lawrence Lewis and Washington Custis set off to inspect the Custis plantations in New Kent County.[71] As they rode away they little guessed that not only the century, but the life of the man they revered was drawing to a close. Hardly had they arrived at the White House plantation, where the General had courted the widow Custis so many years before, when a messenger arrived, spent, to tell them that Washington had died only a few days

[68] Ibid., 390ff., and n.

[69] Mrs. Edward Carrington to Mrs. Fisher, Nov. 22, 1799, printed in William Armstrong, op. cit., 17.

[70] Torbert, op. cit., 83.

[71] Fitzpatrick, Diaries, IV, 319.

before.[72]

The funeral was over and the coffin laid away in the family vault by the time the two travellers reached home. There they learned the details of Washington's last hours: how he had gone out in a rain and sleet storm on Friday the 13th to look over some land he planned to improve, and how on retiring that night he had complained of a sore throat, and by morning had such a high fever that his old friend, Dr. Craik, and two other physicians were summoned, but to no avail. Towards the end, they were told, the General had asked for them, inquiring weakly when they would return.[73]

His widow was nearing seventy and often in poor health, but continued to manage her household with her old efficiency. Gracious and hospitable as ever, she never failed to make a favorable impression on the many visitors who came to see her. "The old lady was habited in black, and wore a plain cap with a black ribbon," wrote a gentleman who met her in 1801. "She was affable and polite, and made us welcome in such an hospitable and unceremonious manner, that without hesitation we agreed to stay and dine.... [She] presided like a lady of hospitality and good sense, tempered by much acquaintance with company. Everything was neat and well-ordered..."[74]

Though she kept her feelings to herself, her sense of loss was obvious; all the vitality seemed to have gone out of her life. Often she would retire to her room during the day and sit there pensively for

[72]Tobias Lear to G. W. P. Custis and Lawrence Lewis, Dec. 15, 1799, Misc. Personal Papers, L. C.

[73]Tobias Lear, Letters and Recollections of George Washington (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1905), 132.

[74]Letter of Dr. Samuel L. Mitchell, Dec. 7, 1801, printed in Harper's New Monthly Magazine, LVIII (Apr. 1879), 742.

hours at a time, rousing only to take up and read her old family Bible.[75] She had agreed to allow the General's remains to be buried under the dome of the Capitol, then in the process of construction, and it was apparent that she did not expect to long outlive him.[76]

She was thankful that in her sorrow she had her nineteen-year old grandson and the Lewises with her. "Mrs. Washington is much broke since I saw her last," the wife of their architect wrote in her diary. "Washington Custis, in whom she seems quite wrapt up, was indisposed, and she seemed very anxious on his account."[77] About this time, too, Mrs. Washington wrote to a neice: "I have been and am at this time very much indisposed. Nelly has been very unwell and Washington ill, thank God he is getting better."[78]

Actually, her grandson was usually in good health, for he was often outdoors, helping to look after the farms or engaging in his favorite sport, deer-hunting. Occasionally there was too much venison for the Mount Vernon household to consume, in which case he gave some away. "Since I sat down...," Mrs. Abigail Adams, wife of the President, wrote to a friend, "I have been called down to a servant from Mount Vernon, with a billet from Major Custis, and a haunch of venison..."[79] Already he was becoming newsworthy because of his association with Mount Vernon, so that occasionally newspapers as far away as Savannah, Georgia, would mention some particularly fine buck he had killed.[80]

[75]The old Custis Family Bible, now in the DeButts-Ely MSS.

[76]Martha Washington to Pres. John Adams, Dec. 31, 1799, quoted in Custis, Recollections, 440n.

[77]Diary of Mrs. William Thornton, entry for Aug. 2, 1800, Wm. Thornton MSS, L. C.

[78]To Miss M. W. Dandridge, Feb. 12, 1801, quoted in The Mag. of Am. His., XXIV (Sept., 1890), 228.

[79]To Mrs. Smith, Nov. 21, 1800, quoted in National Intelligencer, Apr. 28, 1841.

[80]Georgia Gazette (Savannah, Ga.,) Sept.3, 1801.

Most of his time was taken up with more important matters: keeping trespassers off the 1200 acre tract on Four Mile Run left him by his guardian; keeping tab on the distant Custis plantations and occasionally visiting them; and planning for the day, now not far distant, when he would come into his fortune and establish his own home--for Mount Vernon was to go to one of the General's nephews, Bushrod Washington.[81] He also tried his hand at politics, associating himself with the Federalists--as the conservatives were coming to be called--to combat the equalitarian ideas that were gaining the ascendency in many sections. Like most of his class, he firmly believed that the government should be controlled by the wealthy and well-born, and considered Thomas Jefferson, who advocated otherwise, a traitor to his class. He was also convinced that Jefferson sought to discredit the work and reputation of his deceased guardian.

His grandmother felt the same way, even to distrusting Jefferson's motives in paying his respects to her at Mount Vernon. "She assured a party of gentlemen, of which I was one,...that next to the loss of her husband, it [Jefferson's visit] was the most painful occurance of her life," wrote a Connecticutt congressman, in 1802.[82] The Alexandria Daily Advertiser, a Federalist organ, went so far as to challenge the propriety of the Jeffersonians visiting Mount Vernon because of the attacks on Washington that had appeared in their party press.[83]

[81] Alexandria Gazette, Feb. 13, 1800. For his visit to Smith's Island in 1800, see Custis, Address to the People of the United States On the Importance of Encouraging Agriculture and Domestic Manufactures (Alexandria, Va.: S. Snowden, 1803), 16, cited hereafter as Custis, Address. Washington's will was recorded Jan. 20, 1810, so most likely it was read to those concerned shortly after his funeral.

[82] John Cotton Smith to Judge Daggett, Jan. 6, 1802, printed in John C. Smith, Correspondence and Miscellanies (New York: Harper & Bros., 1847), 61.

[83] May 6, 1802.

Washington Custis hoped that he, the adopted son of the General, would be of some influence in maintaining the policies and precedents established by his guardian, and therefore stood for election as representative from Fairfax County to the General Assembly in April, 1802. His platform was typically Federalist. He opposed the extension of the franchise on the grounds that it would inevitably lead to universal suffrage, the greatest evil that could befall the nation because of the corruption that always attended it; he wanted to be elected by "free and independent citizens," not "vagrants." He also maintained that the militia, the backbone of the country's defense, must be composed of land-owners, for no reliance could be placed on men who did not own the soil to be defended. He also charged the Jeffersonians with fostering the radical equalitarian doctrines of the French Revolution.[84]

But his arguments were to no avail. Of the 543 votes cast at the election, he received a dismal showing, only 68.[85]

Any chagrin he may have felt at being so summarily defeated at the polls was forgotten three weeks later, when his beloved grandmother died. Long in poor health, it was apparent from the onset of her last illness that she would not survive. Aware that her end was approaching, the indomitable old lady had herself dressed in the white gown which she had long since set aside for this occasion, then gathered her heart-broken family about her to quietly give them her parting advice and blessings.[86] "The worthy partner of the worthiest of men," read her obituary in the Alexandria Gazette. Her life and that of her husband had been "an honor and a pattern to the country," it said.[87] Reading

[84] Custis to the editor, n. d., Alexandria Gazette, May 3, 1802.
[85] For the election results, see ibid., Apr. 29, 1802.
[86] Ibid., May 25, 1802; Custis, Recollections, 513.
[87] Alexandria Gazette, May 25, 1802.

it, Martha's grandson must have agreed and resolved to pattern his life, as well as he could, after theirs.

With his beloved grandmother gone, nothing held the young man at Mount Vernon. He did make one final effort to hold on to the past, so rapidly slipping away, by offering to buy Mount Vernon from Bushrod Washington--but without success.[88] Then he packed his belongings, to move over to "Mount Washington" as he had decided to call the estate his father had bought for the family seat so many years before.

[88]Rosalie C. Calvert to Jean Charles Stier, July 3, 1802, quoted in William D. Hoyt, "The Calvert-Stier Correspondence," Md. His. Mag., XXXVIII (1939), 131.

CHAPTER III

BEGINNINGS AT ARLINGTON

From Mount Vernon, Washington Custis went to Alexandria, where he stayed at the home of a friend, Washington Craik, for a few weeks while making the necessary legal arrangements preliminary to taking possession of his various inheritances.[1]

The Abingdon estate his father had bought from Robert Alexander was not one of these. Jack Custis had left no will, and therefore, according to the Virginia laws of inheritance at the time, all his lands went to his male heir, Washington Custis, leaving only his personal property for the daughters. No agreement having been made with Alexander as to whether he should be paid for Abingdon in depreciating paper money or receive the real value of the property, Dr. Stuart induced him, in 1789, to take back the property in exchange for a fair rent for the period the Custises had occupied it.[2] The Stuarts then had moved to "Hope Park," an estate some miles west of Alexandria.[3]

Since Jack Custis had bought Gerard Alexander's tract outright, his son had only to reach a settlement with his mother regarding her dower rights in order to take possession of it and the other Custis estates. An agreement was quickly reached, in August 1802, according to which Mrs. Stuart relinquished her dower rights in exchange for an annual

[1]For his mail being sent here, see Alexandria (Va.) Gazette, July 9, 1802.

[2]The settlement is covered in detail in Stetson, op. cit., 30.

[3]For Washington's approval of the settlement, see his letter to David Stuart, Sept. 21, 1789, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXX, 408.

How long did Mrs Stuart live?

payment of $1750 in silver for as long as she lived.[4] It was also stipulated that two of the fifty-seven slaves included in the transfer would not be removed from the Alexander estate or the Four Mile Run tract under any circumstances.

Though Washington Custis was one of the executors of his guardian's estate, then in the process of being settled, his brother-in-law, Lawrence Lewis and Bushrod Washington shouldered most of the responsibility. An equitable division of the personal property was soon arranged among the heirs, but the sale of Washington's widely distributed lands necessarily took much longer, and it was to be some years before all the claims against the estate were finally settled.[5] In contrast, Martha Washington's estate, mainly furnishings, was quickly settled, and her grandson took possession of his share of the furniture, silver, china and family portraits. He also received her famous iron money chest and books, the General's desk, one-fourth of the bottled wine and "a pipe of wine if there be one in the house at the time of my death."[6]

He also bought heavily when the remaining furnishings and much of the livestock and farm equipment were auctioned off in July, 1802 and January, 1803. By bidding recklessly on the relics most closely associated with his deceased guardian, he got many of the most important, such as the General's coach and the tents he had used during the Revolution.[7] Somehow, he also acquired the Hessian and British flags presented to Washington by Congress in honor of the victory at Yorktown, even though the executors had previously announced that these would be given to the

[4]The agreement was recorded Apr. 4, 1803 in Records of Alexandria County, D. C., Deed Book E, pp. 127-132, 133-136.

[5]Frussing, op. cit., 364-370.

[6]Will of Martha Washington, printed in full in ibid., 329-393.

[7]Ibid., 451, 453.

nation.[8] In all, he owed $4545 when the sales ended, a debt which would take him years to pay off.[9] But he never regretted it. Instead, he was considerably put out when Gilbert Stuart refused to sell him an unfinished portrait of Washington.[10]

When he had brought his store of relics to "Mount Washington," and crammed them into the four-room brick cottage, near the river into which he moved the summer of 1802, he must have been hard pressed to find a little room for himself.[11]

At that time most of the estate was covered with virgin timber; only along the river were there a few fields under cultivation. Until he got more land into production, Custis would be largely dependent on his other plantations, especially those in New Kent County, for most of his income. One of his first tasks, therefore, must have been to run down the list of his properties in order to see where he stood financially.

First off, he would have to cross off Square No. 21 in Washington City;[12] a defect in his guardian's will prevented him from inheriting it.

[8] National Intelligencer (Washington, D. C.), July 28, 1802.

[9] Custis to Alexander Moore, Feb. 15, 1843, Custis Family Papers, Mount Vernon.

[10] William Thornton to unknown, Jan. 6, 1800, William Thornton MSS, L. C.; letter of Custis, n. d., cited in Henry T. Tuckerman, The Character and Private Life of Washington (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1859), 57.

[11] His residence is given in an advertisement in the Alexandria Gazette, Aug. 30, 1802. "I came to live in your vicinity in 1802," Custis told Richard P. Jackson, a Georgetown newspaperman years later, for which see the latter's Chronicles of Georgetown (Washington, D. C.: R. O. Polkinhorn, 1878), 71. See also Mrs. R. E. Lee to Mrs. Laura C. Holloway, n. d., reprinted in part in the latter's, The Ladies Of the White House (2 vols. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1886), II, 58; and Decker and McSween, op. cit., 29. The location of the house is shown on the survey made Mar. 31, 1746, by Theodore Bland, Records of Alexandria County, Va., Survey Book, 1748-1857, pp.11f. The cottage, no longer in existance, is described in Decker and McSween, op. cit., 29.

[12] Washington's will passed no title to Square 21 because it was not witnessed as required by the laws of Maryland, of which the property had originally been a part. Stetson, op. cit., 61.

On the other hand, the two long narrow islands off the Eastern Shore, Mocon (now Mockhorn) and Smith's, together about 6,000 acres in extent, should prove valuable. Both were well-timbered and because of the temperate climate, grass grew on their fertile soil the year around. At one time there had been a salt works on Mocon, but now they were being used only to pasture a small number of sheep and cattle.[13]

Not having the capital to develop the islands, one of the first things Custis did after moving to Mount Washington was to devise a scheme whereby he would receive some benefit from them and at the same time improve the general condition of agriculture in his section. In short, he offered to rent Smith's Island, at a low rent, to anyone who would try raising cotton on it. "Southern gentlemen," he stated in a local newspaper, had assured him that cotton could be grown on the island as easily as on those off the coast of Georgia, from which he had procurred cotton seed to give to anyone who would try the experiment.[14] Mocon could be rented for any purpose--cotton, a saltworks, or a fishery. The last offer did not go begging, --but no one took him up on his other proposition--his first attempt at agricultural improvement.[15]

Besides the two islands, he also had what was left of the old Arlington estate on the Eastern Shore, but this was of no importance. His two best plantations lay on the Pamunkey River, about twenty-five miles east of Richmond. Of these, the less valuable was "Romancock," in King William County, the old Claiborne estate of about 2200 acres which Washington had bought for Jack Custis in 1770, and to which the latter had added an additional 1776 acres four years later. The White House estate, in adjoining

[13] Swem, op. cit., 159. Also G. W. P. Custis in Alexandria Gazette, July 9, 1802.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Mocon is mentioned as having been leased in Custis to James Anderson, June 3, 1804, Misc. MSS, N. Y. His. Soc.

New Kent County, was 500 acres larger and tobacco had been the chief crop on both plantations, but by now wheat and corn were the chief cash crops, though fish and livestock were also sold in considerable quantities.[16] Early returns from these estates are scarce, but one for $4790 for livestock sold between 1809 to 1811--"sheep, lambs, hogs, cattle and veals"--indicates the scale of their operations.[17] Both estates also supplied quantities of meat and grain for "Mount Washington," and for sale in Washington and Baltimore. James Anderson, formerly farm manager at Mount Vernon was now in charge of the two estates and was building a grist mill at Romancock and was planning a distillery, to make peach and apple brandy, for the White House similar to the one he had built for General Washington some years before.[18]

Having his most valuable estates in Anderson's capable hands, enabled their owner to give most of his attention to Mount Washington. To assist him in developing it, he first had William Spence, who had been gardener at Mount Vernon, and then, late in 1802, took on a man named John Withers. The position was an important one, for upon it depended not only the present, but the future prosperity of an estate. A manager had to have a practical knowledge of farming, be able to keep accounts straight, and know how to keep the slaves profitably employed and healthy. To successfully exploit Mount Washington required more than average skill, for only the low lands near the river were exceptionally fertile. Elsewhere, the soil was rather thin and poor, which probably led Custis to

[16] Records of Alexa. Co., D. C. Deed Book E, 127-132; report of surveyor Christopher Johnson to Custis, July 1, 1818, Custis MSS, Va. His. Soc; and photostat of deed, George and Martha Washington to G. W. P. Custis, dated Aug. 3, 1795, in Misc. MSS, U. of Va.

[17] Custis MSS, Va. His. Soc.

[18] Custis to James Anderson, June 3, 1804, N. Y. His. Soc.; same to same, Oct. 16, 1806, DeButts-Ely MSS.

decide to have a good-sized farm on the level land along the river and keep the rest of the estate in timber as a "park," after the English fashion.[19] By selling timber off the tract on Four Mile Run, and even pieces of the tract itself, he would conserve the fine stand of virgin timber at Mount Washington and have money to develop his farm.

Apparently Custis became dissatisfied with manager Withers, for within a year he had a new one, John Ball, a local man and a veteran of the Revolution whose grandfather had once worked for Washington.[20] Ball must have been competent , for he held the position for some years.

Custis must have been happy to be relieved of the tasks usually done by an overseer. Of these, one of the first had been to clear the river front of snags and debris in order to establish a fishery, shad and herring being an important item in the diet of the slaves, and an important source of income when sold by the barrel at Baltimore. Because Mount Washington was situated where the tide and river current were in an almost constant equilibrium, fishing was not restricted to high or low water, as it was further down the river. On the other hand, the slack water caused the river to drop much of its burden of silt and miscellaneous debris in front of the estate, forming a bar studded with uprooted trees that often entangled and tore the large seines employed. Telling about a particularly difficult snag, Custis wrote:

> In the year 1803, I removed an enormous log from the present ship channel...I used to remove it, a force which would have heaved it from the solid earth. After resisting the power of the windlass, I was obliged to bind down four boats, at low water, and leave the tide to weigh the tree or sink the boats; when nearly sinking

[19] Washington to Dr. James Anderson, Nov. 4, 1797, Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXXVI, 64; and Alexandria Gazette, Nov. 4, 1802.

[20] The Federalist (Washington, D. C.), Mar. 7, 1803; and Alexandria Gaz., July 22, Aug. 16, 1803. For Ball, see Stetson, op. cit., 114. He was taken on by November; Alexandria Gaz., Nov. 15, 1803.

> the boats, it at length left its bed, and was borne off. I presume this tree, could not have accumulated less than eight feet of mud around it, and formed a little bar in itself. 21

Probably he employed the seine and boat he had purchased at Mount Vernon the year before for his fishing.[22] Like Washington, he was not above working with his hands, thereby shocking a young lady who met him during the fishing season of 1804. "He came in the greatest figure you ever beheld," she wrote. "He had been busily employed caulking a boat--not altogether a suitable employment..."[23]

Another early project was the large truck garden, to manage which he advertised for a single man "with a knowledge of the marketing business..."[24] He may also have grown some tobacco on the rich "bottoms" along the river, but corn and wheat were the principal crops. American grain being in demand because of the Napoleonic War. The fact that Alexandria was an important port for the shipment of grain gave Custis a substantial advantage over farmers further inland.[25] Basically, his income was dependent on the price of grain overseas, then as later, explaining why he was always so anxious to learn the latest news from Europe, especially the grain quotations from the principal English ports. This situation also explains some of his views on domestic politics.

The farm equipment bought at Mount Vernon--everything from axes to corn drills-enabled Custis to get the most out of his Mount Washington

[21] Custis to the editor, Independent American (Georgetown, D. C.) Jan. 12, 1811.

[22] Prussing, op. cit., 454, 456.

[23] [Cornelia Lee?] to [Mrs. Richard Bland Lee?], Apr. 13, 1804, photostat in Lee Family Papers, L. C.

[24] Alexandria Gaz., Nov. 15, 26, 1803.

[25] For the crops raised in the vicinity, see David Baillie Warden, A Chorographical and Statistical Description of the District of Columbia (Paris, France: Smith, 1816), 45. See also, Avery Craven, Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860 (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois, 1925), 79.

farm, and increase it in size, while the market was so favorable. He was well fixed for livestock--mules, horses, oxen, sheep and cows.[26]

He was especially proud of his mules. His jack, "Columbus," he boasted, was "superior to any ever imported into this country, or raised herein." Nor was he exaggerating. "Columbus" was of a breed Washington had developed especially for general farm work in the South, a breed which combined the strength and endurance of the Spanish type with the speed and lightness of the Maltese. He had also successfully popularized their use in breeding mules which were hardier than horses and better able to stand neglect.[27] The stud fees Custis received for "Columbus"--$10, plus pasturage and grooming charges,--plus what he received for his less well-known jacks, must have amounted to a tidy sum each year.[28] "Peter went to Mr. Custis' with the Jenny," was a frequent entry in the diary of a friend--evidence of the local reputation of the Mount Washington stud.[29]

Undoubtedly Custis got a great deal of satisfaction from carrying on a project instituted by his revered guardian. Having no greater claim to distinction, he was proud to be considered "the child of Mount Vernon" and enjoyed talking to the many visitors to the National Capital who sought him out because of his connection with the First President. Such was his personality, he welcomed the role of "Washington's adopted son" that was more or less thrust upon him, and threw himself into it with something of an actor's talent for living a part. Handsome, well-mannered, and an easy speaker with a "full, rich, and melodious voice," it was natural that

[26]Prussing, op. cit., 453-455, lists the farm equipment and livestock Custis bought at Mount Vernon.

[27]Lewis Cecil Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860 (2 vols. Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1933), II, 851f.

[28]The Federalist (Washington, D. C.), Mar. 7, 1803.

[29]Entry for May 14, 1804, and others in MS Diary of Mrs. W. Thornton, L. C.

he should make the most of his position and talents to advocate his guardian's principles and policies at a time when they were being attacked, directly or otherwise, by the party in power.[30]

As a resident of the District of Columbia, he could of course neither vote nor hold office. Nevertheless, being who he was, he could do much to keep the memory of Washington alive. He had begun, shortly after the General's death, by writing an "Address to the Youth of America," which won the praise of Henry Lee, the famous "Light Horse Harry." "The sentiments which it breathes do honor to your heart," the latter wrote, asking permission to publish it. "I ardently pray a similar spirit may pervade the rising generation."[31] Likewise, a speech on Washington's services to the nation, delivered early in 1803 when he presented a portrait of the General to the Academy in Alexandria, was well applauded. In thanking him for the gift, the head of the institution urged him to himself emulate his distinguished guardian: "Treading the steps of your venerable kinsman, you may prove useful to your country, and at a far distant period, leave a name which shall be illustrious."[32]

Such were the social pressures which influenced Custis to become a spokesman for the Washington tradition and the advocate of his nationalistic policies.

Speeches and ceremonies of this sort were always to be a most important part of Custis' life, so that in time he would himself become something of a patriotic institution. But the major achievement of his life was the

[30] The words quoted are Mrs. R. E. Lee's, in Custis, Recollections, 72.
[31] Henry Lee to Custis, Feb. 16, 1800, ibid., 57.
[32] Alexandria Gaz., Jan. 29, 1803.

plan he devised at this early date to popularize the breeding of fine-wooled sheep and otherwise advance American agriculture.

American sheep were the poorest imaginable and there was no woolen industry at this time, though during the American Revolution, attempts along this line had met with success. But with peace, English woolens had flooded the American market, forcing domestic mills to close down. As a result, most farmers raised only enough sheep for their own use, butchering the best for their table, which left the poorest to perpetuate the breed. After 1793, when war broke out between France and Great Britain, the situation became even worse, most farmers giving up sheep altogether in order to concentrate on grain crops. The few sheep that remained were miserable creatures, with long thin legs, gaunt body, and short, knotty fleece, more like cotton than wool.[33]

Other branches of American agriculture were equally backward. Cattle were scrubby, raised more for hides and fat than for food. Razor-back hogs ran wild in the woods. Most farmers simply planted one grain crop after another until their fields were exhausted, after which they abandoned them. Few knew or cared anything about fertilizers, erosion-control, or crop rotation.

The saving factor in the situation was the example set by a small number of well-to-do farmers, such as the First President, who modelled their farms after those of the English gentry, at that time the most advanced agriculturists in the world. Unfortunately, their influence

[33] Ezra A. Carman, H. A. Heath, and John Minto, Special Report on the History and Present Conditions of the Sheep Industry of the United States (Washington, D. C., U. S. Dept. of Ag., 1892), 53. Also, L. G. Connor, A Brief History of the Sheep Industry in the United States (Ag. His. Soc. Papers, reprinted from Ann. Rep. of the Am. His. Assoc., 1918. (Washington, D. C.: Gov't Printing Off., 1921), 96ff. Also Custis to editor J. S. Skinner, in Am. Farmer, VII (May 27, 1826), 73.

had done little so far to alleviate the situation.

Immediately after the Revolution, Washington had set out to improve his sheep and cattle. Using fine English sheep of the New Leicester breed (which he had managed to import in spite of British restrictions), he had built up a large flock which clipped an average of 5 and 1/2 pounds of long wool--a remarkable achievement for that day. Unfortunately, the flock deteriorated sadly after he became President and was away from home most of the time. During his "retirement," he had worked hard to restore it to its former condition, mainly by breeding it with a fine Persian ram imported from the West Indies, but had been only partially successful by the time of his death.[34]

Washington Custis had bought some of the best of the Mount Vernon flock at the executor's sales in 1802, among them two particularly fine Leicester ewes and the Persian ram. With them, he now set out to develop a breed with suitable wool for manufacturing purposes.[35] At the same time, he made plans to create a market for such a wool, for it would be pointless to develop it, if it could not be sold. To do one or the other was difficult enough; to do both simultaneously must have seemed almost fantastic to some of his friends with whom he discussed the matter.

Still, there were signs that the country was ripe for such a venture. The war in Europe had seriously curtailed American trade, throwing the nation more and more upon its own devices. As a result, interest in agriculture was reviving, and one or two of the older agricultural societies were again holding regular meetings and offering premiums for agricultural achievements. However, the gentlemen farmers and businessmen who managed the new societies were interested in the learned and the

[illegible]nor, op. cit., 99; Carman, et. al., op. cit., 53-57.

[35]Prussing, op. cit., 452, lists the sheep Custis bought at Mount Vernon.

scientific aspects of agriculture, rather than their practical application and consequently had little influence among the great mass of farmers.[36] Therefore, it was left to the young master of Mount Washington to devise a way of arousing popular interest in breeding an improved race of sheep and founding a native woolen industry.

No doubt Custis used as his prototype the sheep-shearings held earlier in England by the distinguished agriculturalists, Thomas Coke and the Duke of Bedford. These were annual events lasting several days, during which the practical value of improving crops and livestock was demonstrated; usually they were climaxed by a sheep-shearing contest, the awarding of prizes, and a great feast. Washington had been quite taken with the idea, and had once considered combining the English sheep-shearing with the American county fair, then confined solely to buying and selling, in order to demonstrate to participating farmers the value of improving their farming methods;[37] but he had never had the opportunity to try it.

Custis may have recalled his guardian's scheme, or been reminded of it by one of the General's friends, perhaps David Humphreys, who was also intensely interested in establishing a native woolen industry. To that end, Humphreys had brought back some choice Spanish merino sheep when he returned home in 1802, and may have discussed his plans with Custis when he stopped over in Washington for a few days before going on to Massachusetts. This would explain the family tradition that it was he who first interested Custis in the subject of sheep-raising.[38]

[36] Wayne C. Neely, The Agricultural Fair (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 41. Memoirs of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, I, (1808), i-ix.

[37] N. F. Cabell, "Some fragments of an Intended Report on the Post Revolutionary History of Agriculture in Virginia," with notes by E. G. Swem, in Wm. & Mary Coll. Quar., XXVI (Jan., 1918), 165f.

[38] David Humphreys to Dr. Aaron Dexter, Aug. 25, 1802, in Frank L. Humphreys, Life and Times of David Humphreys (2 vols. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1917), II, 340; and Custis, Recollections, 64.

Others, besides Humphreys, might also be expected to support any practicable scheme Custis might devise to popularize sheep-breeding--Thomas Ludwell Lee of nearby Loudoun County, for one; in later years, Custis described him as "one of the very few southern agriculturalists who had paid particular attention to any kinds of stock (horses excepted)."[39] Then there was James Madison, who hoped to establish an "American Board of Agriculture" modelled after the English National Board of Agriculture and with the same general aim, the diffision of "practical knowledge in Agriculture and Domestic Manufacture." Madison organized a meeting held at the Capitol, February 22, 1803, to make plans for such a board, but nothing came of it.[40]

Madison's meeting may have spurred Custis to announce his own plan, for a fortnight later the Alexandria Gazette carried the following notice in bold type:

> FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF AN AMERICAN BREED OF SHEEP.
> I will give a PREMIUM of FORTY DOLLARS, for the finest RAM LAMB, that can be produced in the Month of March, 1805, then a year old. The Lambs to be inspected by four gentlemen of judgment and respectability; two to be chosen by the breeders and two by myself, they having the power to Choose a fifth. In addition to the premium, the breeder of the fortunate Lamb will be entitled to demand a Ram of the improved [Mount Washington] breed, at any time within ten years of the day producing, gratis. The fortunate Lamb will wear a collar with the breeder's name thereon, together with an appropriate inscription. The place of shewing will be any where within the Territory of Columbia.
> G. W. P. Custis
> Mount Washington, March 8.[41]

As if he were not already busy enough, the young proprietor had also begun building the house which was to be his most enduring monument. "The Americans cherish the belief that, at no very distant period of

[39] Custis to J. S. Skinner, June 4, 1825, in Am. Farmer, VII (June 10, 1825), 95.
[40] Universal Gazette (Washington, D. C.), Mar. 3, 1803.
[41] Mar. 8, 1803.

time, Washington will be not only the handsomest, but the largest city of the universe...," commented a foreign visitor about this time.[42] He might well have been writing of Washington Custis. No one held greater expectations of the future splendor of the new national capital or was more set on having a home commensurate in size and architectural merit with the great city being laid out in the woods across the river.

Instead of trusting to his own limited knowledge of architecture, Custis wisely sought out a professional architect. He was even more wise in his choice, for no man could have better designed the kind of house he envisioned than the brilliant young English architect, George Hadfield.

At the time he drew the plans for Custis' mansion, Hadfield had been in America only a few years.[43] A pupil of the celebrated Wyatt at the Royal Academy of Arts, he had been the only architectural student in forty years to win the academy's annual gold medal award. With it, went a travelling scholarship which enabled him to study classical architecture in Italy for three years, during which he drew restorations of several ancient temples which created a sensation when exhibited at the Royal Academy on his return to England, in 1795. Had he remained there, the young architect would have had royal patronage. But unfortunately for him, he accepted an offer to come to Washington to take over the construction of the Capitol. There he became embroiled in one controversy after another over the plans of that building and ultimately was discharged.[44]

[42]"An Account of the City of Washington," in The Literary Mag. and Am. Register, IV, (Aug., 1805), 134f.

[43]Contemporary sources attributing the mansion to Hadfield, are cited below. Custis is known to have discussed the architecture of his mansion on only one occasion, about 1823, and then with a young army officer who left no record of what was said. Joseph Pearson Farley, Three Rivers (New York: Neale Publishing Co., 1910), 126.

[44]Leslie Stephen and Sydney Lee, eds., Dictionary of National Biography (22 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1937-1938), VIII, 876; Algernan Graves, Royal Academy Exhibitors, 1769-1904 (8 vols. London: Graves., 1905), III, 348; Fiske Kimball, "George Hadfield," D. A. B., VIII, 70.

A wiser man would have gone elsewhere, convinced that he could not prevail against "the rogues then employed in the construction of public buildings, or...the charlatans in architecture who designed them," as Hadfield's friend, architect Benjamin H. Latrobe, described them.[45] But Hadfield chose to stay on in Washington, where he was too unassuming to attract influential attention, other than President Jefferson who was well acquainted with his sister, the gifted miniaturist, Maria Cosway. For some time he led a hand-to-mouth existence, barely making a living by teaching architecture, making drawings of inventions for submission to the Patent Office, and designing a few public buildings and private homes, such as Custis's. He also invented a brick-making machine.[46] "He loiters here, ruined in fortune, in temper, and reputation...," Latrobe wrote of his friend.[47] In time, the tide would turn, for others beside Jefferson and Latrobe admired his "chaste architecture" and his "beautiful proportions," so that some years later he would be commissioned to plan and build the City Hall, one of the finest buildings in the classical style in America.[48]

Presumably, Custis had the plans for his house and perhaps its outbuildings when he began building, for there is no indication that any

[45]Latrobe, op. cit., 133.

[46]The only existing plans by Hadfield, for a "Country House" near Washington, are in the Avery Architectural Library, Columbia University. For his architectural school, see Nat. Intelligencer, Nov. 30, 1801; for the patent drawings, see William Thornton to the "Citizens of the United States," in Nat. Intelligencer, Mar. 12, 1811; and for the brick-making machine, see S. A. Elliot, Am. Museum, and Repository of Arts and Sciences (Georgetown, D. C.: J. Milligan, 1832), I, part 1, 4.

[47]Entry for Aug. 12, 1806, in Latrobe, op. cit., 133.

[48]Hadfield's talent was highly regarded by the unknown writer of his obituary (Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 13, 1826); and by his pupil, William P. Elliot, for which see his letters to the editor ibid., June 17, 1835; Feb. 20, 1835; and Apr. 25, 1840. See also, Elliot's Washington Guide (Washington, D. C.: S. A. Elliot, 1826, 26), in which is the earliest known engraving of Arlington House; and William Dunlap, History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States (2 vols. New York: G. P. Scott & Co., 1834, I, 336. All attribute Arlington House to Hadfield.

change was made in the design of the mansion after it was begun.[49] That he designed the entire structure, not just the center section and portico, is demonstrated by the close resemblance of the windows in the wings to those in other buildings from his drawing board, and to the fact that the wings are obviously designed to balance the massive portico. Any subsequent change in design would certainly have affected the carefully planned proportions of the structure; therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Custis' house was one of the earliest private residences to use the colossal order.

It speaks well for Custis' courage and imagination that he accepted Hadfield's design, instead of a more conventional style. No doubt he was influenced by the vogue for classical architecture created by Thomas Jefferson, though as yet the new style was largely confined to public buildings. The fact that it was purely American, rather than derived from European models, may also have led him to accept it.

"Temples...in foreign climes, we will now copy in these later times,"[50] wrote a poetic Philadelphia schoolmaster who visited Washington in 1799. His words may aptly be applied to Custis' house, for it truly was to be a "temple" in the woods. Its chief architectural feature, a great portico with eight massive columns, was derived from temples Hadfield had studied in Italy and was quite similar to the one he had earlier proposed for the Capitol. It, plus the low wings on either side, would give the building a total frontage of 140 feet, enough to make it "carry" across the river, and

[49] Luther Morris Leisenring, "The Restoration of Arlington House," an unpublished manuscript made available by the kindness of its author. Mr. Leisenring was the architect in charge of the restoration of Arlington House by the War Department, 1928-1931. Like Mr. Leisenring, the author has examined the plans of the house and the house itself, and can find no indication that the plans or design was in any way changed while the house was in the process of being constructed.

[50] John Searson, Mount Vernon, A Poem (Philadelphia: J. Searson, 1800), 40.

in fact terminate the vista from the Capitol, three miles away. Since conventional ornamentation would be lost at the distance from which the house would normally be viewed, Hadfield evidently decided to dispense with it, relying instead on the use of carefully thought out proportions to give beauty to his creation.

Naturally, the scale of the exterior governed the size and height of the rooms inside. Therefore, these would be large, with high ceilings and plain walls decorated only by a simple molding at their juncture. Having them open into each other would give an illusion of spaciousness, and well proportioned windows and a number of semi-circular arches would relieve any impression of austerity caused by the plainness of the interior design.

Careful planning was equally evident in the site chosen for the house, on the very edge of a steep bluff overlooking the river and the natural amphitheatre in which lay the national Capital. Not only was the view superb; here the house would be conspicious from every direction but the west.[51]

Had it not been for the speed with which his family heirlooms and

[51] Fiske Kimball, Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and the Early Republic (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1922), 180; statement of architect Charles McKim in Charles Moore, The Family Life of George Washington (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1926), 179; Talbot Hamlin, Greek Revival Architecture in America (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1944), 5ff; and Howard Major, The Domestic Architecture of the Early American Republic (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippencott Co., 1926), 36, 44, 46, 68, 72.

Early accounts differ as to whether the portico was derived from the Temple of Neptune, at Paestum, Italy, or the smaller Theseum, at Athens. In size and proportions, its columns are somewhere between those of the two (for which, see L. M. Leisenring, op. cit.,), which makes it appear likely that Hadfield had no single prototype, but instead derived the portico from some of the primitive Doric temples he saw in Italy.

shington relics were deteriorating in the old cottage he then occupied, this probably would have deferred building his house until he could better afford such an ambitious undertaking. But dampness and rats had already ruined two fine portraits and injured others, and a better storage place was urgently needed. To provide it, he began his mansion some time in 1803.[52]

Not having the money to build the whole house, Custis planned to follow the common practice of building the wings first, leaving the main part to be built at a later date. His slaves probably did much of the preliminary work--leveling the site, digging the foundations, and clearing a road down to the river. They may also have assisted in the actual construction, though the skilled work was probably done by local bricklayers, carpenters, plasterers, and glaziers under the direction of a professional ilder. Most of the materials were to be had right on the estate. At no great distance were beds of brick clay, so Custis made his own, perhaps using the brickmolds brought from Mount Vernon for that purpose. Such brick was soft and deteriorated rapidly when wet, but would have to do for the foundations as well as the walls until he opened a quarry somewhere on his land. From his forests he could get all the oak and pine needed for beams and rafters, woodwork and floors. By the time he got around to building the large center section, which would require the most timber, he expected to have a sawmill in operation on Four Mile Run.[53]

[52]Holloway, op. cit., II, 59. Mrs. R. E. Lee's statement in Custis, Recollections, 52, could be taken to mean that Custis began building in 1802, but more explicit evidence disproves that.

[53]For the tradition that Custis made his own bricks, see Decker and McSween, op. cit., 30; for the brickmolds, see Prussing, op. cit., 457. The only building stone in the District was poor-quality bluish limestone (Warden, op. cit., 41). Later on Custis used stone, probably from his quarry n Four Mile Run, for the foundations of the service wings and the outildings. For the quarry, see Federal Republican (Georgetown, D. C.), Sept. 8, 1813. The sawmill was in operation by 1807, for which see Alexandria Gazette, June 16, 1807.

North Wings

First to be built was the north wing, this was entirely taken up by one large room, the banquet room, which had three tall recessed windows on the east side and one at the north end to give it an air of formality. There were no windows on the west wall, in the middle of which was a large fireplace flanked by doorways leading to outside steps.[54] Near the fireplace, an inside stairway went down to the kitchen and laundry in the basement.[55] Inside, the walls and woodwork were painted a light green, almost the same shade as that in the banquet hall at Mount Vernon.[56] Outside, the walls of soft brick were covered with a hard stucco plaster to protect it from the weather. Scored with lines and tinted to resemble marble, the stucco made a good appearance and was most durable--qualities which led Hadfield to use it later on for his City Hall.[57]

The south wing, identical in size and shape, was divided into a large parlor and a smaller room at the south end for an office and study; only the larger room had a basement. For some reason, perhaps a building error, its floor was several inches lower than that of the north wing, necessitating an awkward step when the rest of the house was later built to the lower level. At the north end of the parlor was an interesting architectural feature, a great semi-circular arch across the width of the room and touching the ceiling, reminiscent of similar arches Hadfield had seen in Italian villas. This room was painted a light gray and had a dado, or

[54] Gilbert L. Rodier, "Arlington House," Architectural Forum, XL (Mar., 1924), 89-92; and Luther M. Leisenring, "An Account of the Restoration of Arlington House," Federal Architect, July, 1932, p. 8., cited hereafter as Leisenring, "Restoration."

[55] The opening for the stairway, long since floored in, is still visible. It is highly unlikely that it was added or used after the existing curtain walls were built, since it would have blocked the present "inner hall."

[56] Ascertained by an examination of the many layers of paint, Jan., 1932

[57] Photographs now in the National Archives, made by Mathew Brady, 1861-1864, show plainly that at least the front of Custis' house was treated in this way. The City Hall was re-covered in limestone about 1920.

chair rail, of classic design in black and Pompeian red wallpaper, encircling it.[58] Custis entertained some of his friends in this room, not long after it was finished in the spring of 1804. One of his guests, a young lady, was much impressed: "The House will be a very handsome building when compleated [sic]," she told a relative.[59]

The fact that each was a complete building in itself, with its roof hipped at both ends, indicates that Custis did not expect to build the main part of the house for some time.[60] But even this modest start caused some comment. A stranger who saw it at this stage wrote: "His [Custis'] seat is on a superb mount and his buildings are begun in a stile of superior taste and elegance."[61]

All this took money, and Custis cast about for ways of raising money. He decided to rent and, if necessary, sell some of his land on Four Mile Run.[62] He also overcame his Federalist distaste of President Jefferson to the extent of asking him to have the bridge soon to be built across the Potomac abut on the northern end of the estate--which of course would increase the value of his land. His argument that the channel narrowed sharply at this point, making a bridge there shorter and less expensive than one farther downstream, was a sound one, but he received

[58] Leisenring, op. cit., 8. A specimen of the dado was found under a newer mantelpiece when the house was being restored about 1930.

[59] [Cornelia Lee?] to [Mrs. Richard Bland Lee?], Apr. 13, 1804, photostat in Lee Family Papers, L. C. Mrs. R. E. Lee says both wings were finished by the summer of 1804; for which see Holloway, op. cit., II, 59.

[60] The hips are still to be seen under the present roof, Leisenring, "Restoration," op. cit., 20.

[61] Nat. Intelligencer, May 7, 1811.

[62] Custis to J. Anderson, June 3, 1804, Misc. MSS, N. Y. His. Soc. He advertised small acreages for rent in the Alexandria Gaz., June 19, 1804.

only a noncommittal answer from the President and the bridge was eventually built just below the southern end of Mount Washington--which must have confirmed Custis' opinion of all things Jeffersonian.[65]

Even more irritating, the administration was planning a dam across the west channel of the Potomac from the upper end of Mason's (or Analostan) Island to the Virginia shore. This structure, by throwing all the current into the channel east of the island, would clear it of the silt that kept shipping from getting up to the docks at Georgetown--or so its proponents maintained. Custis argued that nothing could prevent the river from silting up at this point, where tide and current were almost always in balance; he predicted that a swamp would build up behind the causeway and make the whole section unhealthy and Analostan Island uninhabitable. The channel west of the island, he said, was the natural one, and could be easily deepened and controlled by floodgates. The subsequent history of both structures, the bridge and the dam, when built, confirmed his opinions. Large sections of the long, low bridge were frequently carried away by floods and ice; and the causeway failed to keep the east channel open to Georgetown, which ceased to be a seaport; and eventually Mason's Island became so unhealthy, because of the swamps behind the causeway, its owners had to abandon it.[65]

These setbacks failed to discourage the young master of Mount Washington. Seeing opportunity on every hand as he walked or rode about his estate, perhaps accompanied by his hound, "Royal E.," his nimble mind ran

[65] Feb. 13, 1804, Coolidge MSS, Mass. His. Soc.; Jefferson to Custis, Feb. 23, 1804, Jefferson Papers, L. C.

[64] See his statement to Jos. Packard in the latter's Recollections of a Long Life (Washington, D. C.: B. S. Adams, 1902), 72; also his letter to the editor, Independent American (Georgetown, D. C.), Jan. 11, 1811.

[65] For the failure of the causeway, see Warden, op. cit., 135. It was breached by floods several times and finally swept away, relieving the situation.

over one project after another for developing his holdings--except when it was occupied with thoughts of a certain young lady in Alexandria.[66]

The truth of the matter was that the young man lacked companionship. He missed the old life at Mount Vernon, the throng of guests and visitors, the hunting, and above all the affectionate attention he had always received from his grandparents. True, he could always ride down to Woodlawn to see the Lewises when he got too lonesome. They, too, were Federalists, and Nelly's husband shared his interest in agriculture. Though quite dissimilar, physically and temperamentally--Lawrence being tall and dignified in his bearing, Washington Custis of only average height and inclined to be puckish--they hit it off well and were good friends.

He could also visit his sister Martha over in Georgetown, where she and her husband, Thomas Peter, were building a large, imposing home, "Tudor Place." They, too, had like interests and political views. He saw less of his other sister, the beautiful Eliza, who eight years before had married a wealthy Englishman much older than herself, but had since left him--rumor had it that a military gentleman had been the cause of the break-up.[67] She was a close friend of such prominent figures as President Jefferson and Mrs. Dolly Madison, and it was probably her politics, rather than her impulsiveness, that caused her to be less close to her brother than his other sisters.

He also had a number of young acquaintances, mostly family friends and distant relations, and with them had some gay times at parties and

[66]"Royal E," is described in Alexandria Gaz., Nov. 4, 1802.

[67]William Faux, Memorable Days in America (London: Simpkin & Marshal, 1823), 390; Allen C. Clark, Greenleaf and Law in the Federal City (Washington, D. C.: A. C. Clark, 1901), 265ff.

balls. These noticed how he seemed to favor a Miss Mary Lee Fitzhugh, daughter of William and Ann Fitzhugh. The Fitzhughs were newcomers to the neighborhood, having moved not long since from their old home, "Chatham," near Fredericksburg, to a small house in Alexandria where they were staying while a larger one was being built at "Ravensworth," their estate a few miles out of town.

The Fitzhughs had been close friends of the Washingtons, so Molly, as she was called, and Washington Custis had known each other since childhood. Though only sixteen, Molly already had a maturity of outlook far beyond her years and was well thought of for her common sense, unaffected piety, and genuine interest in helping others. Her portrait shows her to have been a brunette of average size with an appealing heart-shaped face and a strong chin suggesting a firmness of character affirmed by the direct, kindly gaze from her eyes. Levelheaded and retiring by nature, her temperament was well suited to offset the more mercurial one of her suitor's.[68]

Only one love letter, found in the attic of their home a century and a quarter after Molly wrote it, survives to tell something of their courtship and engagement. In it, much of Molly's character is revealed:

> Perhaps my dear Washington is at this moment thinking of his Mary--wondering what is her employment, how her thoughts are engaged. The deplorable situation of the poor servant who was so ill the day you were here continues to fill my mind with awful ideas of dissolution.....I had intended when I took up my pen to write something which might enliven some of your solitary moments my dear George, but my mind has been so overcast with gloom today ...that it would take a long time to bring my ideas into an agreeable train. Yet when I am writing to one who loves to see me gay and happy, who, as my dear Father says, 'will do all in his power

[68]For her character, see Meade, op. cit., II, 196; and Packard, op. cit., 157. The portrait of her as a young woman is owned by Mrs. Bolling Lee and reproduced in Rose M. E. McDonald, Mrs. Robert E. Lee (Boston & New York: Ginn & Co., 1939), 26. There is also a pen and ink sketch in DeButts-Ely MSS.

to make me so' a cheerful subject should employ my pen....

You need not fear to intrude your sorrows on me...I love to hear you talk of those ever to be lamented Friends whom you have lost...You, who have experienced from them all that affection could dictate, must be more than slightly affected when a grateful memory brings their tenderness to mind....

Sister Ann....says that the solitude in which you live will soon render you unfit for society and make you think yourself the most miserable of the human race. I am quite of a different opinion. [69]

Many were the nights that Molly's suitor sat at his desk in the study, writing to her--his sharp, rather irregular features made almost handsome by the candlelight. Thinking of her, his face lost something of the alertness and distinction ordinarily given it by the firmly set mouth and strong chin, the thin nose and low sloping forehead, and above all the sharp, intelligent eyes. It was a pleasant face, if not especially handsome, expressive of a mildness of character and a whimsical spirit that promised that its possessor would be easy to live with. [70]

Early in 1804, Molly and Washington Custis became engaged, so probably she was present when he addressed the Washington Society at Alexandria, on July 4th. Made up of prominent families who honored the memory of Washington by supporting the "Free School" he had founded, the society met only once a year and being chosen to address it was something of a distinction.

The speech Custis delivered in old Christ Church was tailored to fit his largely Federalist audience. He paid tribute to the heroes of the Revolution; lauded Washington and his admirers for founding a nation knit

[69]Undated, but evidently c. 1803-1804, original in Custis and Lee Family MSS, Lee Mansion National Memorial (hereafter, L. M. N. M.).

[70]From the portraits made by Robert Wage Pine and James Sharples while Custis was living at Mount Vernon, and that by St. Memin in 1803. The best description of him is by his daughter, Mrs. R. E. Lee, in Custis, Recollections, 72.

together in freedom under s strong constitution; and charged that the present administration now sought to discredit the First President and the principles he had stood for. The Jeffersonians, he said, were influenced less by the American than by the French Revolution; they ignored that the one had ended in freedom, the other with a "Corsican Caesar," in control. The same thing could happen here, he warned, unless the Constitution was upheld, for "if you cancel this bond of union, you become a prey to foreign usurption and domestic ambition..." He closed with a fervant appeal: "May an union of sentiment produce an union of brotherly affection throughout the United States!"[71]

The speech is important only as an expression of the patriotic creed that was to govern Custis' entire life. Half a century later, an old man, he would reaffirm these convictions just as strongly.

Three days later, he and Mary Lee Fitzhugh were married at her home in Alexandria. The Reverand Mr. Davis, who had officiated at the wedding of Nelly and Lawrence Lewis five years before and comforted Martha Washington when she lay dying, performed the ceremony.

Perhaps because "Mount Washington" was becoming too common a designation--his sister Eliza, for one, had a place by that name only a few miles distant--Custis renamed his estate after the old Custis plantation on the Eastern Shore.[72] Shortly after he brought his bride home, he began calling it "Arlington House," and the estate "Arlington."[73]

[71] Washington Federalist (Georgetown, D. C.), July 16, 1804.

[72] Ibid., July 11, 1804, and entry in Custis Family Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[73] The new name is first used in G. W. P. Custis to the Speaker of the U. S. House of Representatives, Dec. 11, 1804 (Washington, D. C.: 1804).

CHAPTER IV

"THE PLOUGH AND THE LOOM"

"Washington Custis spends most of his time at home," wrote a cousin, in August, 1804.[1] And why not? Nowhere was there a more romantic situation for a honeymoon.

From their hilltop, he and Mary could look out over the farm, out over the tree-fringed Potomac and the city beyond, clear to the hazy, forested hills of Maryland. Behind, the forest hemmed them in. As yet, their only egress to the outside world was the little carriage road that wound down the hill through the trees until it became only a thin line crossing the fields, towards the river. Inside, the stacks of portraits, the old furniture and the many mementoes from Mount Vernon made it seem as if the young couple were fashioning a new life out of the relics of another age.

To make living quarters, Custis divided the great banquet room in the north wing into three small rooms.[2] Since this was to be only a temporary arrangement until the main section of the house was built, the partition walls were lightly built. A chimney between two of the rooms provided a fireplace for each, and though it was far too large for so small a room, the wooden mantel, intended for the great fireplace on the west wall, was used instead in one of the small rooms. Nothing was done to the south wing. Custis continued to use the small room for an office and Mary the larger one for entertaining.

[1] Cornelia Lee to unknown: Aug. 24, 1804, quoted in part in Torbert, op. cit., 112.

[2] The best analysis of the alterations in the north wing is found in Rodier, op. cit., 89, 92.

That fall, Custis had to journey south when the man died who had been handling his affairs on the Eastern Shore. If possible, he wanted to sell Mocon Island, find out what supplies Smith's Island could provide for the other plantations, and decide on what improvements were needed at the latter. He also wanted to see for himself whether the slaves on his various farms were being as well fed and clothed as he had directed.[3]

The most interesting part of the trip turned out to be his visit to Smith's Island, which he reached in November, after having inspected the estates on the Pamunkey River. With a few retainers, he went over the island thoroughly with an eye to its suitability for sheep-breeding, noting with pleasure the luxuriant grass and shrubs that covered the treeless eastern half of the island and the lush meadows that here and there pierced the woods that covered the rest. Fresh water was to be had almost everywhere by merely digging a few feet in the sand, and of course salt was plentiful along the shore. Allowing four sheep to the acre, he estimated that the island could support a flock of four thousand the year around.

Occasionally the little party startled small bands of almost wild sheep, descendents of those put on the island many years before. One less nimble than the rest was shot, and upon examination its teeth were found to be almost worn away--proof of his great age and the healthfulness of the island. A younger one was also brought down, upon which they all feasted. Its fleece was fine and curly, if somewhat short, and its bones small, a desirable feature in mutton. Observing how the Smith's Island were flourishing, minus any care, made Custis certain that in time he could develop a native breed ideally suited to the conditions in the United States.

[3]Custis to James Anderson, June 3, 1804, Misc. MSS, N. Y. His. Soc.

The horses that had once roamed the island had apparently died off, but there were many wild cattle. These were very shy, yet proved fierce when wounded. A bull hit by four musket balls chased one of the party into the surf, and for a time it seemed the hapless man would be either gored to death or drowned. Their meat, too, proved to be good eating, which led Custis to believe that cattle and sheep should graze together in order to make the best use of pasturage. With enough beef and mutton to supply the Custis plantations for some time stowed away, the party then set sail.[4]

When he reached home, Custis resumed his sheep-breeding with renewed interest. Revising the usual practice of breeding from a fine-wooled sheep to a coarser, long-wooled one, he bred his Persian ram with a Leicester ewe to get a young ram with the long fleece of the Persian and the fine and thick wool of the Leicesters. "Mount Vernon," as Custis named him, also had the compact form and good size of his sire and appeared to thrive on the indifferent pasturage at Arlington. This was what Custis had been seeking--a hardy sheep, whose wool and mutton would both be marketable.[5]

As the year 1804 was ending, Custis was drawn into a political controversy that was to recur periodically until it was finally settled forty years later. Charging that their interests were neglected by the Federal Government, the citizens of Alexandria petitioned Congress to give back to Virginia the territory it had contributed to the District of Columbia. Custis opposed "retrocession" on the grounds that Washington had believed it desirable to include part of Virginia in the federal district, and that going against his wishes would diminish the importance of the

[4]Note to J. S. Skinner, June 24, 1825, 1825, Am. Farmer, VII (July 1, 1825), 114; also Custis, Address, 15-21.

[5]Ibid., 13f.; Carman, et. al., op. cit., 59f.

national government. As chairman of a meeting of citizens opposed to retrocession he helped draw up a set of resolutions to that effect to be sent to Congress.[6] There, they may have had some influence, for the retrocession legislation was shortly put aside and forgotten.

Mary Ann F was 16 in 1807
Custis Washington 23 in 1804

On his twenty-fourth birthday, April 30, 1805, Custis held the first sheep-shearing at Arlington Spring, near the river, the event which he had announced two years before. He was pleased at the number of guests who came to witness the event, but was disappointed that only one exhibitor showed up--Thomas Lee of "Coton Hall," in nearby Loudoun County. This was not the result of any lack of interest in the event; rather, it was a sad commentary on the quality of the sheep in the neighborhood. Fortunately Lee's ram, named "Bakewell," was well worth seeing. Four feet, nine inches from nose to tail, "Bakewell" looked enormous in comparison to average sheep as he was led about in front of the spectators. Shorn, he weighed 140 pounds, and his fleece well over twelve. With short legs and no horns, he was in every respect a fine animal certain to improve the Arlington flocks, well worth the $40 premium Custis paid for him.

Sheep Shearing

After showing the company four of his best ewes and a ram lamb, Custis led his guests over to a feast spread on long tables under the historic war tents of Washington, which had been festooned for the occasion with ivy and laurel and decorated with pictures, one of which was the famous Peale portrait of Washington.[7]

The dinner that followed was the high point of this, as of subsequent

[6] G. W. P. Custis, Letter.../dated Dec. 11, 1804/ Addressed to the Speaker, n. p. no.

[7] Custis to J. S. Skinner, June 10, 1825, Am. Farmer, VII (June 10, 1825), 93; Nat. Intelligencer, May 24, 1805.

shearings; and Custis always recalled them with pleasure:

> We then adjourned to a comfortable dinner [he wrote later on], where we got along jollily enough without getting drunk for we drank only American wine...no wise inimical to the brain- and we sang old songs, talked of the times, the war, and our hope that our veteran enemies would be shorn of their pride and honour when they touched upon the last foothold of freedom; and then we buzzed about the bottle, not greybeards with the cobwebs of a quarter century...but the brand new brewings of the currant and cherry, which blushed in the garden but the year before, and from which we drank, with hearts as full as our cups, success to the cause of agriculture and domestic economy-the cause of industry and independence. [8]

Afterwards, when they were finished eating, Custis told his guests something of the history of the tents under which they sat, then described the Smith's Island sheep and announced his intention to put some of the long-wooled Arlington breed on the island to see what would result from breeding the two races together.[9] Then there were more speeches and toasts by others of the company, until it grew late and the time came to return home.

That the sheepshearing was widely reported in the newspapers augered well for the future success of the sheep-shearing, if not the ultimate success of Custis' scheme to alter the economic life of the nation.

But for a time it seemed that Custis might be diverted from his goal by domestic and financial difficulties. Two weeks after the shearing, the Custis' first child, a girl, was born only to die the same day.[10] And hardly had Molly Custis recovered from the sad event when, three months later, her mother died.[11] Her father, too, was seriously ill and needed

[8] Custis to J.S.Skinner, June 24,1825, Am. Farmer,VII (July 1,1825),123.

[9] Nat. Intelligencer, May 25, 1805. For a detailed description and history of the tents, see Custis to Col. J. H. Riley, May 18, 1855, Custis and Lee MSS, L.C.M.M. The marquee is now in the chapel at Valley Forge, Pa.; the sleeping tent in the National Museum, Washington, D. C.

[10] Entry for May 15, 1805, Custis Family Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[11] Alexandria Gazette, Aug. 19, 1805.

his son-in-law's assistance with his business affairs, though Washington Custis was himself hard-pressed for funds and unable to pay the large sum, now overdue, which he owed the Mount Vernon estate.[12]

To ease his financial situation, he tried a number of expedients. "Washington Forest," as he now called the Four Mile Run tract, offered the best immediate possibilities. Accordingly, he announced to the public that he planned to develop "a pleasant village," named Mount Vernon, along the Leesburg Road where it crossed the property. Here he laid off lots which he advertised for rent either as farms or healthful summer homes. He already had a blacksmith shop on the Leesburg Road, but had trouble finding a reliable man who could build up a thriving business, though he had advertised that he would furnish a competent smith with a new house and fenced-in garden, in addition to his shop and tools. He also advertised a new house suitable for a tavern.[13]

Elsewhere on the tract, he selected a site for a saw-mill and dug a millrace, but lacking the capital to do more, offered to rent the site for a long term and furnish all stone and timber for a grist mill. In the end, he had to build both mills himself, the saw mill early in 1807, the grist mill a year later. He appears to have been more successful in selling standing timber by the acre along the road which he cut through the forest in 1806.[14]

Nor did he overlook opportunities near at hand to improve his situation. Ferries were a profitable enterprise, and early in 1806 he

[12] Custis to Bushrod Washington, July 10, [1805], Custis Family Letters, Mount Vernon.

[13] Alexandria Gaz., Feb. 12, Aug. 10, Sept. 24, and Dec. 3, 1805.

[14] For the grist mill, see ibid., Feb. 24, 1806; for the saw mill, May 14, June 8, 1807; and for the timber, Dec. 19, 1806, and Nov. 14, 1807. Land for a mill dam and pond was condemned in 1808; for which, see Records of Alexandria County, D. C., Deed Book N, 235, 236f.

applied for permission to operate one from his estate to the city opposite. He also hired out some of his slaves, and may have shared the fees received for his father-in-law's thoroughbred stallion, "Potomac," at stud at Arlington. A windfall came in 1807, when he received his share of Washington's lands in western Virginia, which he at once put up for sale.[15] Washington Land

It speaks well for Custis that at a time of financial difficulty, he did not forsake larger ends, such as the education of his slaves. Like many of their friends, both he and Molly considered slavery a curse entailed upon their section by the folly of their ancestors. Custis objected to it mainly on economic grounds; in his opinion, it was an inefficient labor system that gave small return to either master or slave. Mrs. Custis was concerned about its moral aspects, and believed herself responsible as a Christian for the moral and spiritual welfare of the slaves. Knowing that most freed Negroes drifted eventually into city slums, both were against simply freeing slaves; instead they believed that they should first be given a rudimentary education and otherwise trained to support themselves, and then freed.

This was why Custis offered, in the summer of 1805, to give a farm of twenty-five acres to anyone who would establish a school on the estate "to educate a certain number of children in behalf of the proprietor, and the privilege of receiving others who may be able to pay for their tuition."[16] Apparently no one accepted the offer, so that Mrs. Custis herself had to take on the task of teaching the Arlington slaves.

[15] For the ferry, see ibid., Feb. 5, 1806; for the slaves, ibid., Dec. 18, 1805; for "Potomac," ibid., Apr. 26, 1806; and for the Washington lands, ibid., Mar. 13, 1807.

[16] Ibid., Aug. 10, 1805.

Meanwhile, Custis was continuing his sheep-breeding, and when he announced in December, 1805, the date and place of the next shearing in December,[17] he modestly added: "An Arlington lamb will be shown."

At this event, which took place the following April, another Lee, Ludwell Lee of "Belmont," Loudoun County, won first prize for the best lamb shown. His "Sir John Sinclair" was very large, over 160 pounds, but because the preceeding winter had been mild, the fleece was not very heavy. Neither were those of several Arlington ewes sheared for the occasion. But Custis was rightly proud of his ram lamb, "Mount Vernon." Almost as large as the prize-winner, the year-old ram was small-boned and his wool was extremely long--over fourteen inches--and only slightly coarse. This fine animal Custis sent to the White House plantation to improve the flocks there.[18]

Following the custom established at the first shearing, the guests gathered under the famed marquee of Washington to feast and drink patriotic toasts. There, Custis announced his intention of holding the shearing annually for the next eight years, and added that at future shearings he would award an Arlington lamb in addition to the usual prize money.[19]

This shearing, too, was widely reported. One of the guests, an Englishman, whose account was published abroad, was especially flattering:

> The mutton in the southern states is very indifferent [he wrote]; but little attention having hitherto been paid to the breed of that valuable animal...Mr. Custis, a grandchild of the late Mrs. Washington...has lately become eminent as an agriculturist. In laudable imitation of many distinguished characters in England, he gives an annual premium and an agricultural feast at his seat at Arlington on the banks of the Potomack, near the city of Washington, for the best yearling lamb. [20]

[17] Ibid., Dec. 6, 1805.

[18] Ibid., May 13, 1803; Custis, Address, 12, 14; also Custis to J. S. Skinner, n. d., Am. Farmer, VII (June 17, 1825), 98.

[19] Alexandria Gaz., May 8, 1806.

[20] Charles W. Janson, The Stranger in America, 1793-1806 (London: Albion Press, 1807), 414f.

2 Girls

Two weeks after the shearing another little girl was born to the Custises.[21] The parents had high hopes for the baby, which was christened Martha Elizabeth Ann Custis, after her great-grandmother.

But birth and death were more intimately related in those days of scanty medical knowledge; disease often took infants and adults alike off with shocking suddeness. That autumn, Molly's sister Ann, vacationing at the Baths in western Virginia, became ill and soon after died.[22] Her death was a sore blow to Molly Custis, for the two had been fond of each other, but it only strengthened her belief that the ways of the Almighty are inscrutable and not to be questioned regardless of the sorrow they occasion.

Molly needed all her faith, and courage, too, when her little girl died the following March.[23]

The cold, gloomy day on which the shearing of 1807 took place, must have seemed to Custis a reflection of his recent loss. Many people stayed away on account of the weather, which was so bad that Custis sheared only one of his lambs. That a Spanish merino carried off the honors was a portent that boded ill for future of native breeds like the Arlington long-wooled, but at the time it went unnoticed. At the usual feast, Custis passed around samples of wool from his Smith's Island sheep. He also announced that ten of his best lambs, sired by "Bakewell," the prize ram of 1805 and now the stud ram of the flock at Arlington, would be shipped to Smith's Island in the fall to improve the native breed there. Next year, he said, the grand prize would be fifty dollars or a suitably inscribed silver cup of like value; furthermore, thirty dollars would be

[21] Entry for May 15, 1806. Custis Family Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[22] Alexandria Gaz., Oct. 7, 1806.
[23] Entry for Mar. 10, 1807, Custis Family Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS.

awarded for the finest ten-yard length of "Virginia cloth" exhibited--this being a cotton fabric commonly woven on southern plantations.[24]

Two weeks later, when the weather was moderate enough to shear the rest of the Arlington lambs, a large number of spectators were on hand to watch two English shepherds demonstrate their method of shearing. This was worth seeing, for instead of holding the struggling animal to the ground and hacking off wool, skin and even flesh indiscriminately after the American fashion, the English shearers allowed the sheep to stand quietly while they passed the shears around and around its body, shaving the wool off closely and neatly without nicking the animal. The demonstration was a telling one, and Custis hoped that in time the English method would come into general use in America, as it had already at Arlington.[25]

By now, the Arlington shearings had aroused considerable interest in sheep-breeding not only in Virginia, but in a number of other states. Custis had also succeeded in interesting a number of influential men in the subject, by sending them samples of the Smith's Island and Arlington wool. Only Governeur Morris, of New York, was skeptical: he warned Custis that he would probably receive more gratitude from the sheep than from the people whom he sought to benefit.[26] On the other hand, Dr. Mease, Secretary of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, of which Custis had been made an honorary member that year, sent him a fine half-blood merino named "William Penn" as a token of appreciation for his efforts.[27] Custis

[24]Nat. Intelligencer, May 8, 1807.

[25]Ibid., May 13, 1807; also Custis to J. S. Skinner, n. d., Am. Farmer, VII (June 17, 1825), 98.

[26]Part of Morris' letter is quoted in Custis to Skinner, June 24, 1825, ibid., VII (July 1, 1825), 105.

[27]For "William Penn," see Alexandria Gaz., May. 13, 1808; for Custis' membership, Rodney H. True, Sketch of the History of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture (Philadelphia: The Society, 1935), 30.

also sent samples of wool to agricultural societies and prominent individuals in England, one of whom was Sir Joseph Banks, the great naturalist.[28] Friends like editor Snowden, of the Alexandria Gazette, helped by writing or publishing articles on the Arlington and Smith's Island sheep. The latter, Snowden said in one article, had fleece "as fine as can be imagined, of most delicate softness to the touch and purely white... [resembling] the famous Spanish wool, except that the animals will yield three times as great a quantity." The editor kept a stock of wool samples at his office to give to travellers to exhibit wherever they might be going as proof "that we possess the means, and we will promise to use the measures, to render us independent of all nations."[29]

By such means as this, Custis and his friends succeeded in stirring up public interest. But he erred in addressing himself mainly to men of his own social class, instead of the average farmer. Doubtless he was blinded by his Federalist prejudice regarding the relative importance of the well-to-do, for newspaper accounts of the next Arlington shearing, that of 1808, cited the fact that the sheep exhibited were owned by "gentlemen of the best estates in this part of the country" as proof that the event was influencing "the wealthy, and the reflecting part of society, for the great benefit of the community at large."[30] If Custis had given the Arlington shearings a broader, more popular basis, they undoubtedly would have been far more influential. But as it was, another man was to take Custis' idea and develop it along democratic lines, and so make it the real beginning of the vast program of agricultural improvement in effect today.

Actually, the shearing of 1808 went off better than any of its

[28] Custis to E. S. Logan, Nov. 12, 1810, Sec. Coll., Pa. His. Soc.
[29] Alexandria Gaz., Aug. 3, 1807.
[30] Nat. Intelligencer, May 6, 1808.

predecessors. The area about the spring was thronged with visitors and competition was spirited among the exhibitors. Lawrence Lewis exhibited some of his Arlington sheep, and a number of fine rams were shown. Custis had some of his sheep led around for the guests to examine: the Arlington Improved, the Mount Vernon Persian, the Smith's Island and the merino sent him by Dr. Mease.[31]

Homespun fabrics made by ladies of the neighborhood attracted much attention. As proof that cloth of good quality need no longer be imported from England, the display included fine, soft cotton cloth, a fabric for summer coats made of salvaged silk, and heavy blankets compounded of cotton, wool, and cow hair. The ban on the importation of English and French products a few months before had made it difficult to provide clothing for the slaves, and Custis hoped that home manufactures would not only be a stop-gap, but put an end to importation of "Negro cotton," a miserable shoddy that wore out quickly and was ill-suited to the American climate.[32]

At the banquet, it was agreed that guests at future shearings would dress as much as possible in American-made clothing. To further publicize home manufactures, a few weeks later Custis presented President Jefferson with a waist-coat made from "Arlington cloth," as he had named the winning fabric, a "white...very soft, even and extremely beautiful cotton fabric made by a Miss Peggy Fields of Fairfax County.[33]

He had picked the right time for such a movement. The embargo aimed at punishing Britain for arbitrarily stopping and searching American ships on the high seas, by shutting off the raw materials which it normally got from America, so far had only brought about a general stagnation in

[31] Ibid.

[32] Custis to J. S. Skinner, May 14, 1825, Am. Farmer, VII (June 3, 1825), 63.

[33] Alexandria Gaz., June 17, 1808; Nat. Intelligencer, May 6, 1808.

American ports and the ruination of many shipowners. Farmers like Custis, who sold most of their grain overseas, were likewise hard hit. With English woolens shut out by the embargo, they were inclined to try raising sheep for wool to be used in domestic manufacture. To arouse interest in the establishment of a domestic woolen industry, Custis therefore published a lengthy paper entitled Address to the People of the United States on the Importance of Encouraging Agriculture and Domestic Manufactures, the first installments of which appeared in the Alexandria Advertiser in the spring of 1808.[34]

To begin with, he disclaimed any partisanship in the political strife then raging over the embargo. His purpose, he said, was simply to analyse the present condition of American agriculture, especially in the South, and suggest a plan for improving it.

He conceded that the Northern States would be pre-eminent in manufacturing for years to come because of their early start and greater population, during which time the South would be dependent on that section for most of the manufactured products it needed. "It is a tribute I trust we shall cheerfully pay," he wrote. "Remember that we enrich a friend, not support an enemy." He blamed slavery, the "unhappy error of our forefathers," for retarding the development of his section. By raising wool and making it into clothing on the plantations, Southerners could not only improve the lot of their slaves, but also their own. They would also check the steady deterioration of the land, caused by raising chiefly tobacco and cotton, which was turning large parts of the South into a wilderness. The soil, he averred, was the chief natural resource of his section; raising sheep for wool and mutton would improve it and bring increased wealth and population. The development of the West would also

[34] Alexandria Gaz., Mar. 29, 1808.

be aided by the domestic manufacture of wool, for it would provide a livelihood for the settler when he put down his gun to take up the plow. He pointed out that native breeds of sheep, like the Arlington Long-Wooled or Improved, were best for this purpose because they were far cheaper, hardier, and better suited to American climatic conditions than foreign breeds, even though their wool was not quite as fine.

Some might argue, he said, that agriculture was unimportant compared to industry and commerce, but this was not true. The well-being of the republic itself was dependent upon agriculture; therefore the government should assist in its improvement, especially in such troubled times. "May the heraldry of America become the plough and the loom with the supporters of virtue, industry and independence!"

In conclusion, he announced the founding of the "Arlington Institution," for the encouragement of a domestic woollen industry. To raise money for the prizes that the "Institution" would award each year for the best American-made woolens, 100 lambs of the Arlington long-wooled and Smith's Island breeds would be sold for $20 each, the money to be paid to three "commissioners"--Gen. John Mason, William Herbert of Alexandria, and John Tayloe of Mount Airy, Va.--who would invest it in United States bonds. Interest received from the bonds would provide a substantial annual prize for the best ten yards of broadcloth made in America of American wool, national blue in color and equal in width to the best cloth of European manufacture. Specimens would be judged and the award made at the Arlington shearing, and the winning piece would be divided equally between the President of the United States (who would appoint two of the judges), the three commissioners (who would select two additional judges), and Custis himself. If more than the $2000 needed to provide the grand premium was raised, additional prizes would be awarded

for other phases of woolen manufacturing--spinning, weaving, carding and &c., and for the best specimens of blankets, hose and other articles in common use.

Lastly, he proposed to turn Smith's Island over to a commission of five men who would set up and operate a sheep breeding station on the island, the expenses of which would be apportioned equally among those who pastured sheep on the island. There would also be an annual charge of twenty-five cents per sheep to help support the Arlington Institution. This proposal is interesting, in that it contains the germ of the agricultural experimental stations of today.[35]

The Address was advertised in newspapers throughout the country, and seems to have attracted much attention. But the response, financially speaking, was less gratifying, and Custis was forced to devise new ways of raising the premium fund. He offered to ship his finest rams anywhere in the United States to anyone who would pay their transportation and contribute one dollar to the Arlington Institution for each ewe bred, 100 ewes being the minimum. These he listed by name: "Sir John Sinclair," premium lamb at the shearing of 1804; "Superb," premium lamb of 1808; "Marquiss," the Spanish prize-winner of 1807; "William Penn," hold-merino; and the fine Arlington rams, "Potomac" and "Mount Vernon." Four Smith's Island rams would be available in the near future. Then, a few weeks later, he announced that all stud fees for the Arlington ram, "Patriot," would go to the Institution and offered to sell four of the Arlington Improved rams at $20 each for the same purpose. He also tried.

[35] Custis, Address, II, et. seq.

to drum up interest in the Smith's Island proposition.[36]

His friends helped, too. Editor Snowden ran the "prospectus" of the Address almost daily for several months as well as occasionally using excerpts from the work itself. Thomas Digges of Warburton, Washington's old friend, paid to have a long article attesting the value of Custis' sheep inserted in a Baltimore newspaper.[37] Custis' brother-in-law, William Fitzhugh, advertised choice Arlington rams for sale at "Ravensworth," while William H. Foote of Maryland and Lawrence Lewis supervised the shearing of a number of Arlington sheep and published the results to prove that they gave more wool in proportion to their weight than any breed in the world.[38]

Because of the embargo, woolens were so scarce by the summer of 1808 that farmers everywhere were going in for sheep. Shearings similar to those at Arlington were being held in many parts of the country and societies along the same lines as the Arlington Institution were being formed to make awards for the best American fabrics. Everywhere plans were afoot to build woolen mills, the Columbia Manufacturing Company at Washington, capitalized at $50,000, being about average, though a few were on a much larger scale.[39]

"We rejoice to hear that the pulse of Virginia beats high in favor of home manufactures," enthused the Universal Gazette, in Washington City, that summer. "The citizens of that state seem almost universally resolved to seize the occasion presented by the injustice of the belligerent nations to make us truly independent."[40]

[36] Alexandria Gaz., May 13, Aug. 1, 24, 1808.
[37] Thomas Digges to Jacob Wagner, May 4, 1808, Custis MSS, Va. His. Soc.
[38] Alexandria Gaz., Sept. 19, 1808 and May 17, 1808, respectively.
[39] Nat. Intelligencer, July 13, 1808.
[40] Ibid., June 16, 1808.

By now, Custis was being widely acclaimed for his part in inspiring the movement. But actually, there were already signs that native breeds like the Arlington were not gaining in popularity as rapidly as were some foreign breeds, such as the merino. His friend, David Humphreys, for example, who had several hundred fine sheep on his magnificent farm at Remin Falls, Rhode Island, where he also manufactured woolens, challenged the claims made for the Arlington sheep by William Foote and Lawrence Lewis. He even went to the trouble of demonstrating to a visitor from the South that his merinos not only had better wool than the Arlington, but produced more in proportion to their body weight.[41]

About this time, Custis went over to Washington City to have his profile drawn by Saint Memin. The miniature is unquestionably a good likeness, but hardly a flattering one: the receding forehead and bulbous tip of his nose are conspicious, though offset somewhat by thick, curly hair and a warm, direct glance.[42]

In the fall of that year, 1808, another baby girl was born to the Custises, at "Annefield," a Fitzhugh estate in the upper Shenandoah Valley. Born on the first day of October, the newcomer was christened Mary Anna Randolph Custis. When Mrs. Custis had regained her strength and all danger of fever was past, the new baby was brought home to Arlington.[43]

Down the river, at Stratford Hall, the Lee family mansion, Robert,

[41] Alexandria Gaz., Sept. 30, 1808.

[42] Reproduced in Fillmore Norfleet, Saint Memin in Virginia: Portraits and Biographies (Richmond, Va.: The Dietz Press, 1942), 71, 158.

[43] Entry in Custis Family Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS; and statement of Mrs. R. E. Lee, in National Republican (Washington, D. C.), June 12, 1873.

the twenty-month old son of Light Horse Harry Lee of Revolutionary War fame, was learning to find his way about the house. And as he toddled about, no one suspected that some day Arlington would be famous because of him.

Having already lost two little ones, Molly and her husband were the more anxious to do everything possible for their third child, upon whom they centered all their love and affection. Now Molly Custis wanted more than ever to live as she thought God would have her live and to try to influence others to do likewise. Partly because many of its clergymen had sided with the mother country during the Revolution and partly because of the widespread skepticism engendered by the French Revolution, the Episcopal Church to which she adherred was poorly supported in Virginia at this time; there was even some question as to whether the few remaining active parishes could be maintained.

Mrs. Custis realized that new leaders were needed if the church were to regain anything of its former prominence. In the belief that her young cousin, William Meade, of Clarke County, Va., who was studying law at the College of New Jersey, was well fitted by character and intellect for the ministry, she induced him to return home and study under the direction of the Reverand Walter Addison, of nearby Maryland. Though noted for the mildness of his nature, Addison was something of a puritan, well-known for his disapproval of all forms of dissipation--drinking, cardplaying, horseracing, and the theatre. He detested duelling, and on one occasion had prevented one from taking place in Arlington Forest.[44] However, neither he, nor Molly succeeded in convincing Custis that there was any harm in horseracing or the theatre. Consequently, he retained his membership

[44]Reverand John Johns, A Memoir of the Right Reverend William Meade, D. D. (Baltimore: Innes & Co., 1867), 37; Philip Slaughter, Memoir of the Life of the Rev. William Meade, D. D. (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1885), 8-11; and Meade, op. cit., I, 22f.

in the Washington Jockey Club of Alexandria for some years.[45]

Towards winter, Custis came around to the belief that a woolen mill would be a useful adjunct to the Arlington Institution. Heretofore, he had advocated that woolens be made in the home or on the plantation on the grounds that Southerners lacked experience in manufacturing and slaves were unsuited for work in the mills. But seeing how several mills in and about Washington were apparently doing well had led him to change his mind.

To avoid the mistake commonly made of starting such ventures on too ambitious a scale, he first wrote to owners of various mills in Pennsylvania to find out what machinery was necessary and its price. He then made his plans accordingly and published them, in the form of an "Address," in the Alexandria Advertiser a few days before Christmas.

To build and equip "the Washington Woolen Manufactury," he informed the public, would require $3000. This he proposed to raise by selling 150 shares of stock at $20 per share, payable to four directors who would manage the company until such time as the profits from the enterprise would enable them to pay off the capital stock with accrued interest. Then the mill would be deeded over to commissioners of the Arlington Institution. Profits thereafter would be used to promote the advancement of the woolen industry and provide a school for, among others, children employed in the mill.[46] Shares could be paid for in cash, materials, or labor rendered, and he himself would contribute a site on Four Mile Run, stone and timber for the buildings, and an acre of land to each weaver

[45]The bill for his dues for 1807 is in Custis-Lee Family Papers, L. C.

[46]Custis was aware of and disapproved of the use of child labor in mills. In view of his speech at the Arlington Sheep Shearing of 1811, for which, see Nat. Intelligencer, May 7, 1811.

or mechanic who would take a job in the mills. Nor did he expect to profit by the undertaking, he told his readers:

> The subscriber trusts, that the public will fully appreciate his motives in the promotion of this very useful establishment, and acquit him of selfish or interested views. His labors have always been guided by a far different impulse. 'Pro patria semper' will ever be the motto of the Arlington Institution. 47

The year 1809 opened with every prospect of success for the woolen industry Custis had long advocated. The embargo was still in effect and ships that had formerly carried the stars and stripes to every port in the world lay rotting in every American harbour. Woolen mills, in fact all kinds of factories, were going up everywhere, even in the South. There was only one hitch--the scarcity and high price of wool. Unwashed merino wool, for example, was bringing $2 a pound in some places.[48] No longer was it fashionable, or even possible, to dress in European goods. From the President of the United States, greeting the public at his New Year's reception, down to the slaves working in the fields, wearing homespun was the accepted thing.[49]

Dressed in a suit of Arlington wool, Custis attended the grand ball held at Caton's Tavern in Alexandria, on Washington's Birthday. He and a local art teacher had labored for some days on the chief decoration of the ballroom, an immense symbolical painting covering forty square yards of canvas. The description of this "superb painting," as the Alexandria Gazette called it, shows that at least the artists had some flair for symbolism, even if their artistic ability was limited. It read, in part:

47 Alexandria Gaz., Dec. 21, 1808.
48 Carman, op. cit., 128.
49 Ibid.; also Nat. Intelligencer, Jan. 4, 1809.

A temple is seen displaying its tow'ring columns to the right and left; in the center is placed an Obelisk, bearing the name of WASHINGTON, supported by Fame and Liberty, decorating the same with wreaths, &c. a figure representing Time leading future generations to behold what veneration and respect the Sons and Daughters of Columbia, have for the memory of their departed Father. The whole is covered with a flame of Glory, thro' which the American Eagle descends, and places thereon a Crown of Laurel. 50

No doubt he wore homespun, too, a fortnight later, when he went over to the city to see the inauguration of James Madison. The new President was similarly dressed--in a suit made of merino wool--an ill omen for the future of native breeds like the Arlington.[51] In later years, Custis often told an incident that occurred when the inaugural ceremony was over, and almost everyone had followed the new President to the White House. Pennsylvania Avenue was almost deserted, and Custis and two of his Federalist friends were about to return home, when they observed a solitary horseman riding slowly down from the Capitol. As he drew near, they saw that he was none other than Thomas Jefferson. Much as they detested the ex-president's political principles, the little group of Federalists were shocked by this apparent neglect.

"See gentlemen," said Custis, "how soon a great man becomes neglected and his services forgotten in America when he ceases to be the fountain of patronage and power! Whatever may be the revolutionary patriot and statesman's politics now, they were of the right sort in 1776, and led to the independence of his country!"

His companions heartily agreed with these sentiments, and together they then rode over and introduced themselves to the ex-president and then accompanied him down the avenue.[52]

50 Alexandria Gaz., Feb. 21, 1809. A portrait of Washington by John Trumbull is said to have been brought from Arlington and used as part of a larger composition, but since Custis is not known to have ever owned such a painting, it is likely that the reporter was actually speaking of the Peale portrait of 1772.

How do we know who is right

51 The Museum (Georgetown, D. C.), Mar. 8, 1809.

52 G. W. P. Custis in Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 25, 1857.

Like their host, who was dressed in a suit of Arlington wool, most of the spectators were clad in homespun for the Arlington Sheep-Shearing of 1809. Nearly three hundred visitors were on hand when the judging began promptly at noon. First prize for the finest ram and ewe, both of the Arlington Improved, went to two of Custis' neighbors. But this proved to be a hollow victory for the native breed, for a day or two later a pair of Spanish merinos, which through a misunderstanding had not arrived on time for the shearing, were sheared and found to have both heavier and finer wool. A sheepshearing contest in which contestants had to shear a sheep in the English manner was an interesting innovation, as was the auctioning off of all the homespun cloth, stockings, yarn, and other exhibits of home manufacture which failed to win a prize.[53]

As usual, the weathered red Washington war tents were pitched close to the spring gushing from between the rocks of the hugh old Arlington Oak, and after the customary feast beneath them Custis spoke at length on his favorite theme, the necessity of America being economically independent of Europe. His speech made a strong impression on his hearers, judging from what one of them wrote to a local newspaper:

> I have just returned from the Arlington sheep shearing, and although I suppose you will receive a particular account of this annual festival from the gentleman who presided as judges of the superior and relative excellence of the sheep, wool, &c, I cannot help observing that though they may tell you of the fine specimens of our country manufactures, to which this noble institution has added most materially, they cannot do justice to the pleasure and the rational joy of the ample refreshments provided by the patriotic founder of the institution. Above one hundred

53 Alexandria Gaz. Apr. 20, May 3, 4, 9, 1809; Nat. Intelligencer, May 10, 1809.

> dined with the hospitable gentleman at an elegant table, and the plentiful provision gave rise to toasts and feelings I will not now attempt to describe. In short, we all united in our admiration of the amiable and yet truly dignified deportment of Mr. Custis, which I never saw excelled on any similar occasion. 54

He should have said all but one, for one of his companions could not resist using Custis' speech to needle the administration for its timid foreign policy. Signing himself "Old Tup," this man wrote to the editor of the Alexandria Gazette: "I dissent, Samuel, that our independence is in any way dependent on the breeding of sheep. I dissent, because I believe it is the sheep that have jeopardized our independence." 55

54 The Monitor (Washington, D. C.), May 2, 1809.

55 Alexandria Gaz., May 5, 1809. Apparently "Old Tup's" sally was not appreciated by all who read it; a few days later he found it necessary to explain that he had only meant to be ironical, for which see ibid., May 8, 1809.

CHAPTER V

"PRO PATRIA SEMPER"

"Among the most distinguished patrons of American Agriculture may be ranked Geo. Washington; R. R. Livingston, late Ambassador to France; D. Humphreys, late Ambassador to Portugal and Spain, and G. W. P. Custis"[1] so read an editorial in a Boston newspaper in the fall of 1809. But however gratified, Custis must have been concerned that the other two men mentioned, both far wealthier and more influential than he, were advocating the breeding of merino sheep, not native breeds like the Arlington.

Though Custis was disturbed by the growing popularity of the merino, his Arlington Improved was also being widely adopted. The offer to ship rams to anyone who would contribute to the "Arlington Institution" had met with a fair response and samples of the Arlington and Smith's Island sheep had received favorable notice as far south as the Carolinas. The Arlington sheep were quite popular in Maryland and even more so in some sections of Virginia. Some breeders in the Shenandoah Valley, for example, claimed that the breed did better there than at Arlington, the Valley being higher and cooler, and the grass better. As proof, they cited the large and splendid flock owned by Richard K. Meade, one of whose lambs had wool sixteen inches long.[2] And in many places the published results of the Arlington

[1] Boston (Mass.) Patriot, reprinted in Nat. Intelligencer, Oct. 25, 1809.

[2] Custis to J. S. Skinner, June 17, 1825, Am. Farmer, VII (June 24, 1825), 108; Raleigh (N. C.) Star, reprinted in Alexandria Gaz., June 6, 1809; Custis to J. S. Skinner, May 14, 1825, Am. Farmer, VII, (May 27, 1825), 72, and W. H. Foote to the editor, Alexandria Gaz., May 22, 1809.

shearing were being used as a standard for comparison with local breeds.[3]

While doing everything he could to popularize the Arlington sheep, Custis also hit on the idea of having what he called a "national uniform" for the army. This would be modelled on the backwoods hunting shirt: a dark grey coat of American wool ("well calculated to hide dirt or mud...and not be discernible in the woods at any distance"); trousers of like material tucked into high deerskin moccasins to keep them from catching on bushes; a snug calfskin cap; and a hunting knife and drinking cup slung from a black leather belt.

He contended that conventional uniforms, made of imported woolens and copied from those of European armies, were not only expensive, but impractical under American conditions, whereas the "national uniform" he advocated, being truly American in every respect, would inspire patriotism in the wearer, and be inexpensive, warm and comfortable as well. Furthermore, if adopted, it would provide an important market for domestic wool.[4]

But Custis was ahead of his time, and gaudy uniforms would remain in style for many more years.

Molly Custis was away most of the summer, at Annefield, in the Shenandoah Valley, where she had gone to await the arrival of her fourth child. Born August 14, the newcomer was a boy, christened Edward Hill Custis.[5] Having a son to carry on the family name and inherit his estates, strengthened Custis' resolution to do all he could to improve his farms and advance

[3] For example, in New Jersey, for which see Trenton Federalist, reprinted in ibid., July 8, 1809.

[4] Alexandria Gaz., May 23, 1809, reprinted in Nat. Intelligencer, Oct. 5, 1810. Also, Custis, Address, 27. The idea originated with a Major Cuyler, of New York.

[5] Entry in Custis Family Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS.

agriculture in general.

But by this time it was apparent that the Arlington Improved was losing ground to the merino. It was generally agreed that the Arlington sheep were better adapted to American conditions, but the mills wanted the fine, soft merino wool, not the coarser Arlington wool. When farmers could get as much as $10 for the wool from a single merino, naturally they lost interest in native breeds.[6] Even editor Snowden, formerly a staunch advocate of the Arlington Improved was going with the tide to the extent of running articles in his newspaper on how the merino could best be adapted to American climatic conditions.[7]

Wash. Mills

Worse yet, the "Washington Mills" project had to be abandoned for lack of support. The fact that most of the money raised (a little more than $1000) had come from ordinary workmen must have shaken Custis' prejudices regarding the poorer classes. He realized that most of his friends, planters like himself, had little cash to risk on manufacturing projects; what he resented was the failure of the federal government and southern states to help out on such projects, as several Northern states were doing, principally by lending money at low interest.[8] In his disappointment he took his "brethern of the South" to task with some bitterness when he announced that the Washington Mills project was to be dropped:

> We every day hear repeated the happiness and prosperity of our country, and yet, we see poverty and wretchedness on every side; a soil badly cultivated, education neglected, idleness and dissipation prevailing, while want and misfortune crowds the road to the western country. This is too much the state of happiness in Virginia....It will require a great revolution in our domestic policy to produce those improvements which shall entitle this part of the country to the proud distinction of happiness and prosperity.

In part, he blamed the administration for the failure of the project,

[6] Nat. Intelligencer, Dec. 11, 1809.
[7] Alexandria Gaz., Aug. 17, Oct. 4, 1809.
[8] Alexandria Gaz., Sept. 20, 1809.

charging that while it allowed the country to drift towards war, it was doing nothing to enlarge the army and navy or build up domestic industries to sustain the nation when the crisis came. Both parties, he said, were neglecting the national interest:

> The subscriber makes no apology for thus addressing his fellow-citizens [he continued] at a time when factions...are dislocating the nation with political broils; when we are in fact a mere government of newspapers, it is proper, my brethern, that you should be addressed by those who neither seek nor want your favor...Long have you been discussing the political welfare of France and England; now consult the interest and happiness of the United States of America. Speed the plough, which forms the basis of all nations' greatness... Enlarge the means of education..., and prepare to protect your flag, that your flag may protect you.

Convinced by this experience that woolen mills would not succeed in the South, Custis again advocated the domestic manufacture of woolens. Late in November, he announced that in addition to the usual awards at the next sheep-shearing, the family that had made the greatest quantity of clothing at home during the previous year would have all its corn and wheat ground free for one year at the Arlington mill. The same privilege would go also to the farmer who had "manured the most land from his own resources in the last 12 months"--perhaps the first award of its kind ever made in America. There would also be a prize awarded for the most practical "National Military Dress" displayed.[9]

The program of the Columbia Agricultural Society, founded that fall by citizens of Georgetown, was basically derived from the Arlington Sheep-Shearings, though much broader in scope. The new society planned to have two fairs each year at which all kinds of livestock and home manufactures would be exhibited and then auctioned off. These features make the Columbian Agricultural Society the direct forerunner of the modern

[9] Nat. Intelligencer, Nov. 24, 1809.

agricultural fair, though the society lasted only until the outbreak of the War of 1812.[10]

Custis produced another allegorical painting for the ballroom of the City Tavern in Alexandria, where the Washington Birthday Ball was held in 1810. Though not quite as large as its predecessor of the year before, it was in much the same allegorical style. The central figure was a life-size statue of Washington clad in a Roman toga symbolical of Cincinnatus, the farmer-soldier of classical times; overhead, a "majestic American eagle" (wingspread seven feet) hovering in the clouds, just above "Fame," descending to place a laurel wreath on the General's brow. Over to one side was the tomb of Washington with a Revolutionary War veteran standing sadly before it; on the other was the "Genius of Liberty" in the same attitude. Describing the painting, the Alexandria Gazette said, in part:

> Of this performance, if presented as the work of a master, it would be extravagant to speak highly; but as the product of untaught inexperienced talent, it would be difficult to be too warm in its praise: and, indeed, so great has been the success of Mr. Custis, in both execution and design, that we may almost venture to say of painters what Horace has remarked of poets, that 'they are born and not made'. [11]

Aside from such social interludes, Custis spent most of his time that winter in his up-hill battle for the native breeds of sheep, finding the going ever harder. Chancellor Livingston, commenting on the Address, wrote that he agreed as to the need for domestic industry, but believed that merino sheep, because of the superior wool, must be the basis for it,

[10] Custis was one of the founders of the society for which see ibid., Nov. 20, 1809; Feb. 19, 1810. Also Meely, op. cit., 47f.; James Curtis Ballagh, ed., The South in the Building of the Nation: Economic History, 1607-1865 (13 vols., Richmond, Va.: Southern Historical Publications Soc., 1910), V, 248.

[11] Alexandria Gaz., Feb. 19, 22, 1810.

rather than the coarser-wooled native stock. Somewhat condescendingly, he offered to give Custis a choice merino ram with which to improve his flock and several half-blooded merinos to put on Smith's Island. Likewise, he deemed the "Arlington Institution" an excellent idea for the South, though unnecessary in the North where there was plenty of money for such things as agricultural improvement and public schools.

Custis published the letter in the Alexandria Gazette, along with his comments on it, in which he had to admit the justice of the Chancellor's last observation--"If a battalion of militia were paraded in the southern country," he observed bitterly, "how few would be found possessed of the most common rudiments of education." All efforts to develop industry in his section, including his own, had proved futile, and he would make no further attempts along this line unless "the citizens of Virginia will give to the proprietor more ample assurance for the promotion of his future views, than he has received support in his past labors..." That Northern societies, such as the Domestic Society of Philadelphia, recognized him as "a gentleman of patriotic character," made him the more resentful.[12]

True, he was not the only Virginian laboring in the fields of agricultural advancement. Pioneers, such as John A. Binns, John Taylor of Caroline, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, were experimenting with deep plowing, fertilizers, crop rotation and soil erosion control, and an agricultural society was about to be founded in Richmond. But unfortunately these progressive elements were in the minority and would be for years. Meanwhile, the ruinous process of exhausting the soil would continue unchecked in most parts of Virginia.[13] Under the circumstances,

[12]Robert Livingston to Custis, Jan. 5, 1810, reprinted in part in Nat. Intelligencer, Jan. 12, 1810; and Tench Cox to J. H. Taylor, Jan. 29, 1810, Custis MSS, Va. H. S.

[13]Craven, op. cit., 94-110.

Custis' depression was amply justified.

Had Custis possessed the social vision, or the political acumen he acquired a few years later, he probably would have aimed his program at the ordinary farmer, instead of gentlemen farmers like himself, as he was now doing. The support given to his Washington Mills project by the working man of Alexandria should have alerted him to the possibility of enlisting the support of the common man in his program, which might have made it immediately successful and ultimately of far greater influence on the agricultural history of America. But unfortunately he let the opportunity go by, leaving it to another, Elkanah Watson, to invent an agricultural fair combining the best features of the early agricultural societies and the Arlington Sheep-Shearings with a general program of entertainment and recreation--parades, horse races, plowing contests and dances--designed to appeal to the ordinary farmer and secure his participation in bettering agricultural practices. Launched in the fall of 1809, Watson's "Berkshire Plan," as it was called would prove immensly popular almost at once, making it the true beginning of the modern agricultural fair.[14]

1809 Watson's "Berkshire Plan"

As it was, Custis was satisfied when more than a hundred and fifty gentlemen showed up for the Sheep-Shearing of 1810 in spite of bad weather. Perhaps the sheep exhibited were not remarkable, or else there was little interest in them, for only the winners were listed in the newspapers reports of the event. The "domestic manufactures" exhibited attracted more attention. For instance, a pound of woolen yarn, which was sold for "the enormous price" of four dollars, was described as being "exquisitely spun."

1810

150

1 lb wool-$4.00

[14] Neely, op. cit., Chap. III; True, op. cit., 300ff.

As usual after the judging and auction, the company adjourned to the Washington tents, which had been extended by using their interior curtains to shelter a table ninety-six feet long. Due to the presence of M. Chacon, the representative to the United States of the Spanish patriots fighting to overthrow Napoleon's puppet government in Spain, the banquet had more of a political cast than previous ones, and most of Custis' speech dealt with the critical foreign situation. In it, he dwelt at length on the handicaps imposed on American commerce by both France and England in violation of "our legitimate right to the ocean;" deplored the hardships suffered by American sailors; and, in conclusion, lauded the Spanish patriots desperately striving to drive Napoleon's armies from their country. Turning to the Spanish envoy, he offered this toast: "The Patriots of Spain: May their glorious efforts be crowned with success...May they grasp the temple of rational liberty, and crush with its ruins the oppressors of mankind!"[15]

Actually, the situation in Spain was about to have an effect on the Arlington Shearings that Custis had not foreseen. By now, Napoleon's armies had occupied most of the country to avoid losing everything, and wealthy Spaniards were selling their great flocks of merinos out of the country, which formerly had been forbidden. Over 20,000 merinos reached American ports in 1810, and as ship after ship discharged its wooly cargo, prices dropped to where farmers of moderate means like Custis' neighbor, General John Mason, could afford them.[16] Coming when it did, at a time when the merino was already highly popular, the sudden influx promised to make that breed the dominant one in America.

[15] Alexandria Gaz., May 3, 1810; Nat. Intelligencer, May 9, 1810.
[16] Ibid., Sept. 17, 1811; Carman, et. al., op. cit., 172, 214.

Tired of being the only prominent advocate of native breeds, Custis was finally forced "to go with the tide," as he put it.[17] Chancellor Livingston, especially, had done much to weaken his conviction as to their superiority. In his widely-read Essay on Sheep, Livingston described the wool of the Arlington Improved as "fine..., soft, silky, and beautifully white...admirably suited for hose, camblets, serges, and other fine worsted fabricks, though not well adapted to the making of fine cloths." But that of the Smith's Island sheep, he stated was neither as soft or fine as the merino, and would not make as good a fabric.[18] He took the same position in the correspondence he carried on with the young master of Arlington. Still, he was fair-minded enough to read one of Custis' letters on the subject to his guests at the Clermont shearing of 1810. He also exhibited samples of Arlington and Smith's Island wool, and at the banquet which ended the event, which was patterned after the Arlington shearings, gave this toast: "The Arlington Farmer--success to his patriotic exertions."[19]

When the Chancellor sent him a magnificent merino ram that summer, Custis was almost ready to capitulate. In announcing that the ram would be at stud at Arlington, he admitted that he had "long since conceded his partiality to the great sentiment in favor of Merinos" and was now "ardently desirous of promoting that valuable race..." Therefore, he planned to continue selling Arlington Improved lambs to raise money for the Arlington Institution, and by the following spring expected to have a cross between

[17]Custis to J. S. Skinner, June 17, 1825, Am. Farmer, VII (June 24, 1825), 108.

[18]Robert Livingston, Essay on Sheep (New York: T. & J. Swords, 1809), 57-63.

[19]Robert Livingston to Custis, Mar. 22, 1810, quoted in part in Carman, et. al., op. cit., 179f.; same to same, June 29, 1810, Custis MSS, Va. Hist. Soc. For the Clermont shearing, see Washington (D. C.) Universal Gazette, July 5, 1810.

the Arlington Long Wooled and the merino ready for delivery.[20] But he still thought the merino too costly for the average farmer, he confided to a friend:

> It has always been my labour to impress upon the minds of my Countrymen the propriety of cherishing their native flocks, & the good which would result from the improvement of our own sheep, as well as from the importation of others....Of course Merino importations have been so much the rage as to entirely obscure the native breeds, & so great have been the prices given for these valuable strangers, that the humble produce of our own clime has been forgotten or despised. To rescue this valued race from unmerited oblivion & contempt forms the prominent object of my Agricultural labours at present. I truly esteem Merinos, & think that proper crosses upon the native breeds will be highly advantageous, but Sir--we cannot all breed native Americans & cross the same with Merinos. Again, the little Farmer, (a most deserving brother), is excluded from the grace of Merinos by the exhorbitancy of their prices.[21]

Actually, Custis was inclined to be too pessimistic about the future of native breeds. Merinos were indeed too expensive for the average farmer, especially in the South, and as a result the Arlingtons, either purebred or crossed with merino, were quite popular in many parts of the country and would continue to be for some years.[22] His low spirits may have been due in part to the ridicule which someone was heeping upon him in the form of letters to a local newspaper. "Cornplanter," as the anonymous writer signed himself, lampooned such things as the patriotic toasts at the Arlington shearings, sneered at Custis' ideas on agriculture, derided his over-size allegorical paintings. The spiteful letters continued throughout the summer of 1810, until Custis brought them to an end by a letter of his own in which he summed up his personal philosophy:

> Your correspondant is at liberty to sport with my foibles and follies, and amuse himself and the world. But if he seeks to tear me from the affections of my country, and destroy that

[20] Alexandria Gaz., May 28, 1810.

[21] Custis to S. S. Logan, Nov. 12, 1810, Soc. Coll., Pa. His. Soc. Oct. 30, 1810, Custis inquired of James H. Hooe, and Alexandria merchant, regarding the price he would have to pay for several merinos.

[22] Carman, et. al., op. cit., 63, 66.

> merit which a faithful and ardent zeal in her cause has led me to claim - I defy his power and malice. My destiny is so interwoven with the glorious destiny of the nation that whenever our domestic interests are hailed as the guardian genius of our clime, my humble services will not be forgotten. 23

Accordingly, he continued to advocate his ideas. When elected captain of the newly-organized Alexandria Light Dragoons, he recommended that the company buy American-made uniforms, and a few weeks later again publicly urged the adoption of "a national military dress"--entirely American in tradition, materials and manufacture--for the army.[24]

re- Nat'l. Bd. of Agriculture

More important was the plan he advanced, late in the year, for a National Board of Agriculture modelled after the highly successful one in England, which had made that country largely independent of overseas commerce in its titantic struggle with Napoleon. In his Address on the subject, Custis contended that agriculture was the foundation of national power--"short lived has been the history of those nations who sought prosperity from commerce alone." Contrasting "that wondrous isle," England, with America, particularly the South, he showed himself to be a true conservationist, in the modern usage of the term:

> No country ever suffered more from the want of agricultural improvement than ours. The general tillage of many parts of the union is a plunder of the soil and a robbery of labor, and the face of the country...bears ample evidence of the effects of that destructive system which forbids all good. The vast emigrations to the West seem as if the children of our Israel were persecuted in their native land....
>
> What must be the reflections of foreigner on beholding the state of agricultural improvement in the Southern country - men for instance, who have arrived from countries where Agriculture is a political and individual blessing...Would not travellers, on beholding many of our fields, say, surely this land has endured either the wrath of Heaven or the scourge of war and famine? How

[23] Custis to the editor, in Spirit of Seventy-Six (Washington, D. C.), July 16, 1810.

[24] Alexandria Gaz., July 6, Sept. 24, 1810. Custis was appointed Captain of the Alexandria Light Dragoons, June 20, 1810; he resigned June 6, 1811; for which, see Register of Officers in Dist. of Columbia, Nat. Archives.

> patient a people to wring so scanty a pittance from so ungrateful a soil....
>
> Our domestic resources should by no means be prematurely forced - as a young country, our progress should be rather gradual than precipitate, but resolute & perserving. Let not our agricultural and manufacturing systems be hot beds to produce at irregular seasons and by artificial impulse, but rather the well tilled American soil, producing under the genial rays of a protecting government, ripening the fruits of industry and independence in due season.

In conclusion, he maintained that the international situation made it imperative for America to be self-sufficient. England, he said, "beholds a rival flag and sees our commerce whiten every sea," and France "sees the last of Republics preserve for suffering humanity a refuge from the tyranny which marks the route to universal empire." Americans, he averred, should not condemn a whole nation for the acts of its rulers, but should be governed by their country's interests. Therefore, as part of the plan to be presented to Congress at its next session, he proposed "The Order of Washington" to recognize the achievements of patriotic individuals.

"This order does not consist of stars and garters, and such baubles as flatter princes and their peers," he wrote; "nor does it resemble the Legion of Honor, which is intended to dignify the most skillful destroyers of the human race. It is formed as a reward for those who...shall do some good to mankind, either in the progress of national aggrandizement, or productive industry."[25]

In the fall of 1810, the Custises' little son, only fourteen months old, died at Ravensworth. Molly's father, William Fitzhugh, had died there the year before, and now her only brother, William Henry Fitzhugh, was the master of Ravensworth--or would be within a few years.[26]

[25] Nat. Intelligencer, Nov. 24, 1810; Alexandria Gaz., Dec. 31, 1810.

[26] Entry for Oct. 19, 1810, Custis Family Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS. For William Fitzhugh's obituary, see Alexandria Gaz., Dec. 20, 1809.

From her father, Mrs. Custis had inherited £2000, 16 slaves, and 800 acres of land; her husband was to be responsible for the Fitzhugh estate until her brother came of age.[27] The latter, who resembled his sister in disposition, was inclined to be serious beyond his years, but was well liked for his generosity and kindness. His many kinsmen knew they were free to call upon him with their difficulties, many did, including Henry Lee, the dashing "Light Horse Harry" of Revolutionary War fame. General Lee's fortunes were at an ebb by this time, and he was living in a small house in Alexandria to which he had brought his wife, Anne Carter Lee, and his children from Stratford some months before. Their only support the small trust set up by Mrs. Lee's father, Lee was trying to mend his fortunes by writing a history of the Revolutionary War campaigns in the South and getting government employment.

In their adversity, it was natural for the Lees to turn for assistance to their kinsman, the young master of Ravensworth. The latter shared the General's strong Federalist beliefs, greatly admired his wife for her indomitable spirit, and loved the children. Years later, he would state that he had known the youngest son, Robert Edward, "almost from infancy," so the Lees must have been often at Ravensworth. And since the Custises also were there quite often, they, too, must have become well acquainted with the Lees, explaining the tradition that Mary Custis and Robert E. Lee were childhood sweethearts.[28]

Whether their parents--as parents will--ever made any playful references to their being married one day cannot be said. However, when the

[27] Guy Montague Moore, Seaport in Virginia (Richmond, Va.: Garrett & Massie, 1949), 205f.

[28] William H. Fitzhugh to John C. Calhoun, Feb. 7, 1824, quoted in Freeman, Lee, I, 39. For the close ties between the Lees and William H. Fitzhugh, see ibid., I, 20, 34.

Meades--William having married in the meantime--had a son, pleasantries of this sort were exchanged by the two families, Mrs. Custis suggesting that her two-year old daughter be engaged to the newcomer. To this William Meade replied exuberantly: "Teach Mary to wash and spin and cook, and we will make a match of it!"[29]

Not long afterwards, when Meade was ordained in the Episcopal Church and became rector of Christ Church in Alexandria, Custis presented him with a folio edition of Bishop Wilson's sermons, once owned by General Washington--Custis had earlier given the church the General's Bible. From this work, Meade and one of his associates, the Reverand Edward McGuire, extracted a number of prayers suitable for family services and published them in a small volume. This proved most popular and helped re-introduce the custom of holding family services in many Virginia households, a practice which had much to do with reviving the Episcopal Church in the South.[30] At Arlington, Mrs. Custis held daily services for the family and servants, and Mary doubtless was familiar with the little book from an early date.

1811

As interest in native breeds declined, attendance fell off at the Arlington Shearings; hardly a hundred spectators attended the one held in the spring of 1811, though Custis gave it a more elaborate, showier setting than ever before. About the exhibition ring was a large bower, an arbor-like enclosure decorated with laurel and honeysuckle; inside was a smaller one for the judges and guests. Of the latter, perhaps the most prominent

[29] Mrs. M. Custis to Mrs. Mary Meade, n. d., and the latter to Miss Susan Meade, Feb. 11, 1811; both quoted in part in Johns, op. cit., 58f.

[30] Meade, op. cit., I, 34. For the Washington Bible Custis presented to Christ Church, see Rev. R. H. McKim, Washington's Church, A Historical Sketch of Old Christ's Church, Alexandria, Va. (Alexandria, Va.: Robert Bell's Sons, 1886), 18.

were architect William Thornton, Captain Cassin of the Navy, M. Ivanoff, Secretary of the Russian legation, and David Baillie Warden, gifted literary and scientific writer, who was soon to leave for France to be the American consul at Paris. Significantly, of the four sheep exhibited, only one was of purely native stock, the rest part merino. Nor were there as many exhibits of domestic manufactures as on former occasions; consequently the winners were soon chosen, the auction held, and the company seated for dinner at an earlier hour than usual.[31]

The weathered old war tents under which the guests dined were also decorated with laurel and honeysuckle. At one end stood a large allegorical painting from Custis' brush--a bust of Washington surrounded by symbols of war and peace and topped by a globe with an eagle alighting on America. "The piece, though hastily executed for the occasion," a guest commented tactfully, "had a good effect when viewed in perspective." Another guest commented more enthusiastically about the dinner, which had been prepared "not only in a very handsome stile, but with a liberality approaching almost to profusion." He observed that everything served was of native origin, like the Arlington American wine in which the toasts were drunk. "Never did I witness more friendly hilarity, more harmony, more apparent enjoyment," he concluded.

In his customary speech, Custis told his guests that he had long since given up the idea that large industries and monopolies were beneficial to either the people or the nation. After citing examples of the evils which had accompanied the rise of industrialism in Europe, he urged that if American mills must employ children, they should also provide

[31] Nat. Intelligencer, May 7, 11, 1811; and Alexandria Gaz., May 8, 1811. For Custis' change of opinion in respect to monopolies, see his letter to E. S. Logan, June 18, 1812, Soc. Coll., His. Soc. of Pa.

schools "where their little hearts shall receive the benefit earned by their little hands." Naturally, the country must develop its industries in order to be strong, but this should not be done at the expense of patriotism and the good of the people. Nor should improvements in industry and agriculture be motivated by the desire to humble England, the home of their ancestors and the present champion of liberty against Napoleon. Rather, they should be inspired by a desire to emulate a nation which had so vastly improved the lot of mankind by its advances in science and the arts, despite a corrupt government. Concluding, he accused the nation of ingratitude in not having yet marked Washington's grave with a stone or erected a monument to commemorate his services to the nation.

Surprisingly, it was the last part of his speech that aroused the most comment in the press, most of it unfavorable. Even his friend, William Seaton, editor of the National Intelligencer, was averred that Custis put too much faith in monuments of metal or stone which ultimately must perish, whereas the name of Washington was "engraven on the hearts of his countrymen" where it would endure to the end of time. Others were more caustic. One who signed himself "A Stranger to the Sheep Shearing" accused "the little Arlington Ram," as he termed Custis, of "cutting capers" and "butting at the whole nation for delaying the monument to Washington."[32]

It may be that fame endures longer--and at less cost--than when entrusted to monuments of bronze and marble. But certainly Washington's tomb was in deplorable condition at this time. Benjamin Latrobe called it a national disgrace; and a New Englander described it as "a hole dug in the side of a hill, and lined up with bricks...little better than a good farmer in New Hampshire would make to keep his pigs from the storm

[32]Spirit of Seventy-Six (Washington, D. C.), May 10, 1811.

or his potatoes from the frost."[33] Custis' own idea of a suitable tomb combined grandeur and durability in a massive stone platform, around the perimeter of which were eighteen steps representing the eighteen states and territories, and upon which eighteen short heavy stone columns would uphold the enormous stone sealing the tomb directly beneath it.[34]

The controversy over the Mason's Island causeway, built three years before, having been renewed at this time, Custis advanced an ingenius plan for keeping the river open to Georgetown, which was fast declining as a port because of the bar which had formed off Arlington. With small dams, Custis made a small stream into a miniature Potomac and conducted a number of experiments which proved conclusively that "a bar must ever attend the meeting of the current and the tide, nor can the wisdom or ingenuity of man prevent it." Therefore, instead of trying to remove the bar, he suggested that the "Little River" off Arlington be made into a canal by building a wing dam from the southern tip of Mason's Island with flood gates at its lower end and in the causeway. Ships could then be towed up the Little River, past the Arlington Bar and Mason's Island, to the docks of Georgetown.[35]

But his plan was not accepted, dredging out the bar failed, and in time the overseas trade from Georgetown vanished. Custis derived some benefit from the pernicious causeway, however, in that he got $3000 for the right of way across his farm for a toll road under construction from Georgetown to Alexandria via the causeway.[36]

[33] Nat. Intelligencer, July 20, 1811; also John A. Harper to Eliza Jane Harper, Nov. 29, 1812, Misc. MSS, Mount Vernon.

[34] Warden, op. cit., 154.

[35] Independent American (Georgetown, D. C.), Jan. 12, 1811. Also Warden, op. cit., 135.

[36] Records of Alexandria County, D. C., Deed Book I, p. 533.

That fall, his mother died after paying a farewell visit to the scenes of her youth. Long in poor health, for years she had seldom been away from home, but late in the summer of 1811, she journeyed over to Maryland. There she spent a few happy days at Mount Airy with her brother Edward and his family, and visited Croom Church where lay her father and mother, and where she, too, wished to be buried. From there she went on to Georgetown to visit the Peters at Tudor Place and see her daughter Eliza. Probably she intended going on to Arlington and then home, but her strength suddenly gave out and death came quietly while she lay resting.[37]

So died, at fifty-five, the once-beautiful Eleanor Stuart, "the darling child" that the Reverand Mr. Boucher had recommended to the Washingtons as "all the fondest parent can wish for." As one of the executors, Custis had to give much of his time that winter to the settlement of her estate.[38]

"I shall soon be no longer wanted and my humble Institution which first taught my Countrymen to hail the spirit of Industry as of Independence will only be remembered by its long and faithful services," Custis had despondently written to a friend, the summer before.[39]

Events justified his pessimism, for the Sheep-Shearing of 1812 was to be the last one. War with Great Britain was imminent--the war which

[37] For her obituary, see Alexandria Gaz., Oct. 5, 1811; also Torbert, op. cit., 126f.

[38] For the sales he conducted for her slaves, see Alexandria Gaz., Dec. 9, 24, 1811.

[39] Custis to D. B. Warden, n. d., but evidently written about May, 1811, photostat in L. C. of original in Md. His. Soc.

Custis had long feared would result from President Madison's ineptness in dealing with European politicians, England's stubborn disregard of the rights of neutrals, and Napoleon's shrewdness and duplicity. Now Madison was caving in under the pressure asserted by the young "War Hawks" from the West. "These are the men who are to march off and take Canada in a jiffy, and parcel it out in snug plantations," was editor Snowden's caustic comment in his Gazette.[40]

The country was rapidly drifting towards hostilities, when the Arlington Shearing was held late in April, 1812. Like his guests, Custis was no doubt concerned more about coming events than the shearing itself, especially since not one of the sheep exhibited were of pure native breed. Only the war-mongers, such as Nathanial Macon, author of much of the legislation aimed at England, came with an untroubled mind--"Today is the great sheep shearing at Arlington, and I believe I shall go," he wrote to a friend, "So much for the news in the neighborhood."[41]

The weather mirrored the troubled times. The morning was fine, mild and sunny--perfectly suited for watching the shearing, or relaxing somewhere in the shade with one of the books Custis thoughtfully provided for those not interested in a particular event. But clouds began to gather in the middle of the afternoon, when the guests had disposed of the feast provided for them and were awaiting Custis' address. They grew heavier and blacker as he began on his favorite subjects, the American Revolution and George Washington, and stressed the need for passing on the story of those perilous times to new generations so that they might know the price paid for liberty and value it accordingly. Turning then to the international

[40] Ibid., Dec. 31, 1811.

[41] To Joseph B. Nicolson, Apr. 30, 1812, quoted in Randolph-Macon College, J. F. Branch Mss. Papers, I (June, 1902), 139.

situation, he denounced Napoleon as "the modern Genghis Khan," whose conquest of Europe was marked by horror and devastation. Great Britain he termed "the vast Leviathan of the deep," who required much space for its gigantic bulk, but lacked the magnanimity to grant the little part of its domain necessary to the existence of others." Let Britain beware, he said, "America, too, has her rights." Regardless of his country's "manifold foibles and faults," every American should do his duty in the event of war.

By now the sky was black and the wind rising, forcing him to curtail his speech so that his guests could get home before the storm struck. During the dinner one of the guests had delivered a poetic toast in honor of the Arlington Sheep Shearing--and unwittingly, its valedictory:

> Master of the feast, we drink your health,
> And may this day, which gave you birth
> Each year bring happiness and wealth,
> 'Till you return to parent earth.
>
> And now my friends we'll drink once more
> To keep our day in temper,
> And if we live until forescore,
> We'll live 'PRO PATRIA SEMPER'" [42]

"This may be the last time my old canvass may shade this work of Peace," Custis wrote to Dr. Logan in Philadelphia, a few weeks later. "War is our fate," he continued, relating how President Madison had that day asked Congress to declare war. His greatest fear was that when the war ended foreign manufactures, "long heaped up in their warehouses," would be dumped on the American market and ruin native industry. One could only hope for the best, he told his friend: "Let us dare the storm

[42] Nat. Intelligencer, May 7, 16, 1812.

which now threatens, with a noble enthusiasm which cannot fail of success."[43]

His forbodings as to the effects of the war were warranted, for already it had aborted one of his minor projects. In his mother's papers, he had found a number of letters written by his father and George Washington during the Revolutionary War. While reading them, the idea had occurred to him of publishing them in the Alexandria Gazette "as the medium of recording whatever may relate to the public, or private life, of the departed Father of his country." (So read the announcement in that newspaper).[44] But for some reason, perhaps because war news had crowded out items of less immediate interest, the letters were not printed. However, he was able to help out the local Masonic Lodge in Alexandria by lending one of his most cherished relics to its recently established "Washington Museum." The relic was the model of the U. S. S. America which the Viscount de Barras had made at the time the vessel was under construction at Portsmouth, N. H., and later presented to General Washington. In addition, Custis placed several medals once owned by his guardian and parts of the Washington tents on display in the museum.[45]

As did most Federalists, Washington Custis believed that military despotism, as personified by Napoleon, and national integrity, as represented by Great Britain and its allies, were the great forces contending in the war then raging in Europe. Now that Napoleon had invaded Russia, he felt it was almost dishonorable for the United States to attack Great Britain when it and its allies were fighting for their national existance. Once Napoleon had conquered Europe, he was almost certain to turn on America. Reasoning thus, Custis and other Federalists hoped that the war

[43]Custis to E. S. Logan, June 16, 1812, Soc. Coll., His. Soc. of Pa.

[44]Alexandria Gaz., June 10, 1812.

[45]Custis to George D. Meade, June 4, 1812, Custis & Lee Family Papers, L. C.. Also George H. Preble, "Vessels of War Built at Portsmouth, N. H.," N. Eng. His. & Gen. Register, XXII (1868), 398.

would soon be terminated.

Nevertheless, he would probably have volunteered his services in the emergency had it not been for an event that made them unacceptable. This was the atrocious murder, by a Baltimore mob, of old General James M. Lingan, a veteran of the Revolution whom President Washington had made Collector of the Port of Georgetown. Lingan had long supported The Federal Republican, an anti-administration newspaper published in Baltimore by Alexander C. Hanson, and when not long after the outbreak of hostilities a mob destroyed Hanson's press, tore down his building and forced the editor to run for his life, he had joined with other citizens of Georgetown in re-establishing the paper in Baltimore. For their leader, the group chose "Light Horse Harry" Lee.

Within a few hours after the paper resumed publication on July 27, 1812, a mob gathered outside the house in which the Federalists had set up their press. Shots were fired, a man was killed, and only the arrival of the militia prevented further violence. For their own safety, those inside were then escorted to the Baltimore jail, to remain there until the mob cooled off. But instead of dispersing, the mob broke into the jail during the night. A furious struggle then took place. Lingan was beaten to death, and others of his party were severely injured. General Lee was flung down the jail steps, where he lay in a pile of bodies for over three hours while the mob vented its fury on him with knives and clubs. One fiend even poured hot candlegrease into his eyes to see if he were still alive, and only when they were convinced that he was dead, did the maddened ruffians allow him to be carried away by some physicians.[46]

Throughout Maryland, reaction to the riot was strong. Three months later the state went Federalist as a result, and for years Baltimore was

[46] Nat. Intelligencer, Aug. 1, 1812; Niles Register, Aug. 8, 1812.

to be known as "mob-town." Nowhere was public indignation stronger than at Georgetown, where the Federalists predominated. A meeting was held there early in August to arrange an impressive funeral for General Lingan. Francis Scott Key, a prominent local attorney who was later to win fame as the author of the "Star Spangled Banner" was invited to deliver the funeral oration, but for some reason declined. It may be that Key, like others, thought that a public funeral might provoke further violence, and for a time it seemed that no one would risk his reputation--and perhaps his life--by making such an address. But at this juncture, Custis came forward.[47]

"The Charles Street rioters could pick up nobody else to make use of but that ridiculous creature Custis...the standing laughing-stock of the whole district...," sneered an administration newspaper. But the Federal Republican, which had resumed publication in Georgetown, pointed out that Custis was not acquainted with any victims of the mob except General Lee, and sought only to defend civil liberties.[48]

Ignoring President Madison's "request" that no militia participate in the ceremonies, several Georgetown companies marched in a funeral procession, behind the coffin containing the mangled remains of General Lingan, through the streets of Georgetown to St. John's Church. Because of an incident that had occurred earlier in the day-a man armed with a bloody pike had walked under the window of a carriage in which sat the general's widow and brandished it in her face, frightening her so that she was unable to attend the services--the marchers expected trouble. But none came. The church proved too small for the great crowd, so the funeral services were

[47] Spirit of Seventy-Six (Washington, D. C.), Aug. 11, 1812; Federal Republican (Georgetown, D. C.), Aug. 26, Sept. 4, 1812; Virginia Argus (Richmond, Va.), n. d., reprinted in ibid.

[48] Sept. 4, 16, 1812.

held instead in Parrott's Woods, a grove on the edge of town, where a speaker's stand had been hastily erected under a great oak from whose boughs hung the Washington war tents as a canopy. General Lee was still confined to his bed by his injuries, but other victims of the mob were present.

The Custis' old friend, the Reverend Mr. Addison, began the services with a prayer. Then Custis stepped forward to deliver what was probably the best speech of his life.

He had never known Lingan, he said, except by reputation--a hero who had distinguished himself at the Battle of Long Island and demonstrated his fortitude, after being captured at the storming of Fort Washington, by surviving the miseries of the British prison hulks. He also knew that Washington had had a high regard for Lingan. The old soldier, he went on, had championed the cause of the Federal Republican as a matter of principle. His voice trembled as he recounted the old hero's bloody end: "Oh, Maryland! Would that the waters of thy Chesapeake could wash this foul stain from thy character!"

Lingan's death, he went on, proved that freedom of the press--"one of the noblest rights a freeman can boast"--was indeed in danger. He warned his audience: "When the right of opinion, the liberty of speech, and the liberty of the press, are prostrated at the feet of lawless power, the citadel of freedom must soon surrender."

In closing, he praised the Federalists for establishing the nation and fostering its growth: if at this moment an American sailor was climbing a mast to nail his country's flag upon it, "My life upon it, that man is a Federalist!" Passionately he pounded his fist on the railing: "Attend me, friends, to a Federalist's house in 1813: Near

the cradle of my sleeping child stands the musket and bayonet; near the pillow of my invalid wife the sharpened sabre!-And why? Because I will enjoy freedom of speech, and the liberty of the press--those sacred privileges I inhaled with my first breath, and will only lose with my last!"[49]

He was to make many speeches in the years ahead, but none more effective. "The profound silence of the audience...was only interrupted by their sighs and tears," reported the Federal Republican.[50] Little did he think, that day, that the body of the murdered General would one day rest at Arlington.[51]

In time it became apparent that there was no danger of a social revolution, as the Federalists had feared. When the administration was reelected that autumn, largely by the voters in the South and West, it made it a policy to simply ignore the Federalists. Consequently, there was little that the latter could do but bide their time, trusting that events would bring the war to a quick end.

Custis was especially bitter that the war had diverted public interest from agriculture. The merino craze was still going strong and domestic mills were enjoying a mushroom growth; but one agricultural society after another had either succumbed, or soon would. Custis pleaded ill health in postponing the Arlington Sheep Shearing of 1813, but public indifference was probably the real reason, for he never held another. First, the

[49]Nat. Intelligencer, Aug. 18, 1812; Federal Republican (Georgetown, D. C.), Sept. 2, 12, 1812. Also, Ella L. Dorsey, "A Biographical Sketch of James MacCubbin Lingan," Col. His. Soc. Records, XIII (1909-1910), 20.

[50]The speech was published under the title, Oration of G. W. P. Custis of Arlington, with an account of the Funeral Solemnities in honor of General Lingan (Washington City: 1812).

[51]Lingan's remains were removed to Arlington in 1908.

merino craze had swept away his work in developing a truly noteworthy native breed of sheep; now the war had destroyed the Arlington Sheep Shearing itself. All that consoled him was his pride at having instituted and carried on as long as possible a program originated by Washington for the advancement of his country.[52]

In other ways, too, these were trying times. Like most planters, he was dependent on water transportation to take his wheat and other produce to markets, domestic or foreign, and was hard hit by the blockade which the British maintained in the Chesapeake Bay until almost the end of the war. "My resources are so completely cut off that I am obliged to buy the very small family necessities," he wrote to an Alexandria merchant, explaining why he could not pay a bill.[53] Of all his properties, only Smith's Island was actually visited by the British, to victual their ships with its sheep and cattle, so that by the end of the war scarcely any were left. His Majesty's officers offered to pay for what they took, but Custis refused payment, citing Washington's example in so doing during the Revolution. "My property must abide the fate of war, in common with the rest of my countrymen," he informed his agent on the island.[54]

With the price of everything normally imported or shipped by water soaring--salt, for example, which cost fifty cents a bushel before the war, reached four dollars by the end of 1813--and with much of his produce spoiling while he waited for a chance to ship it, Custis was hard

[52] Neely, op. cit., 48; and Alexandria Gaz., Apr. 22, 1813. For a good evaluation of Custis' work in developing a native breed of sheep, see Ballagh, op. cit., V, 249.

[53] Craven, op. cit., 80; and Custis to James H. Hooe, June 14, 1813, Custis MSS, N. Y. Public Lib.

[54] Alexandria Gaz., June 28, 1813. Also Custis to J. S. Skinner, June 24, 1825, American Farmer, VII (July 1, 1825), 114.

pressed for money.[55] In the summer of 1813, he tried to sell the Washington Forest Tract for $7,000, but even at that price no one would buy it. Nor could he sell the Washington Mills--"built of massy stone."[56] He seems to have been more successful in selling standing timber, in ten acre lots, in Washington Forest, but no one accepted his offer of stills; stone and timber to anyone who would buy a site and establish a distillery on Four Mile Run.[57] He did sell some of his "long-eared tribe," as he termed his Arlington jacks and jennets, though he got only $200 for his best jack, "Columbus," instead of the $500 he had asked.[58]

In fact, so serious was his plight, he even had to sell some of his slaves. Like most of his class, he abhorred selling slaves, and in no case would allow them to be taken out of the neighborhood. Had he been able to sell the Washington Mills, the Negro miller and an assistant would have been included in the sale; and when he did sell a Negro woman and her two children, early in 1814, it was to a family in Alexandria. At a time when slavery was becoming ever more unprofitable in his section, the problem of what to do with the slaves for whom he had no use was to his way of thinking insoluble, for when freed, they usually drifted into the slums of Washington or some other Northern city.[59] The dilemma explains why such men as Custis and his brother-in-law, William Fitzhugh (who also was forced to sell a number of slaves at this time) were to take

[55] Alexandria Gaz., Dec. 26, 1813; Thomas E. Stuart to Custis, Nov. 5, 1814, Custis MSS, Va. His. Soc.; and Custis to James H. Hooe, Oct. 15, 1813, Custis MSS, N. Y. Pub. Lib.

[56] Alexandria Gaz., Apr. 27, May 12, June 23, Aug. 30, 1813; and Federal Republican (Georgetown, D. C.),

[57] Alexandria Gaz., Dec. 23, 1813; June 2, Nov. 5, 1814; and Federal Republican (Georgetown, D. C.), Sept. 8, 1813.

[58] Custis to James H. Hooe, May 24, Jan. 15 [1813?], Custis MSS, N. Y. Pub. Lib.

[59] Ibid.; and Records of Alexandria Co., D. C., Deed Book Y, p. 351; and for the manumission in 1803 of the two-year old daughter of one of Custis' slaves, formerly owned by Martha Washington, see Records of Alexandria Co., D. C., Deed Book E, pp. 153f.

n active part in founding the American Colonization Society a few years later.[60]

Fortunately wool was bringing high prices, and Custis was able to make something of the large flocks he had on his Pamunkey River farms. He also had a small flock, mostly part merino, at Arlington, which he was gradually selling off because there was too much damp ground, conducive to sheep rot, on the estate; inroads by thieves and dogs; and because it was almost impossible to keep the pastures free of poison ivy upon which the sheep would sometimes dine with fatal results.[61]

In the summer of 1813, Custis and his Federalist friends celebrated Napoleon's disastrous retreat from Moscow, or as the Federal Republican escribed it: "The expulsion & precipitate flight of Napoleon from the st independent nation on the continent, the deliverance of the United States, and of mankind at large, from threatened bondage." Earlier, an administration paper had attributed Napoleon's precipitous flight to his desire to "retire to winter quarters"; now it criticized as heartless those who would "make merry at the severe frost which destroyed so many Frenchmen."[62]

Held early in June, the first part of the celebration took place at St. John's Church and consisted mainly of a rousing address by Custis, who though in poor health at the time, was more than equal to the occasion.

[60]See Fitzhugh's advertisement in Alexandria Gaz., June 13, 1813.

[61]Custis to J. S. Skinner, June 17, 1825, Am. Farmer, VII (June 24, 1825), 108. Also Mrs. R. E. Lee, in Custis, Recollections, 66. For the dog menace, see John D. Steele, "On Sheep," Memoirs of the Agriculture Soc. of Philadelphia, I (1805), 2f.; and Carman, et. al., op. cit., 452, 857, 866f. Also Custis to the editor, Alexandria Gaz., Jan. 25, 1812.

[62]Federal Republican (Georgetown, D. C.), Apr. 5, 21, 1813; and t. Intelligencer, Feb. 3, Apr. 23, 1813.

Scathingly he denounced Napoleon, and praised the Russians for their heroism, though he admitted that the latter did not as yet know liberty--that "the sun of science has yet but feebly twinkled in their frozen clime." Still they had fought for their national liberty, and their victory was the first ray of light in the long night of tyranny which had long overshadowed the world. Let no one think, he said, that the ocean would defend America from the ambition of Napoleon. Instead, America should steer a safe course between the Scylla of France and the Charybdas of Great Britain while strengthening its defenses, for such had been Washington's policy. Concluding, he advocated a common sense approach to foreign relations, and national unity in time of danger:

> Go on my brethern, the eye of the Chief still rests on his beloved country....However she may have forgotten her duties to you, forget not the high duties which you owe to the land of your birth....It remains not to say whether our rulers are wicked, or unwise. If so, we but share in the common fate of nations, all of whom at some time or other have been unfortunate in these respects. An enemy's anchor now clings to our soil. Be firm my f friends, be mindful of the heroic fame of your fathers; hug to your hearts your recent triumphs and shew to posterity, and the world, that in the hour of danger, Americans will...give their lives to the liberties of the country. 63

Doubtless he repeated much the same sentiments at the dinner that followed in the Union Tavern, decorated for the occasion with a bust of Czar Alexander, the Peale portrait of Washington from Arlington, and a large emblematic painting by Custis of an enormous black eagle grasping a hugh serpent in its talons in front of burning Moscow. 64

63 Federal Republican (Georgetown, D. C.), June 11, 1813.

64 Ibid., June 7, 9, 1813. Custis was presented with a medal by the Russian minister, Daschkoff. His speech was published under the title, The Celebration of the Russian Victories...including the Oration of Mr. Custis (Georgetown, D. C.: J. B. Carter, 1813).

A few weeks later, when the British fleet blockading the Chesapeake repared to move up the Potomac, the citizens of Washington, Republicans and Federalists alike, turned out to build earthworks and militia companies were hurriedly dispatched to Fort Washington, fifteen miles down the river. There they remained for several weeks, during which the water battery and the covering works on the ridge above it were strengthened--though the Federalists derided the fort as "a mere pig pen," too weak to possibly defend. Though the adherrents of the administration professed a greater faith in the fortification, they were equally relieved when the British fleet turned back, apparently because it was unable to navigate the hazardous Kettle Botton Shoals, some distance downstream.[65]

Had the British pressed home an attack on Washington at this time, when both the people and the government realized the defenseless condition of the national capital and were taking active measures to defend it, the outcome might have been far different than it was the following summer, when the British again threatened the city. By then the city had been striped of all but a company or two of regular troops on the assumption that the British could not, or would not, attack the city. As before, the militia was turned out, some from as far away as Baltimore, and patriotic citizens again contributed money and blistered hands, or both, to strengthen the river defenses of the city. Had the British tried to force their way up the Potomac, they might have met with a stout resistance. But instead, they chose to follow some ineffectual American gunboats up the Patuxent River, where a force of regulars under General Ross were put ashore to attack the national capital. Bewildered by this new tack, the

[65] Federal Republican (Georgetown, D. C.), Apr. 14, July 23, 1813; Nat. Intelligencer, July 19, 21, 1813. Also Mrs. Samuel H. Smith to Mrs. Kirkpatrick, July 20, 1813, S. H. Smith Papers, L. C.

government was all confusion. Companies and battalions of untrained, inexperienced militiamen were marched and countermarched to the point of exhaustion as various officials, military and civilian, sought to anticipate the British line of advance and set up some kind of defense. Lacking any central direction, the American forces were widely scattered, and the British forces--which numbered only four thousand and had only a few pieces of artillery and some sailors mounted on commandeered farm horses as cavalry--was able to approach within a few miles of the city with virtually no opposition.

On the 24th of August, it reached the little town of Bladensburg, just over the District line, where a bridge spanned the eastern branch of the Potomac. Here, where the hills overlooking the bridge and the road that branched off to Washington and Georgetown made a natural line of defense, some nine thousand American troops being hurried into position astride the two roads came to a halt. Well led, the Americans could easily have thrown back the invaders, for though they were mostly inexperienced militiamen, they had a fair amount of light artillery and a battery of eighteen pounders manned by sailors and marines under Captain Joshua Barney. Next to Barney's battery, was that of Captain George Peters, made up of gentlemen-soldiers from Georgetown. This was one of the best of the militia units, because its commanding officer had been an officer in the regular artillery for a number of years.[66]

Here, laboring with the gun crews readying shot and shell, sponge and

[66]For the best and most comprehensive modern account of the battle of Bladensburg, see Neil H. Swanson, The Perilous Fight (N. Y.: Farrar & Rinehart, 1945), Chaps. I-VII. See also, Report of the Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Causes and Particulars of the Invasion of the City of Washington (Washington, D. C.: A. & G. Way, 1814), 34, 213f. Also, Samuel Williams, Sketches of the War Between the United States and the British Isles (Rutland, Vt.: Fay & Davidson, 1815), 418-421.

rammer, powder and water buckets, was Washington Custis, who had joined up with the battery after President Madison had declined his services because one of his hands was disabled by rheumatism. "Then I will go into the ranks," he had said, and had done so.[67]

Now as noon approached, Custis stood by his gun watching a thin line of red-clad British skirmishers wade the shallow Anacostia River and advance up the easy slope toward the American position. Seeing how calmly the battle-hardened British veterans from Spain went about their business may well have made him uneasy, if only because his battery and Barney's artillery were in advance of, instead of supporting the infantry in the main line of defense. Actually, he had more to fear from the confusion of conflicting orders being issued by a swarm of self-appointed commanders on the field, including President Madison himself and some over-active members of his cabinet.

For a time the Americans put up a stiff fight. Wellington's veterans quickly drove the weak American first line back on to the road to Georgetown, exposing the right wing of the second American defense line to a flanking movement. A Baltimore regiment then moved out to meet the oncoming British and for a time did well, but when it was finally driven back in disorder, the British continued on obliquely to the right, until they came up hard on Barney's and Peter's guns. Here they were halted and driven back by a storm of grapeshot and musket balls. Unperturbed, the British then shifted their assault still further to the right where the American forces, though shaky, were enduring a barrage of British rockets, a new and terrifying, but comparatively harmless weapon. Then, for some unaccountable reason, this section of the line was ordered to fall back a short distance, a movement which the most experienced troops

[67] Federal Republican, (Georgetown, D. C.), Sept. 1, 1814.

would have found difficult to execute under fire. As a result, the maneuver quickly deteriorated into a panic, and the right end of the line caved in, Barney's men were forced to save themselves by hacking their way out of the battle, leaving their commander seriously wounded on the field. Peter's battery could only linger long enough to fire a parting shot from Custis' gun--the last field piece fired in the battle.[68]

With most of the American forces retreating along the road to Georgetown and the rest simply disintegrating, the road to the capital lay wide open to the enemy. Fortunately for the panic-stricken mass of soldiers and civilians who were now fleeing in all directions, the British infantry was too tired at the moment to pursue them, and instead waited till the cool of the evening to enter the city unopposed. Escaping from the mob, Custis made his way back to Arlington, stopping, according to one contemporary account, at the President's Mansion to insure that the Stuart portrait of Washington was carried to safety.[69]

Standing at the window that night, watching the flames set by the British consume the Capitol, the President's House, and other public buildings in spite of a heavy rain that was falling, Custis felt keenly the humiliation brought on the country by the improvidence and incompetency of a weak administration. It was indeed a dark, depressing moment for all Americans, one they would never entirely forget, despite the reverse suffered by the British at Baltimore a few weeks later.

[68]Ibid.; also statement of Maj. George Williams, History of the Invasion and Capture of Washington (New York: Harper & Bros., 1857), 352, 358.

[69]Diary of Mrs. William Thornton, entry for Sept. 24, 1814, Wm. Thornton Papers, L. C.; also, Charles J. Ingersoll, Historical Sketch of the Second War Between the United States and Great Britain (2 vols. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippencott, 1901), I, 142-145.

CHAPTER VI

"THE HEAVY EXPENSE OF MY BUILDING"

Two guests whom Custis entertained about a year apart illustrate the swift recovery of the American spirit from its recent humiliation.

Federal reaction to the capture of the capital was naturally bitter. "The time has come for all good men to be in their graves, where they may be hid from the disgrace and ruin of their country," croaked the Federal Republican.[1] And, indeed, the outlook was dark, despite the Baltimore victory. Nothing had come as yet of the peace negotiations begun some months before, and it was commonly believed that the Federalists, who controlled all of the New England states and were to meet in convention at Hartford in December, might even advocate the secession of their action.

In view of Custis' position, that everyone, regardless of party, should support the war effort, he was not in accord with the extremist wing of his party, the leader of which, Timothy Pickering, stopped overnight at Arlington that fall, together with Thomas M. Bayley, Congressman from Virginia. No doubt the war was the chief topic of conversation, but the visit is memorable only because little Mary Custis, then seven years old, had a part in it.

It so happened that neither of her parents were home at the time the two men rode up, and it befell Mary, as lady of the house, to greet them. This she did, and afterwards reported to her mother that "Mr. Bayley and

[1] Sept. 1, 1814.

a very old man" were in the parlor. Mrs. Custis passed on Mary's description to Pickering after tea, much to his amusement, he being sixty-nine. "The next morning I saw the little girl and took her on my knee," he wrote to his own daughter afterwards, "and at parting (after breakfast) called her attention to the 'very old man,' and telling her I wished her to remember him, gave her some impressive kisses."[2]

As it turned out, the Federalist convention when it met at Hartford early in January, 1815, did nothing more than severely criticize some of the administration's war measures and invite the states to nullify them--all of which was forgotten when word came that the British had been decisively beaten at New Orleans. And even after it was learned that the battle had been unnecessary since a peace treaty had been signed on the Christmas eve before the battle, the victory served to convert a generally futile and unnecessary war into a patriotic tradition of a "Second War of Independence."[3]

Because of his spirited service at Bladensburg and his generosity in allowing poor families from the city to gather firewood at Arlington during the severe winter that followed the invasion of Washington, Custis seems to have been less unpopular than were most Federalists at this time. He, for one, was glad to accept the new version of the war, and personally escorted the victor of New Orleans, General Jackson, to Mount Vernon that fall when the hero visited the capital.[4] To Custis, as to most Americans, Jackson seemed almost another Washington, a second saviour of his country, as it were.

[2]Timothy Pickering to Elizabeth Pickering, Nov. 13, 1814, Md. His. Mag., XX (1925), 129.

[3]S. Somervell Mackall, Early Days in Washington (Washington, D. C.: Neale Co., 1899), 50.

[4]John S. Bassett, ed., Corres. of Andrew Jackson (7 vols. Washington, D. C.: The Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1935), II, 119f.

By one of those ironical twists that give history its peculiar fascination, the war was hardly over before the party in power began to adopt nationalistic policies, such as a protective tariff, long advocated by the discredited Federalists, indicating a shift from the older colonial way of thinking to a new concept of America as an independent nation. From now on the young nation was to be little influenced by European powers occupied with their own problems, and since Custis had long urged such an independent course of action, he would easily adjust himself to a period in which the nation would expend most of its energies in developing its vast expanse--and in the process generate pressures which would almost disrupt it.

For some time, Republican acceptance of Federalist principles brought peace to a country weary of political strife. "Politics in the District have ceased to excite a struggle; acerbity has been succeeded by a general tranquility," stated the Alexandria Gazette a few years after the war.[5]

Adherents of both parties joined their erstwhile enemies in activities expressive of the new nationalism, such as the American Antiquarian Society founded in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1815, for the purpose of preserving American historical documents and mementoes. The society's membership was truly national in character, including such politically dissimilar men as Thomas Jefferson, John Randolph, Edward Everett, and Washington Irving, Washington Custis was the society's "counselor," or representative, for the District of Columbia, responsible for transmitting to it "communications touching the antiquities of the District [of Columbia]." He also presented the society with a number of letters by the

[5] Alexandria Gaz., Oct. 1, 1819.

English botanist, Peter Collinson, which the latter had written to his great-grandfather, John Custis III.[6]

This newly awakened popular interest in the nation's history, in addition to his personal reverence for his deceased guardian, led Custis on his return home from Smith's Island in the summer of 1816 to place a monument on the site of Washington's birthplace at Wakefield, in Westmoreland County, Virginia.

With him aboard his ninety-ton schooner, The Lady of the Lake, were two friends, Samuel Lewis and William Grymes, both sons of Revolutionary War veterans. Sailing up the Potomac, they brought the vessel in as close as possible to the shoals along the Virginia shore of the river and there dropped anchor. A freestone slab had been prepared beforehand, and after placing this in a small boat, the three rowed up Pope's Creek almost half a mile, accompanied by a fishing party of several gentlemen whom they met on the way. When they beached their boat, they still had three hundred yards to carry the heavy stone slab across the fields to the tumbled ruins of the house in which Washington had first seen the light. There they constructed a rude pedestal of bricks from an old chimney and set up the freestone slab, draped in an American flag. Custis then unveiled the simple monument, and in a brief speech commended it "to the respect and protection of the American people in general, and the Citizens of Westmoreland in particular." The little ceremony over, he and his friends lingered only long enough to glance again at the inscription:

HERE
On the 11th of February, 1732,
WASHINGTON
WAS BORN.

[6]His certificate of membership, dated July 13, 1815, is in the Etting MSS, His. Soc. of Pa. The Collinson-Custis correspondence was edited, with notes, by E. G. Swem, under the title, Brothers of the Spade (Worcester, Mass.: Am. Antiquarian Soc., 1949).

When they reached their vessel, the national colors were hoisted and a salute was fired from a small cannon as the Lady of the Lake heeled to the freshening breeze, the smoke from the discharges lingering on the water as the schooner gathered way.[7]

For half a century the modest monument would serve to mark the hallowed spot to the few travellers who visited that out-of-the-way locality; and when it crumbled, years would elapse before another would be erected, this time by the nation.

Peace brought hard times to the farmers of Virginia and Maryland as the demand for American wheat and other produce dropped off sharply. Prices had fallen so low by 1818, Custis was happy to get three to four dollars a barrel for corn for which he had received nine two years before. During the next thirty years, tobacco and cotton would be the only crops to find a ready market, thus intensifying the forces that were causing the decline of large areas in the South through soil exhaustion. Only a few gentlemen farmers like Custis, possessed of more resources and more resourceful than their neighbors, continued to improve their holdings.[8]

One of the first casualties of peace was the domestic woolen industry. Only slightly protected by a tariff act passed in 1816, American-made woolens could not compete with the English goods dumped on the market. As a result, overnight sheep became almost worthless regardless of

[7] [Custis?] to the editor, June 4, 1816, in Alexandria Gaz. Custis later wrote accounts of the event which were published in ibid., Mar. 6, 1832, and Apr. 16, 1851, in both of which he mistakenly gives the date as 1815.

[8] Craven, on. cit., 81, 86, 108. The comparative corn prices are taken from John P. Walden to Custis, Quarterly Return of Estates for Last Quarter, 1818, Custis MSS, Va. His. Soc., and Custis to F. Nelson, Feb. 25, 1847, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

their quality--merinos which had brought $1000 before the war were now sold to the butcher for a trifle. For years, sheep would be merely a minor farm enterprise.[9] Here and there, as in the Shenandoah Valley and Loudoun County, some of the Arlington Long-Wooled would be retained to supply wool for homespun. Custis also kept a flock at the White House farm for this purpose, but none at Arlington, except two which perhaps out of sentiment were allowed to roam at will over the estate.[10]

Fortunately, Custis had other sources of income besides wheat. His fisheries on the Potomac and Pamunkey continued to be profitable, likewise the produce from his market garden. Hay was another good crop, and he raised and cured a considerable amount of it at Arlington, some of which he sold in the city and the remainder he used to feed his fair-sized herd of beef cattle, also those of speculators who fattened them at Arlington before taking them to market. Though new, this last was an important undertaking, for more than 1500 head of cattle were fattened at Arlington in 1816, which, according to Custis, had become "a very general resort for both Drovers and the Butchers of the District."[11]

On the bad side, the value of farm land declined sharply during these years of agricultural depression as thousands of acres were thrown on the market or abandoned outright. In 1816, Custis tried to sell the 400 acres that remained of the old Arlington estate on the Eastern Shore, but with the market glutted, no one would buy it. He also tried to rent Smith's Island, or pasturage on it, but again there is no evidence that he found any takers.[12]

[9] Craven, op. cit., 116f; Connor, op. cit., 104ff.; Henry S. Randall, Fine Wool Sheep Husbandry (Albany, N. Y.: C. Van Benthuysen, 1862), 53.

[10] Ibid., 66; and Custis, Recollections, 66.

[11] See Washington (D. C.) Gazette, May 14, 1818; and Alexandria Gaz., Oct. 21, 1817.

[12] Ibid., June 16, 1816; and Craven, op. cit., 118f.

Under these circumstances, his decision in 1817 to go ahead and build the main section of his house and its grand portico was almost foolhardy. Perhaps it was meant to be an affirmation of his confidence in the future greatness of his country; or he may have been inspired by seeing the Capitol rising again from the ruins to which it had been reduced by the British.[13] Whatever the reason, he could not have guessed that someday he would be remembered for this achievement when otherwise almost forgotten.

Raising the money for it must have been difficult. Some he probably borrowed as an advance on his crops; he may also have sold some of the Romancock land he put on the market about this time.[14] In any event, the economies evident in the structure and the fact that it was never entirely completed show clearly the financial difficulties under which Custis labored.

The construction of "a house that any one might see with half an eye," as his son-in-law later described it, must have aroused much comment, yet surprisingly little survives, outside of a few bills for labor and building materials,[15] to tell of this important phase in its history. Grown-up, Mary Custis could barely remember when the "middle house," as she termed it, was built; and one of her childhood playmates, would years later recall how she, when a little girl, had chased chickens about the

[13] There is a persistent, but obviously incorrect tradition that Custis followed the stages of construction of the U. S. Capitol in building his house, for which see Sun. Morning Chronicle (Washington, D. C.), July 7, 1872.

[14] For the crops and Romancock land, see John Waldon to Custis, July 1, 1815, enclosing a letter of Christian Johnson, surveyor, to same, Custis MSS, Va. His. Soc.

[15] R. E. Lee to Mrs. M. C. Lee, Apr. 24, 1852, DeButts-Ely MSS.

foundations of the house.[16]

That Custis used soft brick for the foundations of the main part of his house, instead of stone from his quarry on Four Mile Run, may be due to its being the cheaper material; on the other hand, the foundations may possibly have been put in at the time the wings were built, fourteen years before. By using the less durable materials he risked building his house on sand, or more literally dust, for brick baked at the low temperatures employed then crumbles into red powder when exposed to wet or prolonged dampness. He may have relied on the thickness of the foundations--eighteen inches--to give them durability; if he did, time has confirmed his judgment, for they are still in surprisingly good condition. Thick as are these underpinnings, they lack four inches of being as thick as those under the wings; likewise the walls erected upon them are fifteen inches thick compared to the seventeen and a half inches of the wings.[17] These differences may have been motivated by economy, but it is more likely that the architect purposely made the foundations and walls of the wings heavy so that they might, in effect, serve to buttress those of the "middle house."

Like the wings, the new section of the house--except the west, or back side--was covered with a hard stucco cement invented by David Meade Randolph of Richmond, whose wife was a cousin of Mrs. Custis. Randolph claimed that his cement, made by burning fossil shells obtained from a deposit near Yorktown, was far superior to stucco made from common oyster shells or limestone, inasmuch as it grew harder, instead of softer, when exposed to water.[18] To advertise his "hydraulic" cement, which he

[16]Mrs. R. E. Lee to Laura C. Holloway, n. d., quoted in Holloway, op. cit., II, 59; and Marietta M. Andrews, George Washington's Country (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1930), 149.

[17]The dimensions are from the Historic American Buildings Survey, "Arlington House." Sheets 1 & 2.

[18]Richmond (Va.) Enquirer, Oct. 12, 1818.

commended for aqueducts, forts and public buildings, Randolph got Custis to use it on the new part of his house, where it has proved as durable as its inventor could possibly have wished.[19]

Early prints of the house show that the wooden pediment over the portico was plastered and scored in rectangular blocks, like the rest of the exterior, to resemble cut stone. A low balustrade around the roof of each wing was evidently intended to give the same effect, for they appear to be a part of the structure, rather than a mere decoration.[20] To add to the effect, the cement on the front of the house and wings--if not the rest of the house--was streaked with color to make it look like marble. The immense portico columns (twenty-three feet tall and a little over five feet thick at the base) were built of brick about a hollow core, and treated like the rest of the exterior; they are unusual in not being fluted, though drum lines were indicated by horizontal grooves. Only the chimneys were left unplastered; the earliest colored print of the house, made by Benson J. Lossing in 1853, plainly shows their natural color, a soft red.[21] No doubt enonomy accounts for the portico steps being of wood, but why there are four of them, instead of the conventional three, is unknown.

Though forced to economize wherever possible, Custis compromised on neither materials nor workmanship. Joists, studs, and rafters were of well-seasoned hewn timber, neatly mortised together or pinned with wooden

[19] Nat. Intelligencer, Aug. 19, 1818.

[20] The earliest known print of Arlington House, a lithograph, was inserted in some copies (but apparently not all) of William Elliot's Washington Guide, 1826 (Washington, D. C.: S.A.Elliot, 1826), facing p. 150.

[21] The marble effect is obvious in the earliest known photographs of the mansion, those by Mathew Brady in 1861, 1862, and 1864, and now in the Nat. Archives, one of which shows the west front unplastered. This side was plastered to correspond with the rest of the exterior about 1890, according to Rhodes, op. cit., 4. A yellow wash was found under this coating at the time the War Dept. removed some of it during the process of restoring the house about 1930; for which, see L.M. Heisenring, "The Restoration of Arlington House," an unpublished lecture. The Brady photographs also show the chimneys minus plaster.

pegs, hardly any nails being used. Each piece, however small, appears to have been cut according to a pattern on the ground, then put in the right place. Doors, cornices, and other woodwork were of the finest native pine, no doubt from the Arlington forest. Perhaps the most remarkable features of the house were the great, barn-like, roof trusses which were strong enough to support the weight of a slate roof, though wood shingles were used for the time being. To provide for the "action" of the portico roof, which being more exposed to the weather than the main roof, would expand and contract at a different rate, the former was built as a separate unit with its main timbers fitted neatly in alongside those of the main roof, making a drop of a few inches between the two on the outside.[22]

By a skillful translation, the temple motif was carried indoors through a tall doorway almost twelve feet high into a narrow center hall extending clear through to the rear of the house, the effect being heightened by the light grey, painted walls. For some reason, the walls of a service hall, intersecting the center hall at its west end, was even more carefully treated by being scored with lines, like the exterior, to imitate blocks of stone after which they were painted a light grey and sand sprinkled on the wet paint to give a stone-like surface.[23] Though narrow, the main hall would serve as a parlor in the summer, cooled by the air passing through the wide open doorways at each end.

At the back of the house, two narrow, inconspicious stairways led to the second floor, one ascending in two flights from the hall, the other (evidently for the servants) rising steeply in a single flight from a small service room just north of the hall. Since the landing on the main staircase came in the middle of an outside window, the latter served to

[22] Eisenring, "Arlington House," 10.

[23] The original paint colors were ascertained, by examination, in February, 1952.

light the stair landing, a closet off it, and the hall below.[24]

The general effect of walnut-stained woodwork, stone-colored walls, and high ceilings would have been unduly austere had it not been for the graceful semicircular arches that terminated the hall, framed the main staircase, and divided the large room north of the hall into a parlor and a small dining room. Evidently, the latter were intended primarily for everyday use, for in order to make them easier to heat, the middle arch originally had doors under a fanlight, while those on the outside were filled in with lath and plaster. A richly-carved marble mantel in each of these rooms gave a certain air of refinement, while twin closets flanking the mantel in the larger room were something of an innovation as well as a convenience, built-in closets not yet having come into general use.[25] The drawing room across the hall, the largest room in the house, was left unfinished, and was to remain so for many years.

Altogether, the house when finished was an impressive demonstration of architect Hadfield's talents. The builder, too--who was probably the Cornelius McLean to whom Custis paid $200 in April, 1818, "on account of his building being Fifteen Hundred & fifty in cash up to this date"--also deserves credit for the rare sympathy and fine workmanship with which he translated the architect's noble conception into a notable building.[26]

[24]The steep, single-flight service stairway may have been an architectural after-thought, but the paint on its walls and woodwork is the same as that used on the second floor hall, definitely establishing it as having been built long before the Civil War.

[25]George Smith, a Georgetown plaster and lath contractor, included closets in the estimates he prepared on another house while at Arlington in 1818; for which see his letter to Linus Grant Davidson, July 20 [1818], in Misc. D. C. Papers, D. C.

[26]Custis MSS, Va. His. Soc. The name is not found in early directories of the District, but there is a "Cornelius M'Lean, Carpenter," listed in D. Longworth, Longworth's New York Almanac for 1817-18 (New York: D. Longworth, 1816), 298, suggesting the possibility that the contractor may have been from out-of-town.

The finished building is first mentioned by a visitor from New York; "Custis Folly," he termed it, early in 1818.[27] An item which appeared in the Alexandria Gazette in June of that year, is more interesting:

> Arlington House, the seat of Mr. Custis..., was struck by lightening during the storm on Saturday morning. The lightening entered the roof and passed down by a temporary wooden pier erected to support the unfinished part of the portico; but fortunately without any injury to the building or the family, who were at breakfast at the time.[28]

Once built, the mansion was to be a landmark for travellers, an almost irrestible attraction. Most would be highly impressed by its striking architecture, though a few, venturing near, would be somewhat let down by the evidences of Custis' economies--the unplastered rear, for example. "It is visible for many miles, and in the distance has the appearance of a superior English country residence beyond any place I had seen in the states," wrote a British traveller in 1832; "but as I came close to it, I was woefully disappointed."[29] More typical was the comment of Mrs. Trollope, usually critical of all things American; according to her, it was "a noble-looking place, having a portico of stately white columns, which as the mansion stands high, with a background of dark woods, forms a beautiful object in the landscape."[30]

Custis must have been highly pleased with his imposing house. Now he had a family seat which would be worthy of his magnificant collection of Washington mementoes. However embarrassing it might be to have to ask his druggist to accept a note in lieu of payment for a small bill--"not being able to command cash at this time from the heavy expense of my

[27] Republican Chronicle (New York), reprinted in Washington (D. C.) Gazette, May 7, 1818.

[28] June 10, 1818.

[29] Godfrey T. Vigne, Six Months in America (London: Whittaker, Treacher & Co., 1832), 147.

[30] Frances M. Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans (New York: H. Bell, 1904), 204.

building"--the petty humiliation must have seemed worthwhile as he contemplated the magnitude of his achievements.[31]

It may be assumed that he and Molly Custis lost no time in placing the Custis heirlooms and Washington relics where they could best be seen to advantage. The famous lantern which British Admiral Vernon had presented to George Washington's half-brother Lawrence was hung from the ceiling of the center of the hall, opposite the great Peale portrait of Washington. On the same side he hung the Woolaston portraits of Daniel Parke Custis, his wife Martha, and that of their two children. The magnificent Kneller portrait of Colonel Daniel Parke, Custis' most controversial ancestor, was put up on the wall opposite.[32] On the same side was a Van Dyke of another early Custis, perhaps John Custis I, of Amsterdam, and portraits of John Custis III and his fiery-tempered wife, Francis, Colonel Parke's daughter.[33] Elsewhere in the hall he found room to put up two large antlers, one undoubtedly that of the great stag he had shot as a young lad at Mount Vernon.[34]

The rest of the portraits he distributed between the parlor and dining room, putting those of Washington and Lafayette in the latter, together with other portraits and miniatures of the Custis family. In this room, too, he placed the long black walnut sideboard which had once belonged

[31] Apr. 8, 1818, printed in Eleanor Leadbeater, "The Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Shop, Alexandria, Va., 1792-1933," Journal of the Am. Pharmaceutical Assoc., XXIII (Nov., 1934), 1139.

[32] For Colonel Parke, and the other Custis ancestors, see Appendix I.

[33] Benson J. Lossing, "Arlington House," Harper's Magazine, VII (1853), 437ff. Locations given in earlier accounts are in general agreement with those given by Lossing.

[34] Statements of Mrs. Annie Baker and Mrs. Ada Thompson (both of whom were children household servants and familiar with Arlington House in the period 1850-1861), made to L. M. Leisenring, Mar. 3, 1930, and now in the L. M. N. M. Records.

to Lawrence Washington and now held the Washington silver. In the larger room was Martha Washington's tea-table, and other historic pieces from Mount Vernon. Elsewhere in the house, were other notable relics: the deathbed of Washington (in an upstairs bedroom); Martha Washington's iron treasure chest; the camp chests used by the General throughout the Revolution; his war-tents, carefully preserved in their original leather portmanteaus, together with the tent-poles; flags captured from the Hessians at Trenton and from the British at Yorktown; pieces of the "Cinncinnati China" and "States China" presented to General and Mrs. Washington by some French army officers; a half-bust of Washington, made by Houdon in 1785; a sword the General had presented to a nephew, George Augustine Washington--the list went on and on, explaining why the "Washington Treasury," as Custis called it, was considered the largest and finest of its kind in existance.[35]

Since the General's old home at Mount Vernon held only a few of its old furnishings at this time, visitors by the score came to see those at Arlington House, as soon as it became generally known that they were welcome to do so. Instead of resenting their importunities, Custis opened his house to all who showed they were interested, showed them his treasures and delighted them with tales of his early years at Mount Vernon. To most, it was an unforgettable experience. In an age when patriotic emotions were considerably less restrained than now, it was not considered at all remarkable that a scientist like Benjamin Silliman should not be satisfied with merely seeing one of the Washington tents, but must

[35] Ibid. Also will of George Augustine Washington, Jan. 24, 1793, typoscript copy in Misc. MSS, Mt. Vernon Ladies Assoc.

For the best inventory nd description of the Washington relics at Arlington, most of which are illustrated, see Benson J. Lossing, The Home of Washington (N. Y.: Virtue & Yorston, 1879); for the Houdon bust, see Custis, Recollections, 517.

have it draped about him.[36]

Naturally there were some who thought Custis made too much of his association with the First President, but most people were gratified by the hospitality he so freely offered and accepted as sincere his admiration amounting to reverence for Washington.[37] To his credit, instead of being merely possessive, Custis seems to have considered himself something of a trustee safeguarding the relics for posterity. The Washington tents, for example, he intended some day to give to the American Army, and many of the less important relics he would later loan to museums or even give away to those whom he thought would cherish them.

"A great many relicks have been given away as presents to numbers who have begged them," observed a visitor, in 1830: "They are now dispersed in almost every country in Christendom..."[38]

Actually, the Washington relics seem to have been the only possessions in which Custis was interested, for he almost never discussed his new home with his friends or referred to it in his letters. He remained as he had always been--notable for the plainess of his dress and his unassuming manner, qualities which disarmed potential jealousy and caused him to be well liked by friends and strangers alike. His wife Molly was much the same, and in addition, her sincere piety strongly impressed all who met her. To her Arlington House was simply a home for her family, not a pretentious setting for elaborate social affairs. Wrapped up in seeing

[36] Nat. Intelligencer, Aug. 21, 1824.

[37] Robert B. Hughes, an English sculptor who visited Arlington in 1829, thought Custis "too enthusiastic, too soon taken with strangers & too patronizing even to officiousness," according to Mrs. William Thornton; MS diary, entry for Apr. 22, 1829, Thornton Papers, L. C.

[38] Nat. Intelligencer, Aug. 21, 1824; and J. Elliot, op. cit., 292.

to the welfare of her husband and little daughter, the servants and field hands, and her circle of friends and relatives, she had no desire to participate in the social life of the worldly city across the river. What recreation she needed she got by working in her flower garden or exchanging visits with her relatives.

Little Mary Custis was raised accordingly. Though an only child, she was kept unspoiled by the example of her parents, who saw to it that she received an education suitable for a young lady of her position. She learned some arithmetic and composition, a considerable amount of history, and was taught to paint in both watercolors and oils. Her mother taught her how to manage a large household and impressed upon her her responsibility, as a Christian, for the well-being of the slaves. From her, too, she acquired her religious beliefs, and learned to place her main reliance on an inscrutable and just, but always kind God. As soon as she was old enough, one of her tasks was to teach the children of the family servants their lessons.

By this time, Custis had come around to a different viewpoint on the ever-present slavery problem. Formerly he had thought the solution lay in educating, then liberating them. Now he thought that slavery did something to its hapless victims that could not be remedied by this method, however humane the motives behind it. Most of the Mount Vernon slaves had been given some training to prepare them for freedom, but to his knowledge few had done well on their own.[39] Like his neighbors, he considered free Negroes a troublesome element in any community, idlers prone to dissipation, and approved the action of some Southern states--Virginia for one, in forbidding them to remain within their borders. Yet he knew something must be done, because yearly the slaves were becoming

[39]Custis, Recollections, 158.

more numerous, an ever-growing burden on owners like himself who could not sinfully employ them and yet would not sell them South, into the cotton country. The only alternative, as he saw it, was to first give them a rudimentary education, then their freedom, following which they should be sent somewhere out of the South, or even out of the country, to a place where they could support themselves.

Such were the aims of the American Colonization Society, founded in Washington in 1817 for the purpose of colonizing emancipated Negroes on the west coast of Africa, and for this reason Custis supported it from its inception. The society planned to hire agents, charter ships, and transport freedmen to a new homeland where they could be economically self-sufficient, and with some of the most influential men in the country behind it--Henry Clay, Daniel Webster and John Randolph of Roanoke-- it had every prospect of success.[40] The Custis' pastor, the Rev. Mr. William H. Wilmer was a charter member, as was Mrs. Custis' cousin, the Reverand Mr. William Meade, who was also the first agent hired by the society. Molly's brother, William H. Fitzhugh, was also a member, and later was the society's vice-president from Virginia.[41]

Though not leaders, the Custises were active in the colonization program from the beginning. With their dues, they sometimes enclosed small sums contributed by some of their slaves--evidence that some of them, at least, were in sympathy with the scheme. For some reason, Custis emancipated four slaves in 1818, but since these ranged in age from eight to fourteen, they are too young to have been candidates for colonization.[42]

[40]For the best study of the American Colonization Society, the one on which this account is based, see Early L. Fox, The American Colonization Society 1817-1840 (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1919), 46ff.

[41]List of Original Subscribers, Am. Col. Soc. Papers, L. C.; also Second and Fourth Annual Report of the society (Washington, D. C.: Davis & Force, 1819) 1821), 125, 66, respectively.

[42]Ibid.; and Records of Alexandria Co., D. C. Deed Book G-3, p. 14.

Custis was able to assist in one of the first tasks undertaken by the society--returning to Africa slaves caught being smuggled into the country. The first incident of this sort occurred in 1819, when a slave-ship was taken into custody by the state of Georgia, whose governor was induced to turn its unfortunate human cargo over to the society, instead of auctioning it off as had been the practice heretofore. The plight of the unhappy Negroes aroused much sympathy, and Custis offered the use of Smith's Island for "a refuge for the poor Africans until such time as the new colony should be made ready for them." The society accepted his offer, and the slaves remained there for some time while arrangements were made to transport them back home.[43]

To the Custises, the colonization movement was a moderate, middle-ground approach to the slavery problem, the need for which was pointed up by the current controversy over the extension of slavery into the western territories. Custis was to be its staunch advocate for years, his views being summarized in a newspaper account of a speech he made at the annual meeting of the Society in 1825:

> He went into a brief review of the origins and efforts of the society--paid a handsome compliment to the fine principles and prosperous condition of the Eastern States--mourned the existance of slavery to the South--vindicated the Southern States from all opprobrium of so great an evil, and rejoiced that there was, at length, a ground of hope that it will one day be removed. He encouraged the society to perserverance and zeal, and presented the picture of a free Republic, founded on the shores of Africa, and looking to this society as its origin.[44]

To the end of his days he would maintain that the perpetuation of the Union was more important than the immediate welfare of the slaves; slavery could be abolished only by moral suasion; and that the only

[43]Minutes of the Bd. of Managers, Am. Col. Soc., entry for Apr. 7, 1819, Am. Col. Soc. Papers, L. C. Also Washington (D. C.) Gazette, Apr. 23, 1819.

[44]Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 21, 1825.

practical thing to do was to return the freed slaves to Africa. The fact that the colonization scheme demonstrated its practicability, if on a small scale, before it was wrecked by the extremists, North and South, about 1830, strengthened his convictions.

That agricultural conditions in his section began to improve during the next few years had much to do with his interest in the colonization scheme. Sheep, for instance, were again becoming profitable as British imports declined and American mills increased their output of woolens.[45] More important, there was strong demand for wheat and flour in the West Indies and South America.

Better times offered the possibility of checking the forces which were causing the decline in his section, but in order to take advantage them, Southern farmers would have to improve their crops and methods of cultivation and get the roads and canals needed for access to profitable markets. To get the latter, all that was needed was sufficient public interest, but making improvements in agricultural practices under the slave system was considerably more difficult. It was almost impossible to experiment with new crops and methods when large field forces had to be kept constantly employed; furthermore, the natural increase of the slaves tied up the capital needed for improvements and made it impractical to decrease the size of the areas cultivated to where the owner could manage them himself. Under the compulsion to change their ways or go under, many slaveowners sold unneeded slaves to the south, but others, like the Custises, could only hope that emigration to Africa

[45]Conner, op. cit., 106ff.; Randall, op. cit., 33.

would siphon off their excess.[46]

Stimulated by the awakened interest in agriculture, but lacking the capital needed for major improvements, Custis had to rely largely on his ingenuity to take advantage of the times.[47] One measure he adopted in 1820, to cut expenses, was "the Arlington Shoe," a shoe with a thick wooden sole to which leather uppers were nailed, hobnails and cleats keeping it from slipping in wet or cold weather. According to Custis, the shoes were cheap, yet dry, comfortable and easily repaired. Telling the readers of a popular agricultural magazine, the American Farmer, about the shoe, he whimsically wrote:

> I see the sons of St. Crispin arise, brandish their awls, and cry, "What the devil has gotten into the fellow with his Arlington economies, and his wooden soals!"....Gentle Crafts, forbear! Think not of harm where none is intended. There will always be enough of the vain, the wealthy and the gay...to keep your needles from rusting. We cater not for the rich, but minister to the poor. The clatter we make with our clogs will not be heard in the pavilions of the Great...We have no Dandies in agriculture.../and/ this meritorious innovation will give comfort to thousands. [48]

Equally ingenious was his solution to the fencing problem which bedeviled farmers prior to the invention of barbed wire, half a century later. Unless fields were enclosed, it was impossible to restore worn-out lands to fertility by planting them with timothy, clover and wheat, yet wooden fences were costly and decayed quickly in the damp climate of the District of Columbia--one reason local residents favored a canal up the Potomac by which rails could be imported cheaply.[49] Custis also

[46] Craven, op. cit., 125f.

[47] Custis' financial condition at this period may be inferred from a letter he wrote Edward Stabler, May 19, 1823: "For all my great property, I feel...the pressure of the times, and wish to negotiate a small sum," Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Shop Papers, Alexandria, Va.

[48] Custis to J. S. Skinner, Feb. 1, Oct. 24, 1820, in Am. Farmer, I, 380; II, 255, respectively.

[49] For the fencing situation in the District of Columbia, see the letter to the editor in Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 14, 1823.

advocated the canal and participated in meetings held to get it under way, t in the meantime sought to solve the fencing problem by enclosing several fields with a wide, deep ditch, the spoil from which was banked outside and crowned with either a thick cedar hedge or a low post and rail fence. This type of enclosure, he told the readers of the American Farmer, would last at least fifty years, in addition to which "nobody burns it--nobody steals it, and if any part should fall down, it will remain where it falls, till put up again."[50]

Because of the labor involved, this method of fencing was practicable only in special instances, for example, in enclosing the "ash pocosin" at Arlington, a stretch of marshy land bordering the Potomac, for which Custis hired Irish laborers--perhaps as an experiment to see how free labor compared in cost and efficiency with slave. The Irishmen first dug a ditch about the area to be enclosed, using the earth from it to build a low .ck dike along the river, with one flood gate being provided for every hundred acres thus enclosed. Then, when the land dried out, slaves cut down and burnt all the trees within the enclosure, leaving the stumps to rot. That done, a corn crop was planted by inserting seedlings into holes poked in the soil.

The results were spectacular. Composed of decaying vegetable material, instead of the usual mud and rushes, the pocosin was extremely fertile, and the luxuriant corn that grew on it, ten to thirteen feet tall, became the wonder of the neighborhood. Custis also experimented with other crops on the reclaimed land. He found that clover and timothy were invariably choked out by weeds; but that when used as a pasture,

[50] Custis was a delegate to the "Grand Union Canal Convention" which met in Washington in 1823 to sponsor a canal up the Potomac, for which, ibid., Nov. 7, 10, 22, 1823. Also Custis to J. S. Skinner, May 6, 5, Am. Farmer, VII (May 6, 1825), 51.

the cattle would keep the weeds down. The dikes, incidentally, proved ideal for pumpkins, turning out bumper crops year after year, until in time muskrats burrowed the dikes to where they could no longer keep out the river and the fields had to be abandoned.[51]

He also tried--and again with no success--to get Georgia planters to experiment in growing Sea Island cotton on Smith's Island; and having returned to his old advocacy of domestic manufactures in a series of letters to the American Farmer, directed the manager of his Pamunkey River plantations to make them as self-supporting as possible--"spinning, weaving, turning leather, & anything & everything, that will save the possibility of buying." As a result, enough cotton was being raised to make close to two thousand yards of cloth the following winter.[52] He also had his White House flocks kept up by judicious breeding in preparation for the day when the reviving woolen industry might make native breeds popular again--as they still were up in the Shenandoah Valley.[53] Wheat and corn were still the principle money crops on the Pamunkey farms, but beef cattle and hogs were also important, as was the fishery, which brought in almost $700 each year--at a cost of $150 for a cook, eleven hands and three barrels of whiskey. In addition, varying quantities of tobacco, cotton, timber, brandy and butter from the Pamunkey farms were sold in Richmond, and Arlington was supplied with large amounts of corn,

[51] Ibid. Also "Ferley," in Nat. Intelligencer, May 22, 1857.

[52] Savannah (Ga.) Georgian, May 5, 1825; Custis to J. S. Skinner, May 14, 1825, Am. Farmer, VII (May 27, 1825), 73; and same to William Bromley, May 25, 1824, Custis & Lee MSS, L. M. N. M. Also Bromley to Custis, Return for last qtr. of 1824, Custis MSS, Va. His. Soc.

[53] For Custis' renewed interest in sheep breeding, see his letter to J. S. Skinner, June 17, 1825, in Am. Farmer, VII (June 24, 1825), 108. For the continued popularity of the Arlington Improved, see R. K. Meade, "Address to the Farmers of Virginia," in Nat. Intelligencer, Nov. 16, 1829; also Carman, et. al., op. cit., 66, 456.

pork, lard, turkeys, cider and apple brandy.[54]

Custis' attitude towards his slaves is apparent in the instructions he sent his White House agent in 1824: "I wish my people well fed, well clothed, treated fairly, & made to do their duty...," he wrote--words that would be echoed by his son-in-law years later. Mrs. Custis' interests in the welfare of the slaves on the Pamunkey farms is equally apparent from a stilted letter the agent wrote to Custis: "To Mrs. Custis you will be pleased to say, that no addition had been made to the list of working hands, by adding thereto any of the children since she was here."[55]

Better times may also have enabled Custis to build those interesting structures, the two outbuildings which form a court in the rear of the mansion and the stable, destroyed by fire in 1904, about this time.[56]

Nothing is known of the early history of these buildings except what can be deduced from the structures themselves, though the fact that a new roof was put on the stable in 1851, makes it likely that it was built around 1825, if not earlier.[57] Early photographs of the three structures, made during the Civil War, show a rough resemblance to the mansion in architectural style and construction, all of them being built of plaster-covered brick and decorated with recessed semicircular arches. The stable was built on somewhat the same plan as the house, with a two-story center

[54]John P. Walden to Custis, Nov. 3, 1823; quarterly returns on the estates rendered by same to same, for Mar. and Apr., 1819; Oct.-Dec., 1822; Oct.-Dec., 1826; also returns from fishery for 1821 and 1825; all in Custis MSS, Va. His. Soc.

[55]Custis to William Bromley, May 25, 1824, Custis MSS, Va. His. Soc.; and John P. Walden to Custis, Nov. 3, 1823, Custis MSS, Va. His. Soc.

[56]For the burning of the stable, see Rhodes, op. cit., 6.

[57]Mrs. M. L. Custis to G. W. C. Lee, Oct.; n. d., Nov. n.d., /1851/, Freeman MSS, Va. State Library.

section--(hay loft upstairs, carriages and harness room on the ground level)--and a one-story wing to the east and west, each with twenty stalls. In front, the stable had a miniature portico with four columns, while large doors front and rear and at the end of each wing gave easy access to the building.[58]

The two outbuildings, each rectangular in shape and forty feet in length, were almost as finely finished--at least on the exterior--as the mansion itself. Originally, the north one had two rooms in a basement, one of which was a summer kitchen, but for some reason--perhaps because it was unhealthily damp--this was later filled in.[59] The corresponding building to the south had three rooms: one for the housekeeper and her family, one used first as a smoke house-later as living quarters, and one (nearest the mansion) used as a storeroom for nonperishable provisions. Over each door was an interesting decoration, a narrow rectangular panel in which Custis painted Washington's war horse or an American eagle.[60] That the outbuildings and the stable had stone foundations like those under the service wing of the mansion would indicate that they were probably built about the same time as the latter. A well, conveniently situated between the "kitchen" and the mansion supplied cool, clear water from an early date.[61]

Other outbuildings, built at one time or another, were not located in any definite relationship to the house. Between the mansion and the

[58]Rhodes, op. cit., 6f.

[59]From the earliest sketch of the north outbuilding, made by some member of the Lee family about 1854 and now in the DeButts-Ely MSS, It is clear that the basement had been filled in by this date. Nevertheless, it must have continued in use as a kitchen, for R. E. Lee refers to it as such in an application for insurance, with the Hartford Fire Insurance Company, dated Oct. 17, 1859.

[60]The panel decorations are seen clearly in the photographs made by Mathew Brady in 1862, now in Nat. Archives.

[61]It is shown in the pencil sketch cited in note 69 above, and also in the Brady photograph made in 1862.

stable was a large icehouse; on the edge of the hill north of the vegetable garden was a small building perhaps used to store gardening equipment; and just down the hill was a large barn. On the slopes below the mansion were a number of cabins for the slaves, but most of these were situated in the vicinity of Arlington Springs, near which was also the farm manager's more substantial house.[62]

Mary Custis must have often lingered to watch the construction of some of the buildings described, but like most little girls was probably more interested in her playmates, for though an only child, she seldom lacked companionship. One of her favorites was Jimmy Craik, grandson of Washington's personal physician, who as a schoolboy used to trudge up from Alexandria Friday afternoons to spend his Saturday holiday at Arlington, where he sometimes met two of his classmates, Smith and Robert Lee, and their mother.[63] The Lees and the Custises also met occasionally at Christ Church, in Alexandria, where Robert was learning his catechism from the Reverand Mr. Meade. But more often they met at Ravensworth, for Mrs. Custis' brother, William Fitzhugh, had assumed a greater measure of responsibility for the Lee's welfare since the death of "Light Horse Harry" in 1818. Of all her playmates, Robert is said to have been Mary's

[62] Their location is shown on "Maps of Washington and Its Environs," War. Dept., Chief of Engineers, c. 1866 (F99, Sheet #5), Nat. Archives.

[63] Mary Craik Morris, "Boyhood Memories of Dr. James Craik, D. D., LL.D.," in Va. Mag. of His. & Bio., XLVI (Apr., 1938), 139. Mrs. Ann P. Lee to Charles Carter Lee, May 8, 1816, printed in Ethel N. Armes, Stratford Hall (Richmond, Va.: Garrett & Massie, 1936), 355, is the earliest contemporary evidence that the Lee boys were familiar with Arlington, and, inferentially, that their mother was also.

favorite.[64]

Mary's parents, too, were fond of Robert, and in later years he would often recall the affection they bestowed on him as a boy.[65] His brother Carter was also a favorite, especially with Mrs. Custis in whose honor he wrote a little poem in 1825, enclosed with a moss rosebush for her flower garden:

> Cast not away the shrub I give thee
> Although it now degenerate seem;
> For cherished by thy care, believe me
> 'Twill flourish in the vernal beam.
>
> .....
>
> O Then the moss-encircled roses
> Shall glitter in the mornings' sun
> Or lovelier glow when bright reposes,
> It's evening's beam on Arlington.

No gift could have been more acceptable to Mrs. Custis, who loved flowers, particularly roses. Thanking Carter for his gift, she wrote with characteristic kindness and simplicity:

> My Dear Cousin,
> I received the moss Rose this morning from the faithful hands of Nat and could not but regret in reading the lines which accompanied it that I had not found favor with the muses--you must however accept my thanks in veritable prose and believe me I value the gift doubly as a token of the good will of the donor. [66]

[64]Freeman, Lee, I, 37ff; John Esten Cooke, Robert E. Lee (New York: G. W. Dillingham Co., 1871), 18. According to Mrs. Sally Nelson Robbins in R. A. Brock, ed., General Robert Edward Lee (Richmond, Va.: B. F. Johnson Pub. Co., 1897), 323, some of the trees near the mansion were planted by Mary and Robert when they were children, as statement confirmed to some extent by a letter Mrs. Lee wrote shortly before her death in 1873 (quoted in part in MacDonald, op. cit., 296) in which she refers to trees "planted on the lawn by the Genl. & myself."

[65]For example, see R. E. Lee to Martha C. Williams, Jan. 2, 1854, quoted in Avery Craven, ed. "To Markie," The Letters of Robert E. Lee to Martha Custis Williams (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934), 59.

[66]Charles Carter Lee to Mrs. M. L. Custis, March, n. d., 1825; and Mrs. M. L. Custis to C. C. Lee, Mar. 17, 1825; both in Lee Family Papers, L. C.

Others besides the Lee boys remarked how Mary was turning into a fine young lady as she grew older. About the time Carter Lee wrote his poem, a gentleman from out of town noticed her as she sat with her mother in the Supreme Court listening to a case involving a confiscated slave ship. Attracted by her "placid and winning face," he noted that she appeared to be about sixteen, and as he recalled later: "She was richly but plainly attired, as was her mother, and there was a modest and reserved dignity about both of them that significantly bespoke their rank and bringing up. Miss Custis was described to me by those who knew her best as a young lady of sound and vigorous intellect, in which judgment and discrimination decidedly predominated.

Thirty-eight years were to pass before he would see her again, in beseiged Richmond--and then she would be a pale, thin, almost-old woman hobbling about on crutches.[67]

[67]Henry S. Foote, Casket of Reminiscences (Washington, D. C., Chronicle Pub. Co., 1874), 15.

CHAPTER VII

AN IMPORTANT VISIT, AND ITS RESULTS

An event which occurred late in 1824 and stirred Custis deeply was to profoundly influence his life by giving it a sharper focus and clearer purpose.

This was the return of the aged Marquis de Lafayette to America, the nation he had helped to establish as a youth. Cities and towns everywhere sought to out-do each other in the ebullience of their welcome, and from the moment he stepped ashore until he sailed home not quite a year later, the old hero's tour was a triumphal progress marked by giant celebrations, parades, thunderous salutes--in fact, every kind of acclaim that ingenuity and extravagance could suggest.

To Custis, who shared the general excitement, it seemed almost as if the great days of his own youth had been revived. To him, as to almost everyone, the Marquis embodied the spirit of the American Revolution and evoked a host of memories of its heroes, especially Washington. Through the years, he and his sister Nelly had kept in touch with the General and his family, and so were understandably anxious to see him once again.

Therefore, it could be expected that Washington Custis would be present when Lafayette arrived in Baltimore, early in October, and was publicly greeted by city officials under the Washington war tents, erected at Fort McHenry for the occasion. He was also one of the official party which greeted Lafayette a few days later at the edge of the District of

Columbia, and escorted him to the Capitol, where the Washington tents had again been set up, this time under the Rotunda, for his reception by the Mayor of Washington.[1]

The distinguished visitor was beset by a flood of invitations, public and private, which made Custis feel the more honored when Lafayette chose to spend an entire evening at Arlington House, October 15th.[2] Presumably he was pressed to stay over-night, but elaborate plans having been made to escort him to Alexandria the following day, the Marquis thought it advisable to return to his hotel in the city.

Next morning, a colorful procession of marines and militiamen escorted the old hero across the Potomac Bridge to the Virginia shore where more militia and the town officials of Alexandria awaited him. The day was sunny, yet cool; and rain which had fallen during the night had laid the dust which usually plagued travellers. Cannon spaced at intervals along the turnpike saluted him as the procession moved towards Alexandria, where every street and house along the parade route had been decorated.

Custis rode with Lafayette's son in the coach directly behind that of the Marquis, while next in line came a cart, decorated with oak branches and laurel, carrying the Washington tents. Nothing had been overlooked in the planning. To everyone's delight, the live eagle perched on the triple arch over Washington Street rose and spread its wings as Lafayette's carriage passed under it. It was a day to be long remembered and Custis' heart was in the toast he gave at the public

[1] Nat. Intelligencer, Oct. 12, 14, 1824; Alexandria Gazette, Oct. 16, 1824; also Levasseur, op. cit., I, 162ff.

[2] Nat. Intelligencer, Oct. 16, 1824. There is a tradition that Custis pitched the Washington tents on the lawn in front of the mansion in honor of the occasion, but there is no contemporary evidence to support the story, given in MacDonald, op. cit., 22.

dinner which climaxed the program: "An holy alliance: Virginia, Liberty and Lafayette!"[3]

The following morning Custis and a large crowd of notables accompanied the Marquis on his trip down the river to Yorktown, where the anniversary of the closing victory of the Revolution was to be celebrated. At Mount Vernon, their steamer hove to while Lafayette went sshore for a brief visit. There he was greeted by Lawrence Lewis--Judge Washington being away--who showed him about the mansion and then took him to the modest tomb of his former commander. The door to the vault had been opened so that the Marquis could see the coffin, and while a national salute was fired by the guns of Fort Washington, across the river, Custis presented him with a gold ring enclosing a lock of Washington's hair, also a Masonic sash and a medal once worn by Washington. The old Frenchman's eyes were filled with tears as he accepted the gifts and embraced the donor.[4]

As one of Lafayette's "family suite," Custis participated in the three-day celebration at Yorktown, the climax of which was a great dinner held in the Washington tents, erected on the exact spot they had occupied at the time of the surrender, in 1781.[5]

In December, the Marquis returned to Washington after a lenghty visit at Woodlawn, where Mrs. Lewis got his promise to keep a lock of his scanty white hair uncut during his stay in America and give it to her and her brother upon his departure--a promise which he faithfully kept.[6] Passing through Alexandria, he stopped to pay his respects to the widow of his old comrade-in-arms, "Light Horse Harry" Lee, where

[3] Alexandria Gaz., Oct. 19, 1824; Nat. Intelligencer, Oct. 20, 1824.
[4] Niles' Register (Baltimore, Md.), Nov. 6, 1824; also Custis, Recollections, 591-594.
[5] Nat. Intelligencer, Oct. 14, 1824.
[6] Alexandria Gaz., Oct. 13, 1825.

presumably he met Robert. Then he went on to Arlington, and from there to Washington City.[7]

Lafayette was again at Arlington early in January, 1825, when Custis may have presented him with Washington's old umbrella and a cup and saucer of Mrs. Washington's famed "States" china. Years later, Custis would recall how Lafayette had termed the view from the portico the finest in the world, and while standing there had told Mrs. Custis: "Cherish these forest trees around your mansion. Recollect, my dear, how much easier it is to cut a tree down than to make one grow."[8]

One may be sure that the principal topic of conversation during these visits and those Custis paid Lafayette in return, in the city, was the glorious days of the American Revolution and Washington's Presidential years. Skillfully, Custis drew out the aged Frenchman with leading comments or direct questions, and was rewarded by a wealth of reminiscences of men and events of the Revolutionary days, of Washington's mother and his wife, and of himself as a little boy at Mount Vernon. He took no notes while Lafayette was speaking, but wrote down every word he could remember as soon as he reached home.[9] Early in 1825, when the

[7] Ibid., Dec. 16, 1824. Benjamin Hallowell, in his Autobiography (Philadelphia: Friend's Book Association, 1883), 100, is in error in stating that Lafayette stopped to see Mrs. Lee at the time of his official visit to Alexandria in October; no such visit is mentioned in any contemporary account; probably he confused it with the later one. There is also no evidence for the traditional story that Lafayette stayed overnight at Arlington, then or later.

[8] For the visit in January, 1825, see G. W. Lafayette to Custis, Jan. 3, 1825, printed in Custis, Recollections, 67n. See ibid., 168f. for the gift of the Washington umbrella; and for the Washington china, The Mount Vernon China (Mount Vernon, Va.: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 1949), 28. Also statement of G. W. P. Custis to Ben: Perley Poore, quoted in PCOre's "Waifs from Washington," Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion, IV (Mar. 19, 1853), 190.

[9] For Custis' not taking notes and relying upon his "truly remarkable memory," see Alexandria Gaz., Oct. 29, 1825.

Marquis was still in the capital, the first of a projected series of twenty "Conversations with Lafayette," written by Custis, appeared in the Alexandria Gazette.

Judging from the increasing prominence and space given later installments, the "Conversations" must have proved popular. Most of them dealt with great events of the Revolution--battles such as that of Brandywine, where Lafayette was wounded; Monmouth and Yorktown; and with the great figures of the war--Hamilton, Jefferson, Laurens, and above all Washington. However, in one entitled "The Prisoner of Olmutz," Lafayette told of his arrest and imprisonment by Napoleon, and his final release; and in another, Custis related the reminiscences exchanged by the Marquis and an aged veteran of the Revolution who broke in on his dinner.[10] They also touched on more recent events, such as the war for Greek Independence, in which he would have fought, Lafayette told Custis, if he had been only a little younger.[11]

Two of the most interesting interviews were on the subject of slavery. "Cayenne" told of the Marquis' experience with a colony of free Negroes he had established on an estate in the West Indies some years before, when he had freed all his slaves who would consent to settle there. According to Lafayette, the colony had failed only because he lacked the means to make it self-sufficient; he felt certain that similar colonies established by societies with greater means were bound to succeed--which gave Custis the opportunity to discuss slavery at some length and the history, and objections of the American Colonization Society.[12] In another, entitled "Slavery-Colonization," Custis quoted

[10] No. XV, in ibid., Oct. 13, 1825; and No. VI, "The Veteran of Ninety-Six," ibid., Feb. 15, 1825.

[11] No. XIII, "The Campaign of 1781," ibid., Sept. 22, 1825.

[12] No. XI, in ibid., May 12, 1825.

the Marquis to the effect that slavery was a barbarous institution on the decline everywhere except in the United States, where it was becoming ever more firmly entrenched in seeming contradiction to the world-wide movement towards universal freedom. For this reason, he said, he wanted Custis to keep him informed of the progress of the Colonization Society.[13]

In this article Custis also set forth a plan for the "gradual emancipation" of his own slaves, one which he thought would be fair alike to master and slave. In brief, he proposed to free all his slaves in sixteen years on the condition that they devote one day each week to working out their value to him and settle, when freed, in Liberia, the African colony recently established by the Colonization Society. There was some danger, he admitted, that the natural increase of the slaves during the stipulated period might cause their number to remain the same, in which case he would have to "bargain with himself and his conscience" and free them all.[14]

According to Custis, Lafayette thought the plan worth trying, but was inclined to believe it impractical. Apparently, he was right, for Custis never put it into effect, perhaps because his slaves objected to having to emigrate to get their freedom. Levasseur, Lafayette's secretary, was probably expressing the views of his master when he wrote in his diary:

> If Mr. Custis, instead of the great number of indolent slaves, who devour his produce, and leave his roads in a bad condition, would employ a dozen free labourers, I am sure that he would soon triple his revenues, and have one of the most delightful properties, not only of the District of Columbia, but of all Virginia. 15

[13] No. XVII, ibid., Oct. 29, 1825.

[14] Ibid., and Lafayette to Custis, July 7, 1826, printed in Nat. Intelligencer, Nov. 28, 1826.

[15] Lavasseur, op. cit., II, 12.

During the months when Lafayette was touring the rest of the nation, Custis occasionally relayed to the newspapers such interesting items as the younger Lafayette's account of the sinking of their steamboat near Louisville, Kentucky.[16] The excitement which marked his progress affected Custis deeply, strengthening impressions made upon him in his early years and renewing his pride in his country. From this time on, he was to find his deepest emotional satisfaction in expressing, by all the means he could command, the love and admiration he felt for his country, its history, and its institutions.

That summer, he held a Fourth of July celebration at Arlington, inaugurating an event that was to be as well known as the once-famous sheep shearings. As before, the old Washington tents were pitched by the spring and a large number of guests had dinner at a long table in their shade, after which Custis spoke on the struggle for freedom going on throughout the world. Naturally he had much to say about Lafayette and Simon Bolivar, the liberator of South America, but most of his speech was concerned with the independence of Ireland, a cause then arousing considerable sympathy in America. Eloquently he paid tribute to the Irish heroes of the American Revolution; vehemently he urged that the Irish achieve national independence. The impulse to freedom was universal, he told his audience: "The mark of liberty is beyond all human ken. 'Tis the mark of the mind! What barrier can resist its great force! What alliance of power can long impede its progress!"[17]

He also opened Arlington Spring to the general public for family picnics and outings by all kinds of organized groups--patriotic societies,

[16] G. W. Lafayette to Custis, May 12, 1825, printed in Nat. Intelligencer, May 26, 1825.

[17] Ibid., July 21, 1825.

Sunday schools, militia companies. The natural beauty of the spot and Custis' activity in seeing that everyone was made welcome soon made it one of the chief attractions of the city. "You will find the spring a comfortable place...," he wrote to a friend in Washington City, that summer. "Come over to the shades of Arlington, where peace and pleasurable breezes, good air, good water, and a tolerably good fellow will make you welcome"--a formula that would appeal to thousands of visitors for the next thirty years.[18]

In August, when Lafayette returned to Washington to board the U. S. S. Brandywine for his return to France, Custis participated in the round of ceremonies and dinners that preceded his departure, including a birthday breakfast given by President Adams at the White House. He was also present at a little ceremony in which Lafayette, acting for him, gave the Columbian minister two heirlooms from Arlington, to send to Simon Bolivar--one, a solid gold medal presented to Martha Washington by the town of Williamsburg, the other, a miniature of Washington made by Field from Gilbert Stuart's famous portrait of Washington.[19]

Custis accompanied the Marquis on the small steamer which took him down the river to where the Brandywine, awaited him. In an article he wrote for a local newspaper, he described the touching scene at Mount Vernon where the General, after acknowledging the salute fired from Fort Washington, stopped to see the tomb of Washington for the last time. He also related how the sun burst through the clouds the next morning, making a rainbow arch from shore to shore, under which sailed the

[18] Custis to W. W. Seaton, July 15, 1825, printed in Josephine Seaton, William Winston Seaton (Boston: J. R. Osgood & Co., 1871), 178f.

[19] Charles F. Adams, ed., Memoirs of John Quincy Adams (12 vols. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippencott & Co., 1877), VII, 48. For the gifts, see N. Intelligencer, July 4, Sept. 3, 1825; and Levasseur, op. cit., II, 247.

Brandywine, bound for France. It was as if nature had heeded the toast Custis had given that morning at breakfast: "The Brandywine...May the winds of Heaven not visit her course too roughly, but with kindest breath swell the bosom of her sails..."[20]



At the time this event occurred, young Robert E. Lee, was in the third month at West Point. One of his brothers, Carter, had gone to Harvard, but because his mother's means were limited, another brother, Smith, had entered the Navy. It was probably for this reason, too, that the family sought an appointment to the Military Academy for Robert, whose mathematical ability made a military career seem logical.[21]

Just how it was obtained from Secretary of War John C. Calhoun has never been determined. William H. Fitzhugh wrote a letter of introduction to the Secretary; Congressman Charles Fenton Mercer, long a friend of the Lee family, wrote a letter of recommendation signed by five senators and two other representatives, as did Carter Lee and his half-brother, Henry, who thought Robert was entitled to preference because of his father's military service. There is also a tradition that Mrs. Lawrence Lewis introduced Robert to General Jackson in Washington, and that he was so impressed by the prospective candidate that he used his influence to get the appointment for him.[22] Custis, too, may have helped enlist Jackson's support, for he had kept up his acquaintance with the hero of New Orleans and only a few months before had presented him with a pocket telescope

[20] Ibid., Sept. 10, 1825.
[21] Freeman, Lee, I, 37f.
[22] Ibid., I, 40-44. Also A. L. Long, Memoirs of Robert E. Lee (New York, Philadelphia & Washington: J. M. Stoddard & Co., 1887), 28.

used by Washington in the Revolution.[23] In any case, the coveted appointment was won, and in June Robert set out for the Military Academy--his feet on the road that would eventually take him to military renown and a fame transcending the humiliation of Appomattox.

Cadet Lee was half way through his first year at West Point, far removed from the thorny problem of slavery, when Custis expressed his views on the subject to the Colonization Society at its annual meeting in Washington, in January, 1826. He supported the society, Custis said, because "it interferes, in no way whatever, with the rights of property, at the same time it permits its members, and myself among the rest, a right of opinion." Slavery, he said, was "the mightiest serpent that ever infested the world," contrasting the rapidly growing western territories with the thinly populated South. Two hundred years of slavery, he declared, had not accomplished as much in the South as had one generation of free [24] in the West.

That the time was ripe for such a project is shown by the enthusiastic response given Custis' "Recollections of Washington," the first of which appeared about this time. Six years before, the publication of an oration he had delivered to the Washington Society of Alexandria, together with "copious notes detailing very interesting incidents of the revolution," had received scant attention; likewise, an article, entitled "Recollections of Washington," he had written for the Alexandria Gazette, a year later.[25]

Stimulated by the success of the Lafayette "Conversations," Custis apparently decided to drop them and return to his "Recollections of

[23] Nat. Intelligencer, Jan. 5, 1824; Niles' Weekly Register (Baltimore, Md.), Jan. 10, 1824.

[24] The Georgetown (D. C.) Metropolis, Jan. 12, 1826.

[25] The oration was printed in the Alexandria Gaz., Feb. 28, 1820, and appeared in pamphlet form (Alexandria, Va.: Davis; 1820), the following month; Nov. 8, 1821.

Washington," with the encouragement of Lafayette himself, who promised him more reminiscences and access to his papers whenever he could get to La Grange. John F. Watson, a Philadelphia historian, also was partly responsible for the change, his suggestion being that Custis answer a series of questions about the Washingtons. His answers, he assured Custis, would do more "to develop, as by moral painting, the individual character of General and Mrs. Washington, as they appeared in domestic and every-day life, than all that had ever been published.[26]

By way of introduction, Custis stated that he intended to write an account of the domestic life of the Washingtons, hitherto neglected by conventional historians, using as sources his own memories and what he had learned from some of Washington's friends--Lawrence and Robin Washington of Chotank, who had known Washington as a boy; Bishop, the General's English servant, and Dr. James Craik, who had known the General for many years. It was a large undertaking, Custis explained to his friend Watson, but:

> Altho my avocations in agriculture, & my generally active & out of doors habits, fit me but little for labours which require literary leisure, yet I shall spare no labour or pains in endeavoring to effect an object most dear to my heart, & which I hope will not be unacceptable to my Country. 27

The first of the "Recollections," appeared in the Alexandria Gazette, in May, 1826, and was entitled "The Indian Prophecy," This was an incident Dr. Craik, who had witnessed it, had related to Custis. According to Craik, Washington had encountered an old Indian chief

[26]Custis apparently cut the Lafayette series from the twenty projected to sixteen. Lafayette to Custis, July 7, 1826, printed in Nat. Intelligencer, Nov. 28, 1826. Watson's letter is quoted, in part, in Custis, Recollections, 120.

[27]"Extract from the Author's Preface," reprinted in Nat. Intelligencer, May 27, 1826, and incorporated with additions in Custis, Recollections, 121-124; and Custis to Watson May 23, 1826, Soc. Coll., His. Soc. of Pa.

while travelling in western Virginia in 1770, and in talking to him had learned that the old warrior had fought with the French at the Battle of Turtle Creek, fifteen years before, where he had ordered his men repeatedly to fire at the conspicious young officer in the uniform of the Virginia militia. But to their amazement he had remained unharmed, convincing them that the Great Spirit was preserving his life for some great purpose. Now he wished to prophesy, said the old chief, that Washington would never die in battle, and one day would be the founder, and chief of a mighty empire.[28]

This was one of Custis' favorite stories, often retold, and seems to have been accepted by most historians of the period, including Jared Sparks and George Bancroft.[29] In "The Field of Braddock," published a few days later, Custis described the battle in detail, telling how English and Virginian doctors had of necessity used Indian poultices to dress the wounds of those who survived the defeat.[30]

Watson may have helped to get some of the "Recollections" published in the newspapers of his city. One which made its first appearance there was entitled "The Mother of Washington." Citing Lawrence Washington, Custis described her simplicity, natural dignity, and the authority with which she ruled her strong-willed son. His account of the mother's plain way of life in her later years, he got from Lafayette and Fielding Lewis. "Having only seen her with infant eyes," he could add nothing himself. Though laudatory, the long article did throw light on an important

[28] May 8, 1826. It was reprinted from the U. S. Gazette (Philadelphia, Pa.)

[29] Respectively, The Writings of Washington (12 vols. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1855), II, 475f; and History of the United States (10 vols. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1854-75), IV, 190.

[30] Alexandria Gaz., May 15, 1826. Craik's obituary, ibid., Feb. 10, 814, mentions "the Indian Prophecy" and states that Craik was the surgeon who dressed Braddock's wounds.

influence in Washington's life, and was for many years almost the only source concerning it.[31]

In "His Portrait," Custis described the several pictures of Washington at Arlington House and the General's appearance and physique. Most portraits of the General, he said, made him appear too bulky, instead of tall and lean. Describing Washington's physical prowess as a horseman and athlete, he told how the General had once thrown a piece of slate the size and shape of a silver dollar across the Rappahannock River below Fredericksburg. In still another chapter, published in June, he described one of Washington's "most valued friends," Robert Morris.[32]

Though discursive and extravagant in style, anecdotal rather than historical in content, the "Recollections" were not only interesting to the general public, but to historians of the period, most of whom used them in their own writings. They were reprinted in newspapers from Boston to Savannah, which may have led Custis to postpone publishing them in final form until after he had been to France and had gone through Lafayette's papers.[33]

Under the circumstances, Custis might have easily become an antiquarian, pre-occupied with the past, and thus avoiding the unpleasantness of the unpredictable present.

[31]The first part of "The Mother of Washington" appeared in the Nat. Gazette (Philadelphia, Pa.), May 13, 1826.

[32]Nat. Intelligencer, Nov. 21, 1826; and National Gazette (Philadelphia, Pa.), June 29, 1826.

[33]For example, Savannah (Ga,) Georgian, June 12, 1826; and Columbian Centinel (Boston, Mass.), reprinted in U.S.Gazette (Philadelphia, Pa.), Dec. 5, 1826. For his original intention to publish, see Custis to J. F. Watson, May 25, 1826, Soc. Coll., His. Soc. of Pa; and for deciding not to, see same to Jared Sparks, June 10, 1827, Sparks MSS, Harvard U.

Instead, he tried to adapt the principles he had acquired in his youth to the contemporary scene. The belief in human freedom, for example, made him certain that the desire for personal liberty felt by all men must inevitably overthrow despotism everywhere. Having applauded the recent revolutions in South and Central America and the fight for Greek independence, therefore he now took up the cause of political and religious liberty for the oppressed people of Ireland, mindful of the high regard Washington had held for such Catholic Irish leaders in the American Revolution as Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore.[34] In June, 1826, he helped the "Friends of Civil and Religious Liberty" draw up resolutions to be sent to Irish leaders and prominent Englishmen.[35] Speaking with his usual eloquence, at Arlington Spring on the 4th of July, he urged Americans to support the cause of Ireland and send more aid to the embattled Greeks. He was applauded by most of the city's newspapers, but one account of his speech reveals why he was never numbered among the great of his time:

> Mr. G. W. P. Custis...is a gentleman of fine taste and classical attainments of which we should have been better convinced, however, if he had invited us over to Arlington. We merely throw out this hint to let him know, that men are esteemed nowadays by three things--namely the political weight they can bring to bear, the patronage they have to bestow, the polite invitations, condescending smiles and significant nods which they are pleased to dispense... [36]

In 1827, Washington Custis turned out two more chapters of the "Recollections," one for Washington's Birthday, the other for the 4th

[34]Custis to Rev. Dr. White, June 10, 1855, Georgetown U. Archives.
[35]Nat. Intelligencer, June 23, 1826.
[36]Ibid., July 6, 7, 1826; and The Metropolitan & Georgetown (D. C.) Commercial Gazette, July 8, 1826.

of July. "Washington at Mount Vernon" described the General's personal life--his habits, appearance, what he ate and drank, what he liked and disliked--information of minor historical importance, but useful in showing him as a human being, not a demigod. He also cited instances of the General's kindness to his slaves, told of his interest in agriculture, and described his triumphal progress to New York for his first inauguration. The second article gave the same kind of information regarding Washington's daily life in Philadelphia and New York during the presidential years.[37]

"Tales of the heart," Custis termed his anecdotes. And so they were. Indeed, this was their main failing, for the author's extreme respect for his subject caused him to over-sentimentalize the incidents he recounted. Nevertheless, he did successfully portray his guardian as a living, breathing man. American in style and content, the "Recollections" were part of the contemporary movement, led by Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and William Cullan Bryant, to create a truly national literature.

An interesting phase of the nationalist movement at which Custis now decided to try his hand was the writing of plays on American themes. Hitherto, the drama presented in American theatres was almost entirely English in all its aspects--authorship, actors, costumes and scenery. Custis' friend, David Warden, writing a few years earlier had accurately described the situation in his History of the United States: "With respect to original plays they are very deficient; and, indeed, this species of production cannot be expected to thrive in a country where all branches of authorship lie under great discouragement."[38]

[37]Reprinted in Custis, Recollections, 160-178; 406-432. "The Battle Sword," may also have been published in 1827; for which, see ibid., 160n.

[38]III, 467.

But by now, the situation was changing. Where formerly Philadelphia had been the theatrical capital of America, setting the pattern for the rest of the country, the theatres of New York were rising to pre-eminence as that city grew ever wealthier and more important. With New York managers able to outbid all others for the services of prominent European actors and plays, managers in lesser cities were hard pressed for attractions to fill their houses. And to their surprise, when they experimented with native drama, they found some highly profitable.[39]

Even so, few native dramatists had enough spirit to break with European traditions. Most shared the general prejudice against "home-made" dramas and therefore wrote on conventional lines. The few who did attempt to put American themes on the stage often had to exaggerate the well-known events which they sought to dramatize in order to interest the public, and many subjects had to be altered for dramatic effect. Nevertheless, their efforts are more significant than the better plays of foreign inspiration in that they greatly influenced the growth of American nationalism.[40]

Of the native dramatists, none had more pride in the history of his country and faith in its future than Custis--and none was more eager to express those sentiments. Therefore, it was natural that he, too, should try his hand at writing plays on native subjects. Hence the announcement that appeared in several Philadelphia newspapers in July, 1827--that a new play, "The Indian Prophecy," written by "a member of Gen. Washington's family," would shortly be performed at the Chestnut Street Theatre.

Except for its brevity, the Indian Prophecy, which opened on the night

[39] Arthur Hobson Quinn, A History of the American Drama from the Beginning to the Civil War (New York: Macmillan Co., 1933), 199-203.

[40] Quinn, op. cit., 203; also Margaret C. Mayorga, A Short History of the American Drama (New York: Donald, Mead & Co., 1932), 74f.

of July 4th, had little to commend it. Set in the rugges mountains of western Virginia and alternating between a hunter's hut in the forest and the wigwam camp of Washington's party, the play consisted mainly of conversations between Woodford, a ranger, and his Indian wife, and Marietta, the daughter of the old chieftain, Menawha. Some attempt was made at humor by having a voluble French trader named Duquesne try to persuade Marietta to run away with him to Paris, but otherwise there was little action and almost no plot. Basically, it was merely a device for the expression of nationalistic sentiments, such as the following, spoken by one of Washington's party:

> It may appear romantic in me, now that we are indebted to the mother country for every article..., to predict future independence. But see, my dear Sir, how every where nature points to the future destinie of this great country...The mother country should embrace with arms of parental fondness, the child of promise; for rely upon it, although America is yet but in the infancy of her being, she will hereafter be clothed with a giant's power.

Only one newspaper noticed the play, and its verdict was harsh--"absolutely destitute of plot, incident, character, and stage effect... trash." Still, it could not have been too badly received, or it--and the author--would have been dropped.[41]

Instead, the company from the Chestnut Street Theatre presented it in Washington a few months later, and the play itself was published at Georgetown the following year.[42] More important, its use of the American Indian for a subject seems to have inspired John Augustus Stone to write his Metamora, an instant success which popularized the Indian drama and was followed by many others. Thus Custis was directly responsible for beginning the vogue for Indian plays which lasted until after 1860.[43]

[41] Democratic Press (Philadelphia, Pa.), July 5, 1827.

[42] Nat. Intelligencer, Oct. 5, 6, 1827. The quotation is from the published edition, by James Thomas.

[43] Quinn, Drama, 270f.

The first known burial took place at Arlington on a wintry day the following January, when the body of Mary Randolph, wife of David Meade Randolph and a relative of both the Custises, was brought over from the city and buried at a spot she had earlier selected, on the slope just below the mansion. Said to have had a "charming manner...and a masculine mind," Mrs. Randolph was one of the best cooks in the South, her The Virginia Housewife, having passed through three editions.[44] She is also reported to have been Mary Custis' godmother. According to tradition, her end was hastened by the devoted care she gave a son, David Meade Randolph, Jr., a midshipman in the Navy who died in 1825, some months after falling from aloft on his ship.[45]

A low brick wall, still there, was built about her tomb to keep cattle away, and probably the Custises planted the ivy which still grows upon it.

Two more chapters of the "Recollections" appeared in 1828: "The Last Hours of Washington" and "Henry Lee."[46] The first, published on Washington's Birthday was dignified in tone and marred by few of Custis' customary flourishes, making it one of his best literary productions. That about "Light Horse Harry" Lee is noteworthy only because its subject was

[44]For the quotation, see Harmon Blennerhassett, Oct. 18, 1807, quoted in Norfleet, op. cit., 202. The cookbook was published in three editions in 1824; 1825 (Washington, D. C.: Way & Gideon); and 1839. Its popularity is attested in Lucy Lee Pleasants, Old Virginia Days and Ways, (Menasha, Wis.; Banta Pub. Co., 1916), 34.

[45]Nat. Intelligencer, Oct. 15, 1825, Jan. 24, 1828; also Sun. Morning Chronicle (Washington, D. C.), June 2, 1872.

[46]Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 22, Aug. 8, 1828, respectively.

the father of Custis' future son-in-law. "Light Horse Harry," said Custis, excelled almost all his contemporaries in one important respect: "a surprising quickness of talent, a genius sudden, dazzling and always at command,...an eloquence which seemed to flow unbidden." He recalled that his conversation was "fascinating in the extreme," and thought his faults--principally "his unhappy rage for speculation"--best forgotten, Lee, he said, should always be remembered for his services on the battlefield, his patriotic eloquence, and his History of the War in the Southern Department. Reading this must have pleased Robert Lee, now in his third year at the Military Academy, for it may be assumed that he was sent a copy.

Interest in the past did not blind Custis to contemporary developments. Instead of deploring the rapidity with which an essentially colonial way of life was giving way to a period of material progress along entirely new lines as the result of the introduction of steam navigation, agricultural machinery and railroads, he welcomed the new era as a proof that America was indeed becoming the great nation he had long envisioned. Hence, he shared the general excitement when the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was begun on July 4, 1828, and was inspired to write the first drama to be written on the subject,--The Rail Road.

Written to please the crowd, not the cultivated, The Rail Road was a smash hit from the start. Taking advantage of the vogue for Italian opera, only recently introduced into the country, Custis made his drama an operetta. To please the gallery, the two principal characters were Irishmen--"Mike M'Ilhany," played by Joseph Jefferson and "Thady O'Brien" by Lewis Heyl, a popular American singer. The Baltimore Theatre resounded with whistles and cheers as the latter sang:

> Och, good luck to the trade of the shovel and spade,
> 'Tis the very best trade after all;
> And St. Patrick's brave boys know how to handle those toys,
> In making rail road or canal.

The operetta breathed the spirit of the times, expressing the nation's pride in its mechanical advancement. Washington and his contemporaries exemplified the nation's heroic past; the railroads its future, in that they would knit it together politically as well as physically--all of which was expressed in a song Heyl sang to the tune of "Yankee Doodle:"

There's father and I, and Uncle Hay,
Dick, Bob, and little Andy,
Have come along the great rail way,
And find its just the dandy.
Yankee Doodle, roll along,
The road's not rough or sandy;
On iron rail we bowl along,
And sing Yankee doodle dandy.

.....

And now to Him who first did plan
Our public works so grand'y
The purest, wisest, greatest man,
Who ever blest our land'y.

.....

Yankee doodle, lake and sea
Now join so snug and handy;
And lasting may their union be
As Yankee doodle dandy. 47

Custis was at his blithe, exuberant best in the rollicking "Steam Coach Song":

Of each wonderful plan
E're invented by man,
That which nearest perfection approaches,
Is a road made of iron,
Which horses ne'er tire on;
And travelled by steam, in steam coaches.

And we've no longer gee up and gee ho,
But fiz, fiz, off we go
Nine miles to the hour,
With thirty horse power,

[47] Patriot and Mechantile Advertiser (Baltimore, Md.), Oct. 28, 1828; and Alexandria Gaz., Mar. 28, 1829.

By day time and night time,
Arrive at the right time,
Without rumble or jumble,
Or chance of a tumble,
As in chaise, gig, or whiskey,
When horses are frisky,
Oh! the merry Rail Road for me! Oh! the merry
Rail Road for me!

At the inns on our route
No ostler comes out
To give water to Spanker or Smiler;
But loll'd at our ease
We ask landlord to please
Put a little more water in the boiler. 48

The musical tributes to the heroes of the Revolution included a song in honor of General Nathaniel Greene, based on Lafayette's toast to a Baltimore regiment famous in the Revolution:

General Greene used to say with his soldierly air--
And few soldiers like him did such merits combine,
That for who'd stand cutting, and would cut their full share,
Give him forever the Old Maryland Line.

But above all, the drama relied upon the novelty of the new means of transportation, the last scene being "a distant view of the Rail Road in full operation!"

So enthusiastic was the response to this combination of patriotic novelty and spectacle, the management cancelled the next night's program in order to put the Rail Road on again.[49]

The illness which kept Custis away from the debut of his new play, had kept him at home a fortnight before, when the Friends of Civil and Religious Liberty in Ireland met in Washington. His contribution to the meeting, therefore, was limited to a long poem entitled "An Appeal from

[48] Ibid.

[49] Nat. Intelligencer, Oct. 2, 1828; The Marylander (Baltimore, Md.), Oct. 22, 1828; and Patriot and Mercantile Advertiser (Baltimore, Md.), Oct. 28, 1828.

Ireland to America." This read in part:

> Remember the days when ye struck for your freedom,
> When Erin's brave sons to your standard repaired,
> The first of your friends, and when most ye did need them,
> In your triumphs rejoiced and your ill fortunes shared.
>
> . . . . .
>
> Then remember poor Ireland, and can you deny her?--
> Shall your old friend, your best friend, a suppliant sue?
> She asks not your blood, 'tis your gold now will buy her,
> The invaluable rights her blood once bought for you. 50

"The poetry /is/ probably bad," he admitted, at the next meeting of the association, a month later. "But the sentiments, I trust, will ne endorsed good, and as such pass current with Americans." He hoped that England would wisely heed American public opinion by granting civil and religious liberty to Ireland, he said; otherwise, the Irish would eventually revolt and become independent like America. Freedom, he averred, rested upon toleration:

> I thank God that in the American Republic religion and politics are far asunder; they never should, and I trust they never will, come any nearer together...Where religion and government have been blended together, they have aggrandized the rich at the expense of the poor and trammeled with human laws that beneficent spirit, amenable only to Divine. America has no established church. Here every form of religion is tolerated and stands upon its own basis, and every religionist worships after the manner which the heart shall dictate.....As Americans, we cannot but remember with pride, that in our great struggle for liberty, this holy principle was strictly maintained.../affording/ the rare spectacle of Protestant and Catholic, Jew and Gentile, fighting side by side for the power of self-government and the rights of mankind. 51

He wanted everyone to notice, he said at another meeting, on Washington's Birthday, 1829, that he was not wearing pontifical robes, as reported, but only a plain grey coat, somewhat the worse for wear. No Protestant, he said, should think that the hymns from his church were any more acceptable to God than those of Catholics, for He heard all alike with equal

50 Nat. Intelligencer, Oct. 13, 1828.

51 Ibid., Jan. 27, 1829; U. S. Telegraph (Washington, D.C.), Jan. 15, 1829.

favor, whether they arose from "the marble wonders of Michael Angelo" or from "some rude log tabernacle" in the West. All Americans should be guided by the example of Washington, whose life was a monument to the principle of tolerance, an inspiration to all mankind, even the "dust-trodden serf" of Russia.[52]

A month later, on Saint Patrick's Day, he exchanged his grey coat for one of bright green, and with a shamrock in his hat, marched at the head of the Hibernian Society through the streets of Alexandria to the First Presbyterian Church. That they should meet there, to be addressed by a Protestant, he told the Society, was proof indeed of the harmony and good feeling existing between religious groups in free America.[53]

A few months later, when Parliament removed religious qualifications for holding office, the Freinds of Civil and Religious Liberty disbanded after a "Valedictory Address" by Custis. But the affection and mutual respect which had grown up between him and the local Irish was to persist throughout his lifetime.

About this time, Custis entered upon another period of hard times as the price of staple crops dropped sharply--forty per cent, in some instances. He was also beset by a series of crop failures and poor fisheries. "We must hope for the best," he wrote his White House manager, in 1827. "For my part I have been so long used to misfortune that good news would be truly unexpected & surprising to me."[54] As he explained to

[52] Nat. Intelligencer, Mar. 14, 1829.

[53] Alexandria Gazette, Mar. 25, and June 29, 1829.

[54] For the effect of the depression of 1826 on prices and land values, see Thomas Law, Address to the Columbian Institute (Washington, D. C., Gales & Seaton, 1830), 9f.; and Custis to William Bromley, May 4, 1827, Soc. Coll., His. Soc. of Pa.

Lawrence Lewis, an executor of the Mount Vernon estate to which he still owed a substantial sum: "I can assure you that I have been often in want of a single dollar, & with my large property have no available funds but such as are derived from the produce of my Estates. I need not say how & in what price that produce is at present....My health is not good & my spirits very bad."[55]

To a great extent, his spirits would always be geared to the vagaries of the economic cycle of his section--high when times were good, low when they were not. Struggling to avoid being swamped by debts as were many farmers of his section, he found his only diversion in writing about his beloved country. By coincidence, the same day, January 8, 1829, that William Penn Smith's play about General Jackson--the first of its kind--was put on at Philadelphia to celebrate the anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans, a long poem by Custis, entitled "Gen. Jackson to his Army at the Battle of New Orleans," was published in Duff Green's U. S. Telegraph, the leading Democratic newspaper in Washington. Intended to be sung to "Scot's wha ha' wi' Wallace bled," it went, in part:

> Comrades arouse! the dawning day
> Shews the proud Foe in full array--
> Soon shall we join in battle fray,
> Orleans, his grand emprize.
>
> . . . . .
>
> And should a foe, invade our land,
> Old Hick'ry with a Patriot band,
> Will hope once more to make a stand,
> And strike for victory.

Evidently the poem, or song, was well received for Custis used it in a new drama, The Eighth of January, which was staged in New York a few month

[55] March 27, 1808; Custis Papers, Mt. Vernon. According to the Executor's Account Book, Washington Estate, 1802-1830, photostat copy in Washington Papers, L. C., Custis owed over $700 at this time, he paid it off in 1829.

later. Rewritten as an operetta, it was presented at Washington in 1830. The piece was made up of a number of battle scenes, full of marching and bellicose oratory--poor drama, but an interesting expression of contemporary political and nationalistic sentiments.[56] Custis had long admired the crusty, old hero of New Orleans, and the new drama served to renew their acquaintance. The new President, and his portege, Martin Van Buren, occasionally visited Arlington House, and Custis sometimes accompanied them on vacation trips down the Potomac.[57]

Shortly after Jackson was inaugurated, the Rail Road was staged in Washington and Alexandria by a Philadelphia company, its title being tactfully changed to the Rail Road and Canal because of local interest in the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal then under construction up the Potomac. According to a Washington newspaper, the operetta was "rapturously received," so its author must be pardoned for any complaisance he may have expressed in a letter to Lafayette at this time--to which Lafayette referred in one to Mrs. Lawrence Lewis: "I have Received a letter from your Brother, who I see has produced two very Good plays...Remember me most friendly to Him, and the Arlington family."[58]

During the summer, Custis wrote another long poem, in honor of Robert Emmett, the Irish patriot, and a few weeks later one of the best of the "Recollections," "Washington the Sportsman," appeared in a new publication, The American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine.[59] In the

[56] Nat. Intelligencer, Jan. 8, 1831; Alexandria Gazette, Apr. 2, 9, 1831.

[57] For which see Custis' toast to Jackson at a public dinner in Washington, July 4, 1824; and was on the committee for a public dinner tendered Jackson in 1827; for which, see Nat. Intelligencer, July 7, 1824, and Dec. 21, 1826. For the visits, see John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., "The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren," in Annual Report of the Am. His. Assoc., 1916, 618; also Bassett, op. cit., VI, 175, 179.

[58] Nat. Journal (Washington, D. C.), Mar. 20, 21, 23, 1829; Alexandria Gaz., Apr. 3, 1829. The letter is dated Jan. 11, 1828; Lewis Family Papers, Mt. Vernon, Va.

[59] For the poem, see Nat. Intelligencer, Aug. 13, 1829; for the "Recollections," ibid., Sept. 28, 1829.

latter, he told of Washington's love of hunting, described his costume--blue coat, scarlet waistcoat, buckskin breeches, top boots, velvet cap and whip--and recalled the leader of a pack of stag hounds given the General by Lafayette, Vulcan, upon whose back he had ridden as a little boy. Vulcan's most famous exploit, he recalled, took place not in the chase, but in the kitchen at Mount Vernon, when he made off with a great ham, hot out of the oven, while a number of guests waited for it in the dining room in vain--much to Mrs. Washington's indignation and the General's amusement.

During the summer, Arlington Spring was put to a somewhat different use when a militia company, the Washington Guards, spent a day there drilling, skirmishing in the fields and shooting at a target, after which they had dinner--a custom it and several other companies carried on for many years. In presenting a silver cup to the best marksman, Custis set forth some thoughts on national defense--views far in advance of his times. He reasoned that a country growing as rapidly as America must inevitably find itself at war with rival nations sooner or later. Modern wars, he said, could only be won by having a large army composed of well-trained men. Therefore, instead of relying as in the past upon individual patriotism to provide militia companies in an emergency, he recommended that there be adopted "a wholesome and effective system, whereby the young men shall be embodied at convenient seasons and undergo a training and discipline which will fit them for camp and field: and after a limited tour of service in each year, for, say ten years, thereafter be exempt from all military duties, except...in case of invasion." In other words, he was advocating universal military training for all

able-bodied citizens.[60]

It would be interesting to know whether his views on this matter had any connection with the fact that Robert E. Lee had just recently graduated from the Military Academy, for almost certainly the handsome young officer must have visited Arlington on his return home after graduation. Mary Custis was now of marriageable age and many suitors are said to have come over to Arlington at one time or another to seek her hand--to all of whom she gave the same answer that she is said to have given Sam houston of Tennessee--she was interested in no one but Robert Lee. This bears out the tradition that Mary first began to fall in love with Robert when he came home, three years before, on his first furlough from the Military Academy.[61]

Having graduated second in his class, Lieutenant Lee was about to enter that summer on what promised to be a brilliant military career when, to his sorrow, his mother, who had long been ailing, died on July 10 and was buried at Ravensworth. Mrs. Custis particularly must have been a great comfort to him at this trying time, and it may be assumed that he was often at Arlington during the weeks he spent settling his mother's small estate.[62]

Finally, the time came in October for him to set out for Cockspur Island, a desolate marsh at the mouth of the Savannah River, where he was to assist Major Samuel Babcock in building a fort to protect the city a

[60] Ibid., Oct. 16, 1829.

[61] For Robert E. Lee's attentions to Mary Custis, see Marietta Fauntleroy Turner Powell, "Personal Recollections of General Robert E. Lee," in Marietta M. Andrews, Scraps of Paper (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1929), 198f., cited hereafter as Andrews, Scraps. For Sam Houston, see Marquis James, The Raven, A Biography of Sam Houston (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1929), 55f. Also, Fitzhugh Lee, General Lee (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1894), 25.

[62] Ann Lee's remains were later removed to Lexington, Va., to a vault near that of her son. Henry Lee's bones were moved there from Cumberland Island in 1913. Freeman, Lee, I, 87. See also Ann Lee's obituary in Nat. Intelligencer, July 29, 1829.

few miles upriver. With him, he took his mother's coachman, Nat, hoping that a change of climate would benefit the ailing old man. With him, too, he carried the memory of Mary Custis' bright eyes and ready smile--and perhaps her promise to write to him.[63]

[63]Freeman, Lee, I, 94. For Nat, who was left to Lees sister Mildred by her mother's will, and his death at Cockspur Island, see Emily V. Mason, Popular Life of General Robert E. Lee (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1897), 53.

CHAPTER VIII

A SUCCESSFUL PLAY AND A WEDDING

"There are many fine villas about Washington," wrote a Scotsman who visited the national capital in 1830. "The handsomest in the neighborhood is Arlington House, the seat of Mr. Custis..."[1]

But a handsome house was not always a healthful one, Custis could attest. Ill health, he explained to Jared Sparks, had prevented him from getting the "Recollections" in shape for publication as a book. Now that he was somewhat better, the work was progressing, and were it not for the hard times, he would be off for France to interview Lafayette, from whom he had gathered "a monstrous store of historical information" at the time of his visit to America.[2]

Sparks had recently been at Arlington seeking information for the Life of Washington upon which he was then engaged. Sparks had interviewed Caroline Branham, who as personal maid to Martha Washington, was present when John Parke Custis died at Eltham. Promised her grandson's freedom if she gave a good account of the death scene, "Nurse" carried out her end of the bargain so well, her master had to go through with his promise.[3]

Custis was working on two Indian plays at this time. One, The

[1]James Stuart, Three Years in North America (2 vols. Edinburgh, Scotland: R. Cadell, 1835), II, 90.

[2]Custis to Jared Sparks, June 10, 1827; Oct. 18, 1829; Sparks MSS, Harvard U.

[3]Mary G. Powell, The History of Old Alexandria, Virginia (Richmond, Va.: William Byrd Press, Inc., 1928), 244. The grandson was named Robert Robinson.

Pawnee Chief, he wrote some time before 1830. His least successful effort, it seems to have been staged only once, at Washington, in 1832.[4] The other, Pocahontas, or The Settlers of Virginia, was to be his best and most popular play.

In order to prepare the elaborate settings required, the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia was closed the week before the initial performance of Pocahontas, January 16, 1830. Public response justified the time and money spent on its preparation, for it was an immediate hit and was put on eleven times by the same company.[5]

Though the Pocahontas legend had been staged before, Custis was the first dramatist to have the courage to take the rescue of Smith out of its chronology and use it for the climax. As a result, his drama was one of the best of the forty-odd Indian plays produced in the next two decades.[6] Equally novel was the sympathy with which Custis depicted the ills inflicted on the Indians by the white man and his characterization of Pocahontas as a mature woman, rather than the childish heroine of Barker's earlier drama, The Indian Princess. Showy spectacles being the rage at this time, Custis' play had many exotic scenes and much pagentry to please the crowd. But more significant were the evidences, found throughout the play, of the author's love for his native state and country and his affection for the mother-country, England. Thus, he has Barclay, a renegade Englishman, whom Matacoran, an Indian chief, wishes

[4]The Pawnee Chief is listed on the title page of the published edition of Pocahontas (Philadelphia: C. Alexander, 1930), from which the passages quoted are also taken. See also, Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 22, 1832.

[5]Charles Durang, "Annals of the Philadelphia Stage," in Sunday Dispatch (Philadelphia, Pa.), June 21, 1857; and American Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia, Pa.), Jan. 16, 1830

[6]Mayorga, op. cit., 83; Quinn, op. cit., 272f. See also A. H. Quinn, Representative American Plays from 1767 to the Present Day (5th ed. New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1938), 167-169, 273ff., cited hereafter as Quinn, American Plays.

to retain in his service, say:

> ...but all his /Matacoran's/ favours and his Kingdom in the bargain, can never make me forget Old England, the land of my birth and affections, and tho' far distant from her, she is ever present in my sleeping and waking thoughts.

The author's love of the out-doors is also apparent, as when he vividly describes a splendid stag bounding across a meadow, or has Captain Smith speak of "the plaintive notes Virginia night birds sing." And no doubt he was influenced by Sir Walter Scott and the English romanticists when he wrote the scene in which Pocahontas and John Rolfe plight their troth:

> Smith. And now let me place my gold chain, the symbol of the preux chavalier, and which I bequeath'd to this lady at my death, around the neck of her who hath preserv'd my life.
> Percy. And bind two in thy golden shackle, the good and gallant Master Rolfe, and thou will unite the hands of those whose hearts have long since been united.
> Smith. Aha! Master Rolfe, do ye plead guilty to the charge?
> Rolfe. Aye, and glory in the guilt.
> Smith. What sayeth the lady?
> Pocahontas. She will most cheerfully submit to wear the chain which binds her to the honour'd master of her fate, even tho' the chain were of iron instead of gold.

His sympathy for the red man is revealed in the same scene, when Chief Matacoran, implacable foe of the white man, tells Captain Smith:

> Hear me, chief, know that Matacoran scorns thy friendship and hates all thy kind. The fortune of war is on thy side; thy gods are as much greater as the gods of the Indians, as their arms are greater than his. But altho' thy gods and thine arms have prevail'd, say did not Matacoran fight bravely in the last of his country's battles? And when his comrades fled, singly did he face the thunders of his foe. Now that he can no longer combat the invaders he will retire before them, even to where tradition says, there rolls a western wave.

And in Powhatan's speech at the end of the play, Custis voiced his pride in America: pleading for a distinctive national literature:

> Now it only remains for us to say, that looking thro' the vista of futurity, to the time when these wild regions shall become the ancient and honor'd part of a great and glorious American Empire, may we hope that when the tales of early days are told

> from the nursery, the library, or the stage, that kindly will be received the national story of POCAHONTAS, OR THE SETTLEMENT OF VIRGINIA. [7]

So popular was Custis' new play, and the acting of Edwin Forrest in a similar play, Metamora, produced a short time later, the Indian took over the American stage, a vogue which lasted until about 1855. By disregarding safe and approved foreign standards, Custis had written a drama whose originality and dramatic structure make it one of the very few national plays which bear reproduction today.[8]

"The First President was partial to the amusements of the theatre," said Custis in the next installment of the "Recollections," "The Birthright." In it, he told how the custom of celebrating Washington's birthnight with balls had originated, emphasizing that Washington had always approved and enjoyed such "rational and elegant pleasures of life."[9]

From this, it may be inferred that Custis hoped by citing Washington's example to offset to some extent the disfavor in which many people of his class held the theatre. The Episcopal Church in Virginia, led by Bishop William Meade, was undergoing an almost puritanical reformation, and many Episcopalians considered the theatre highly disreputable and dramatists nothing but idlers. To the extent that liquor was served in most theatres and brawls were common, their criticism was justified, but this attitude was bound to be discouraging to a dramatist in Custis' social position. As he wrote to his wife, some time later, after

[7] Oscar Wegelin, Early American Plays, 1714-1830 (New York: The Dunlap Society, 1900), 26, lists an 1839 edition, also published in Philadelphia.
[8] Ibid., xxvi; Quinn, American Plays, 167f.
[9] Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 22, 1830.

finishing one of his plays: "I have made a great mental effort lately. But I am sure you and the bishop [William Meade] will think my energies might have been better employed."[10]

Custis respected the good bishop who was often at Arlington, but he loved the larger world of the theatre too much to forgo the pleasure of attending it. Having seen Madame Vestries dance at a local theatre the year before, he told Carter Lee about it. "Her manner of saluting the audience particularly strikes him," the latter wrote, "and he expatiates upon the style with which she elevates her toe higher than her waist and points it deliberately at the spectators."[11]

Such naughtiness delighted Custis, but his own purpose in writing plays was a serious one, to stimulate American nationalism. That he continued to do so, despite the disapproval of his friends, was due largely to the enthusiasm with which works of native origin like his own were being received by the public, in Washington, as well as in more important cities.[12]

His new operetta, The 8th of January, Or, Hurra for the Boys of the West!, was equally well received when it was staged in Washington in March, 1830. Though inferior to Pocahontas, it had a number of exciting scenes, such as one in which "steamboats [are] seen descending the Mississippi, full of troops."[13] These, and the fact that it expressed popular political and national sentiments, made it a favorite, while Andrew Jackson was president.

[10]Sept. 12, 1833, quoted in Custis, Recollections, 59.

[11]Carter Lee to Hill Carter, Mar. 11, 1829, quoted in part in Freeman, Lee, I, 130.

[12]"The theatre here [Washington] is a most miserable looking place," wrote Tyrone Power, noted English actor, about 1834, "...but it was filled nightly with a very delightful audience" for which see his Impressions of America during the Years 1833, 1834, and 1835 (2 vols. London: R. Bentley, 1836), I, 210.

[13]U. S. Telegraph (Washington, D. C.), Mar. 11, 13, 1830.

At this time, too, Custis was re-working the Rail Road for its debut Philadelphia, in May, the chief innovation being a comic character named Fidgett, a nervous traveller. The high point of the performance was reserved for the last scene, when for the first time on any stage a real "locamotive steam carriage" came in view tootling its whistle in time with the orchestra's rendition of the "Carrolltown March," composed for the occasion by a Mr. Clifton of Baltimore. Its appearance was greeted with roars of applause and the audience seems to have heartily agreed with "Thady O'Bralligan," when he sang:

> Och hotheration, what's got in the nation?
> Why the people are mad I declare,
> Now steamboats and stages no longer the rage is,
> Och we shall soon be trav'ling in air.
> With patent balloon, and a mail to the moon,
> We shall do what will make people stare.
> And with flying post-chay, will start every day,
> And see what they're doing up there. [14]

But Custis' jubilation at its success was stilled a few days later when his brother-in-law, William Henry Fitzhugh, fell from his horse and was killed.[15] He like all the family felt the loss deeply, for William Fitzhugh had been much loved for his kindliness and respected for his sound judgment in family matters. Always a strong supporter of the Colonization Society, he had given much of his time in recent years to educating his slaves for their eventual freedom, and in his will, directed that they be freed by 1850 and that those who consented to go to Africa be given their passage and a bonus besides. There were no children, so his estate was to go to his widow, Anna Maria Goldsborough, and after her

[14] Daily Chronicle (Philadelphia, Pa.), May 13, 15, 1830; Durang, "Annals of the Philadelphia Stage," Sunday Dispatch (Philadelphia, Pa.), July 5, 1857. The song from the Alexandria Gaz., Mar. 28, 1829.

[15] The inscription on his tombstone in the family cemetery at Ravensworth, gives the date as May 21, 1830, although his obituary did not appear until Aug. 14, 1830, in the Nat. Intelligencer.

death, to his neice, Mary Custis.[16]

In only one important respect had William Fitzhugh differed with his brother-in-law regarding the program of the Colonization Society: a conservative, he believed that the government lacked the constitutional power to contribute funds to the Society; whereas Custis maintained that without such funds, the colonization plan could not succeed. By now it appeared that Custis was right, that private contributions were inadequate for the task, for to date the society had transported less than fifteen hundred free Negroes to Africa--far less than the natural increase in Virginia along.[17] Therefore, when his resolution advocating government aid was voted down at the annual meeting, in 1830, Custis began to lose interest in the society.[18]

After his death, some of his slaves would recall that he had been "rude to'em in his young days," but indulgent in his later years--a change in attitude which must be attributed not to the mellowness that supposedly comes with age, but to becoming resigned to an apparently hopeless situation.[19] Opposed to outright emancipation, Custis was left without hope when it became apparent that the colonization scheme would not succeed.

With the arrival of summer and its fevers, work on the fort at Cockspur Island was suspended and Lieutenant Lee returned home.

[16]Records of Alexandria Co., D. C. Deed Book S-2, 37f. Also Fox, op. cit., 195.

[17]Ibid., 85.

[18]For the resolution Custis introduced, see Nat. Intelligencer, Jan. 25, 1830. Custis continued to attend the annual meetings until about 1835, for which see ibid., Feb. 2, 1835.

[19]The quotation is from an interview with one of the Arlington slaves published in Harper's Weekly, XXX (May 29, 1886), 347.

With his mother dead, Robert now had no home of his own. Stratford had passed out of possession of the family two years before, and its former owner, Robert's half-brother Henry, had gone abroad to be United States consul to Morocco, leaving behind him a cloud of scandal involving his wife's younger sister which eventually cost him his position and made him an exile in Europe until after his death in 1837. All the Lees were humiliated by the affair, and it may have strengthened Robert's determination to himself lead a blameless life, just as his father's laxness in financial matters had made him careful in money matters.[20]

Returning home, then, to Robert meant visiting friends, preferably those within easy distance of Arlington. For like a good soldier, he had his campaign to capture the hand of Mary Custis planned out in advance, as earlier he had maneuvored her into writing to him:

> Tell Cousin Mary Custis [he had written to his brother Carter, then at Arlington], that if she thinks I am going to stay here after you go away, without hearing any thing of her, or Cousin Molly,...she is very much mistaken. So...she must write to me, & if she does not I'll tell her mother. Of if she will say that I may write to her, she will have to answer me through common politeness. 21

Considering the reputation for promptness in expediting important matters that Lee had already won on his first army assignment, one may be sure that he wasted no more time than necessary before proposing to Mary Custis, once he reached Arlington. Mary and her mother--so goes the tradition--were seated in the hall with Robert one day, listening while he read aloud from one of Sir Walter Scott's novels. Finally, he paused.

"Mary," said Mrs. Custis, "Robert must be tired and hungry; go into the dining-room and get him some lunch."

[20] Freeman, Lee, I, 97f.
[21] May 8, 1830, Wagstaff MSS, U. of Va.

Mary got up, and Robert went with her; and as she stooped to get some fruit cake out of the sideboard, Robert leaned over also; and, slipping his arm around her, asked her to marry him. Then and there he had his answer,[22] one that made his heart light.

"A month from now I must be wending my way towards Cock Spur," Lee wrote to his brother Carter from Arlington in September. "I am engaged to Miss Mary C. Think of that Master Brooks--That is, She and her Mother have given their consent..But the Father has not yet made up his mind,[23] though it is supposed will not object."

If Custis did object, it could have only been to Lee's profession, which he feared might take his only daughter too far away from home. In any case,[24] his consent was soon forthcoming. Perhaps he, or Mrs. Custis, entertained the hope that Lee would resign from the army after his marriage, for the latter found it necessary to set his brother straight on this subject: "But what are you talking of Weddings, & my resigning?," he protested. "The Wedding, if there is one, will not be till next Spring (so she says). And I am not going to resign, till God knows when, for I don't."[25]

Too soon the days flew past. Autumn came, when Robert had to say goodbye to Mary and report back to Cockspur Island. With him he took a "very pretty present" from Mary--most likely her picture.[26]

[22]Sally Nelson Robbins gives the family tradition in Brock, op. cit., 323. The sideboard from which Mary got the cake was probably the famous one from Mount Vernon, described in Lossing, Mount Vernon, 316.

[23]Sept. 22, 1830, Wagstaff MSS, U. of Va.

[24]Long, op. cit., 33. There seems to be no basis, other than the reason Long gives, for the story that Custis opposed the engagement. Jones op. cit., 30, says that if Custis objected at all, it was only because he was reluctant to see his only child marry "any one." Freeman, Lee, I, 99, expresses the belief that Custis feared his daughter could not be supported on a lieutenant's pay, but cites no source.

[25]Sept. 30, 1830, Wagstaff MSS, U. of Va.

[26]Mary Custis to R. E. Lee, Sept. 20, [1830], Custis Family Papers, Mount Vernon, Va.

"It afforded me great satisfaction to learn that my favourite Dramatic work went off well," Custis wrote Carter Lee on New Year's Day, 1831, referring to the New York performance of Pocahontas which Robert's brother had witnessed in that city a few days before.[27] That Carter had thought the presentation at the Park Theatre over-elaborate may be inferred from the explanation Custis offered him concerning it: "I have no doubt... that your remarks touching Pocahontas are perfectly correct, but what is a poor Devil of an author to do? Even in Historical Plays you must sprin-kle show, & pagent and things to please the senses, as well as the judgment." He promised to do his best to improve his dramatic efforts in the future.

"Drama is all the go now," he went on. With some pride, he informed Carter that his 8th of January--now a two-act "National Opera"--was soon to be played in Philadelphia, Washington and Alexandria, with Joe Jefferson in the lead part. The company would also put on Pocahontas during its tour. This play was now on the boards at Charleston, S. C., and Mrs. Barnes, the actress, had promised to take it with her to Boston. The Rail Road was soon to have its twentieth performance in Columbia, S. C.[28]

In a way, the caustic remarks made in his diary about this time, by William Dunlap, Nelly Custis' childhood teacher and now himself a dramaist, may be taken as an inverse measure of the popularity of Custis'

[27]Custis to Carter Lee, Jan. 1, 1831, Custis Papers, L. C. Pocahontas was staged Dec. 28, 1830; for which, see New York Daily Advertiser of that date.

[28]Custis to Carter Lee, Jan. 1, 1831, Custis Papers, L. C.

plays. "At tea I heard a most delectable critical conversation on plays and players," wrote Dunlap. "Geo. Washn. Custis said to be over 50 and the author of several plays all very bad...C. is said to be an Orator & a painter! Hamlet a poor character & play!"[29] Actually, Dunlap was one of those native dramatists who, contemptuous of "home-made" dramas, sought to educate the American public to the best European theatrical standards.

The two men at least had one thing in common--chronic insolvency. For all his undisputed talent, Dunlap could hardly earn a living while the man he criticized was finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet as agriculture in his section continued to decline. Under such circumstances, writing plays could be little more to them than an avocation to one who was hard pressed to pay his tradesmen's bills. "As rich a man as I am <u>in property</u>; I cannot do more for you at the moment," he explained to one. And in another letter, to an official of the Bank of the United States to which he owed a large sum, he described himself as "a poor farmer."[30] For this reason, he was unable to be of much help to Lawrence Lewis in building a new tomb for the remains of the Washingtons, a project the two, as the only surviving executors, undertook at this time.[31]

Therefore, he set out to see what could be done about the remains of Mary Washington, which lay in an unmarked grave in what was described as "a dreary, deserted, solitary field," some distance outside Fredericksburg, Va. Five years earlier, the sketch of her life in his "Recollections" had inspired a movement to have her remains removed to a better

[29]Entry for Oct. 13, 1832, in William Dunlap; <u>Diary</u> (3 vols. New York: New York His. Soc., 1930), III, 622.

[30]Custis to T. Stabler, Jan. 27, 1831, Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Shop Papers, Alexandria, Va; and same to Sam. H. Smith, Jan. 5, 1830, Soc. Coll., His. Soc. of Pa.

[31]Fitzpatrick, <u>Writings</u>, XXXVII, 293n. The remains were transferred to the new vault in 1831.

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[30]Custis to T. Stabler, Jan. 27, 1831, Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Shop Papers, Alexandria, Va; and same to Sam. H. Smith, Jan. 5, 1830, Soc. Coll., His. Soc. of Pa.

[31]Fitzpatrick, <u>Writings</u>, XXXVII, 293n. The remains were transferred to the new vault in 1831.

location and marked by a suitable monument, but nothing had come of it. Now he obtained permission from the owner of the property to remove the remains, apparently with the intention of having them reburied in the new tomb at Mount Vernon. However, so many local citizens protested against the removal, he was forced to give up the project. Still, the stir he had created had one good result, in that it revived the movement to mark the grave with a suitable monument.[32]

Early in 1831, work was stopped on the Cockspur Island fort in order to make changes in its design, and in April, Lieutenant Lee was ordered to Old Point Comfort, Va., to assist in the construction of the fort being built there for the protection of the Chesapeake Bay. To Lee, the change of station was the more pleasant because it was so much nearer to Arlington.

He began to make plans for his wedding as soon as he reached his new post. Ordinarily engineer officers could expect to get off duty only when work was suspended for the winter, he explained to his brother Carter; in any event, he must wait until Captain Talcott, the officer in charge of construction, returned late in May. Then "they must let me off," he told his brother. In the meantime, he wanted Carter to get him his wedding clothes in New York. "I believe I will wear my uniform coat on the important night, & therefore white pantaloons must be in character,...Let the material of all be the best & don't let him charge too much," he cautioned.[33]

[32] B. J. Lossing in Custis, Recollections, 148n. Also Visitor & Telegraph (Richmond, Va.) reprinted in Alexandria Gaz., July 16, 1828; and Samuel Gordon to George Washington Bassett, et. al., May 25, 1831, in Galloway-Maxey-Markoe Papers, L. C., vol. 36.

[33] May 26, 1831, Wagstaff MSS, U. of Va.

Lee was in high spirits when he learned that he could take a one-month furlough just as soon as Captain Talcott returned. Telling Carter about it in another letter he wrote:

> The day has been fixed & it is the 30th of June. I can tell you I begin to feel right funny when I count my days....Can you come on to see it done?....I expect to leave here in the Potomac on the 29th & reach Alexa. Thursday morning. Go out to Arlington in the afternoon, dress &c. I am told there are to be six pretty Bridesmaids, Misses Mason, Mary-, Marietta, Angela, Julia & Brittannia & you could have some fine Kissing. For you know what a fellow you are at these weddings! 34

As the great day neared, preparations for the wedding were completed and Arlington House was made ready to receive the bridal party. For her bridesmaids, Mary had chosen cousins or childhood playmates: Catherine Mason, of nearby Analostan Island; Mary Goldsborough and Julia Calvert of Maryland, Angela Lewis from Woodlawn, Brittannia Peter of Tudor Place, and Marietta Turner from Kinloch, Fauquier County. As groomsmen, Robert had selected his brother Smith his cousin Thomas Turner from Kinloch, then a lieutenant in the Navy, and four Army friends, Lieutenants John P. Kennedy, James A. Chambers, Richard Tilghman, and James H. Prentiss.[35]

A heavy rain was falling as the guests arrived for the wedding on June 30, 1831, but inside all was warmth and happiness. The Reverand Mr. Reuel Keith, who was to officiate, came on horseback and arrived soaked to the skin. Great was the merriment when it was discovered that the only civilian clothes in the house were those of Mary's father, who was several inches shorter than the tall and angular parson. Amidst the hilarity of those who helped make the change, the Reverand Mr. Keith got into Custis' clothes, taking comfort in the knowledge that his ludicrous garb would be hidden by his cassock and surplice.[36]

[34]June 15, 1831, Wagstaff MSS, U. of Va.

[35]Freeman, Lee, I, 105 and n.

[36]Long, op. cit., 32; Packard, op. cit., 157; Marietta M. Andrews, Memoirs of a Poor Relation (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1927), 91. Keith was rector of Christ Church, Alexandria, Va.

As soon as he was ready, the ceremony began. The bridal party marched into the parlor--the room on the right as one enters from the portico. Mary was nervous--her hand trembled in his, Robert confided later to Captain Talcott. Some of the feminine spectators thought that the groom looked "pale and interesting," though he insisted afterwards that he had been no more nervous than when at the blackboard at West Point waiting to recite. Still he was glad when it was over, he admitted to Talcott: "The Parson had few words to say though he dwelt upon them as if he had been reading my Death warrant."[37]

"Do you recollect what a happy day thirty-three years ago this was?," he would write to his wife from the trenches of beseiged Petersburg in 1864. "How many hopes and pleasures it gave birth to!" And, indeed, none of those who were there ever forgot that happy evening--the ceremony itself, and the bridal feast which followed it. "My cousin, always a modest and affectionate girl, was never lovelier," one of the bridesmaids would recall years later; "and Robert Lee with his bright eyes and high color was the picture of a cavalier."[38]

The notice in the Alexandria Gazette, a few days later, was short and gave no hint of the happy celebration still going on at Arlington:

> MARRIED. At Arlington House, by the Rev. Dr. KEITH, Lieut. ROBERT LEE, of the U. States Corps of Engineers, to Miss MARY A. R. CUSTIS, only daughter of G. W. P. CUSTIS, Esq. [39]

So proud was Mary of her soldier-husband, she was determined to live on his pay as an officer and, like any other young Army wife, go with him

[37] July 13, 1831, quoted in full in Douglas Southall Freeman, "Lee and the Ladies," Scribner's Magazine, vol. 78 (Oct., 1925), 342.

[38] June 30, 1864, quoted in Robert E. Lee, Jr., Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1904), 133; also Andrews, Scraps, 202f.

[39] July 6, 1831.

wherever he might be stationed.[40] She was to be a vital, fundamental part of his life, a major influence on his career. Arlington, too, was to be a major part of Lee's life and, as such profoundly influenced him. Henceforth, it was to be inseparably associated with his name and future fame.

Honeymoon trips not being the custom at this time, the newly-married couple remained at home with the wedding party, and for several days Arlington resounded with merriment and festivity into which Mary's father entered with his usual wit and good nature. On the Fourth of July, he went to Alexandria to take part in the ceremony marking the start of the canal that would link that city with the great Chesapeake and Ohio Canal then being built up the Potomac, but it is doubtful whether any of the wedding party went with him. That night the entire company moved down to General Mason's house on Analostan Island for a final round of festivities before breaking up the next day when the young officers had to return to duty.[41]

Now that the wedding was over and the young folks and Mrs. Custis had gone off on a journey to the "upper country"--Loudoun and Fauquier Counties--to visit relatives, Arlington House seemed strangely quiet to Mary's father, though he professed to like it. "A perfect solitude reigns with me, & suits well with the depression my pecuniary difficulties create in my mind," he wrote to them. "In better days, I shall be glad to take a peep at the world once more, [but] at present

[40] Statement of Mrs. William N. Pendleton, Mrs. Lee's close friend and neighbor for many years, to Thomas Nelson Page, for which see his Robert E. Lee, Man and Soldier (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), 19 & n.

[41] Alexandria Gaz., July 7, 1831; and Long, Lee, 42.

I am content to be a recluse."

There was little news to report, he said. Nothing had been heard from the runaway slaves as yet; the drought would certainly decrease the corn crop; his overseer was over the ague; and to amuse himself, he was painting "a sea piece" for "Sister Maria," Mrs. Fitzhugh. After signing himself "Your Affectionate Husband, Father & Father-in-law," he observed humorously in a postscript: "The puss has appropriated the sofa in the parlor to himself, while I occupy that in the hall."[42]

A few weeks later, the Lees and Mrs. Custis were home again, with only a few days for a flurry of packing. Then it was time for the young couple to board the steamboat for Old Point.

[42]Custis to Mrs. Custis, July 26, 1831, Soc. Coll., His. Soc. of Pa.

CHAPTER IX

"COMFORTABLY SETTLED AT THE GARRISON"

Her new life at Fort Monroe must have been something of an adventure to Mary, as she and Robert settled down in their quarters with the things they had brought from Arlington. That done, she was ready to meet her husband's friends and their wives, and try the salt-water bathing which was one of the main attractions of the otherwise drab little army post.

Back home, sickness added to the depression of her parents, both of whom missed her badly. To make matters worse, Mrs. Lewis who came over from Woodlawn to keep them company, became ill also. "We were for two days a complaining trio," Mrs. Custis wrote to her daughter. "I will not attempt to tell you how I felt at your departure. I hastened to turn from my own loss to a contemplation of your happiness, united to the man of your choice..." Turning to the local news, she mentioned that the old carriage had broken down again. Daniel, the coachman, thought it needed new braces, she said; "but Mr. Custis adheres to the patching system." In a short postscript, her husband sent his regards to his "very Dr Son & Daughter," whom he hoped were now "comfortably settled at the garrison."[1]

A slave insurrection which broke out a few weeks later in Northampton County, not many miles from Fort Monroe, must have greatly disturbed Mary's parents, but as it turned out, there was no reason to fear for her safety, for the revolt was quickly put down. Lee did not accompany the troops sent from Fort Monroe to the scene of the disturbance, but the

[1]Aug. 10, 1831, Freeman MSS, Va. State Lib.

incident made a deep impression on him for only a misunderstanding on the part of many of the Negroes as to the date on which they were to revolt had prevented greater bloodshed.[2] As a precautionary measure, the garrison of the fort was increased.[3] The new officers and their families added much to the social life of the post, but still Mary felt homesick at times. "How much I should like to go with you & stroll about," she wrote to her mother about this time. "What would I [not] give for one stroll on the hills of Arlington this bright day."

Now that life at Arlington centered on the arrival of the mail bag each day, Mary's father returned to his writing. His first task was to finish a drama on which he had long been working, entitled, Montgomerie, or The Orphan of a Wreck. All that survives of this play, a tragedy laid in the Highlands of Scotland in the 13th century, is one song:

> Oh gather ye Clansmen, frae mountain and lea!
> The Piper is blawing right merrilie;
> And banners are waving sae gallant an' free,
> For the bonnie braw Earl o'Montgomerie.
>
> Wi' his tartan an' hose, an' courage sae true,
> Wi' plume o' the Eagle, in bonnet sae blue,
> There's mony a lassie a langing e'e,
> For the bonnie braw Earl o'Montgomerie.[4]

Apparently, some people thought that the author should not look outside the national scene for inspiration, for one wrote to a local newspaper:

> Messrs. Editors:....
> In the Intelligencer...I read a beautiful Scotch song from the pen of G. W. P. Custis, Esq. But I would respectfully ask of Mr. Custis--Can the nephew [sic] of Washington, and the author of Pocahontas, find no subject worthy of his muse, in his own land? Our literature already has too much of the mocking-bird character,

[2]R. E. Lee to Mrs. Custis, c. Sept. 1, 1831, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[3]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Custis, c. Sept. 1, 1831, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[4]Nat. Intelligencer, Sept. 2, 1831.

> and such a gifted writer as Mr. Custis should not...be an echo of European writers. 5

Actually, there was no reason to fear that Custis would lose interest in the American scene. At the moment, he was trying to borrow money for a journey to La Grange. As he explained to his banker:

> Gen'l Lafayette has kindly promised me all his Revolutionary papers, and all his personal Recollections of the venerated Chief. But the conditions of my obtaining these treasures is a visit to La Grange. No tongue but that of Lafayette can now tell the private memories of by gone days from 1777 to the end of the war of the Revolution. You will I am sure be aware..of the importance of my voyage across the Atlantic to secure these precious mamentoes, from accident, if not oblivion. 6

That his request was turned down was the more unfortunate, because events in France that year warranted his concern for the safety of Lafayette's papers--and the General himself. The aged Marquis had helped overthrow the reactionary Bourbon King, Charles X, that summer, and had been suggested to head the new government. This had not endeared him to Charles' successor, conservative Louis Philippe, and there was some doubt as to how long the old Republican would stay out of prison. Tied in with the French difficulties was a revolt which had broken out in Poland the year before in protest against the Czar's proposal to use his Polish army to crush the liberal movement in France--which explains why Custis was chosen to preside at a series of meetings held in Washington in the fall of 1831 to raise funds for the Polish patriots.[7]

At one of these, he delivered one of his most eloquent addresses, his main argument being that the Poles had come to the aid of America in its revolution, and now America should come to their assistance. What if the government was officially neutral?, he asked his listeners.

[5] Ibid., Sept. 5, 1831.
[6] Custis to Sam. H. Smith, Sept. 27, 1831, Custis and Lee Family Papers, L. C.
[7] Nat. Intelligencer, Oct. 24, 1831.

"The Government is Something, but the People are everything!" Lafayette, he said, appealed to America and the Poles, since his own country, with its "mere apology for a King," would not. "Had she [France], instead... founded a noble republic under the consulship of the good Lafayette, her Eagles would, long ere this, have flown to the Vistula, and liberated Poland; formed a cordon, the most sanitaire, against the irruptions of that vast and warlike Power, which like its barbaric ancestors of old, threatens to overrun and make desolate the fairest portions of civilized Europe." For all he knew, Warsaw might have already been reconquered by the Russians--which turned out to be true--but as "the orator of liberty," he had no choice but to pursue the cause of freedom "no matter of what clime or nation."[8]

Towards Christmas, the Lees returned home by way of Baltimore, where they visited Robert's sister, Mrs. Marshall.[9] At Arlington, Lee received a belated invitation to the wedding of one of his Savannah friends, Eliza Mackay. Writing to her, Lee was at his facetious best:

> How I should like to say 'Mr. and Mrs. Lee have the honor to accept Mrs. Mackay's kind invitation for Wednesday night.' But this cannot be Miss Eliza (My Sweetheart) because it only arrived here last night, by this token that I have been in tears ever since at the thought of losing you. Oh Me!....
>
> But Miss E. how do you feel about this time? Say 12 o'clock of the day, as you see the shadows commence to fall towards the East and know that last the sun will set? Though you may not be frightened I 'spect you are most marvelously alarmed....If I could but drop in this morning and tell you what a powerful fine thing it is to stand up before the Parson with all eyes bent on you (except one pair) he mournful and solemn as if he were reading your funeral service.

The postscript Mary added shows how different was her temperament from that of her handsome young husband at this time:

> You see what a small space is left me my dear Miss Eliza to offer my congratulations and to wish that your pathway in life may be as bright as our beneficent Creator and Father sees best

[8] Ibid., Oct. 29, Nov. 7, 1831.
[9] Freeman, Lee, I, 112.

> for you....I am now a wanderer on the face of the earth and know not where we are going next and hope it will be East. I suppose you remain in Savannah near your Mother? What happiness! I am with mine now--the past and future disregarded. I offer my love and congratulations to you and the family on the late joyous occasion.... [10]

The festive air that prevailed at Arlington during the holidays was replaced with sadness soon after the start of the New Year when word came that Mary's aunt, the gifted, impetuous, irresponsible Eliza, had died a few days before at Richmond.[11] Though never close to those at Arlington as Mr. Custis' other sisters, largely because her interests had been centered on the social life in Washington, Eliza had been well liked by the Custises, who probably attended her funeral at Mount Vernon.[12]

Early in January, Lee returned to Fort Monroe, but Mary stayed on at Arlington, reluctant to leave her parents and her old home. Thus she had the opportunity, in February, of witnessing the local observances of the Centennial of Washington's birth. For the great day, her father had painted a heroic portrait of Washington on his charger watching the cannonade at the battle of Trenton to decorate the ballroom of the Union Hotel in Georgetown. He also marched in the parade in Alexandria, and afterwards spoke on his favorite subject, Washington and the heroes of the Revolution, to the Washington Society gathered in Christ

[10] To Mrs. E. S. Stiles, Jan. 4, 1832, quoted in part in ibid., I, 113f.

[11] Nat. Intelligencer, Jan. 7, 1832.

[12] It is said that Eliza's eccentric ex-husband, Thomas Law, was at breakfast when a servant timidly broached the news: "Master Law, Missus Law, she died las' night." "The hell she did," Law is said to have replied--"Hand the potatoes." The story is hard to reconcile with Law's defense of his former wife's character, published some years before. For the tradition, see Powell, op. cit., 421. For Law's defense of his wife, see his Reply to the Quarterly Review (Washington, D. C.: 1824). Eliza Custis was buried at Mount Vernon; Alexandria Gaz., Jan. 9, 1832.

Church. But the high point of his day must have been to see his play, The Pawnee Chief, performed that evening in a Washington theatre.[13] He must have also been pleased, reading the newspapers a few days later, to learn how much attention the Washington tents had received in the Birthday celebration in New York, where it had been pitched in front of the City Hall, as a review stand, for a handful of Revolutionary War veterans. Custis had sent the tent in care of his valet, Phillip Lee; also a letter to the Mayor which read in part:

> My old and favorite body servant, Philip Lee...is the nephew of Washington's celebrated Revolutionary follower, Will Lee. Philip is a highly intelligent, nay, talented man, of gentlemanly manners, and worthy of every confidence and consideration. He will not be my slave much longer--he has been my friend for two-and-thirty years... [14]

In only one respect was the centennial a disappointment to Custis--nothing came of the movement to rebury the Washingtons under the dome of the Capitol. When Congress, by a joint resolution, asked permission of the surviving executors to permit the reburial, Custis had given his most "hearty consent," asserting that Washington had assumed that his remains would be reburied by the government. He also told how, when she lay dying, his grandmother had said, "Remember, Washington, to have my remains placed in a leaden coffin that they may be removed with those of the General at the command of the Government." But the project was dropped when John A. Washington, who owned Mount Vernon at the time, refused on the grounds that Washington's will provided for a new tomb at Mount Vernon, showing that the General wanted his remains to be left

[13] Custis to Charles F. Mercer, July 17, 1832, Custis Papers, L. C. See also, Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 22, 25, 27, 1832.

[14] Custis to Silas E. Burrows, Feb. 17, 1832, printed in Alexandria Gaz., Feb. 27, 1832. Custis also sent some of Washington's clothes to be displayed inside the tent.

there.[15] Meanwhile, national sentiment had contended with sectional pride in the newspapers, and the Virginia state legislature resolved that the remains should stay in Washington's native state--to which Custis snorted: "The right of a State! No one State can appropriate to itself that which belongs to the whole!" Still, he had lost the argument, for most people agreed with the sentiments expressed by an anonymous poet in a Philadelphia newspaper:

> "Undisturb'd let the dust of the lov'd warrior lay,
> Where living he wish'd in his death to repose.[16]

Thwarted in this matter, Custis then attempted to arouse interest in Washington's birthplace in Westmoreland County, by describing it, in an article in the Alexandria Gazette, as it was in 1816, when he placed his monument there. "Will not Wakefield, like Mount Vernon," he asked, "in after time, be the resort of Patriotic Pilgrims?"[17]

He was to be long dead before that question could be answered in the affirmative.

As the weeks slipped by and Mary continued to linger at Arlington, Lee grew concerned about her reluctance to leave home, though he was in a bantering mood when he wrote to her in April:

> I hope My dear Mary that my letter...arrived safe & have not been parading about the 'ten miles square' in search of a House that any one might see with half an eye...Let me tell you Mrs. Lee, no later than today, did I escort Miss L. to see Miss Kate! Think of that Mrs. Lee! And hasten down, if you

[15] Custis, in "The Last Days of Mount Vernon," in Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 22, 1854; and same to "the Gentlemen of Congress," Feb. 14, 1832, printed in Alexandria Gaz., Feb. 18, 1832, along with John A. Washington's letter of refusal.

[16] Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 22, 1854; and U. S. Gazette (Philadelphia, Pa.), reprinted in Richmond (Va.) Enquirer, Apr. 3, 1832.

[17] Alexandria Gaz., Mar. 6, 1832.

> do not want to see me turned out a Beau again. How I did strut along with one hand on my whiskers & the other elevating my coat tail! And my whole face thrown into the biggest grin I could muster--Surely it was a sight for the Old Pointers to see, and I only wish you could have been of the number. How you would have triumphed in my happiness & then Molly I would have been happy. 18

In a more serious vein, he then approached the question of whether they should consider Arlington their home or content themselves with the quarters, however poor, which the Army might provide them:

> You seem to think Molly you would prefer living as we are, but are you right in this. We ought not to give others the trouble of providing for us, always, and besides as I can see how we might incommode & be a restraint upon them...I know your dear Mother will be for giving you <u>every</u> thing she has, but must recollect <u>one</u> thing, & that is, that they have been accustomed to comforts all their life, which now they could not dispense with. And that we, in the commencement, ought to contract our wishes to their smallest compass, & enlarge them as opportunity offers.

No doubt he was relieved to learn a few weeks later that it was not distaste for the comparative lack of comfort of garrison life that kept Mary at home, but the fact that she was expecting a baby that summer. Startled by this news, Lee's reaction was about what one would expect from a husband about to become a father. "Take care of yourself," he wrote. "Don't ride on horseback, or go into crowds, or hurry about the house." Nor was she to go to church: "Suppose the carriage was to break down, what would you do then?" To avoid the sickness that usually accompanied hot weather at Arlington, he urged her to come, with her mother, to Old Point by June 1st.[19]

Evidently he had been helping Mary's father keep an eye on his Eastern Shore properties, for in the same letter, he mentioned that he had recently visited them. Part of old Arlington was being well cultivated, he reported; a small part had been abandoned. The old

[18] Apr. 24, 1832, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[19] May 13, 1832, DeButts-Ely MSS.

mansion was still standing and the famous tombstone in a good state of preservation. Smith's Island he found "in a very rough state, & the inhabitants in a rougher." He promised to give more details in a separate letter to her father.[20]

Packing may have taxed Mary's strength, for in another letter Lee inquired: "And what fatigued you so much? Did I not tell you Molly to be careful & did you not promise? Answer me that Madam if you please." He promised to keep a tight rein on her activity once she was with him. "How I do wish that we were all quietly arranged here now--you, & our goods & chattels," he added wistfully.[21]

Mary's departure, late in June, caused her to miss the exciting and heart-warming celebration of the birthday of the Irish nationalist, Daniel O'Connell, that took place in Washington City that summer. Her father, introduced as "the warm and eloquent advocate of the rights and liberties of Ireland," was the principal speaker, and to repeated applause, he compared O'Connell to Washington and predicted that eventually he would gain complete independence for Ireland. When that day came, Derrynane Abbey, O'Connell's home, would be the Mount Vernon of Ireland.

Ordinarily, affairs of this kind ended with everyone dispersing to his individual home, but this time the crowd insisted on escorting Custis down to his boat. With a band in front and Captain Foy's company of militia bringing up the rear, Custis marched down Pennsylvania Avenue with the Sons of Erin, who enlivened their march with shouts, cheers, and Irish songs. Night had fallen when the procession reached the

[20]No trace of the old Arlington mansion remained when a traveller visited the site in 1879, for which see Harper's Magazine, vol. 58 (May, 1879), 807.

[21]June 2, 1832, DeButts-Ely MSS.

wharf; still the crowd would not let Custis go without another speech.[22] All in all, it had been a memorable day for Custis and his Irish friends.

After this event, there was little to divert the Custises while they waited patiently for news from Old Point. Mary's mother had expected to be with her when the baby came, but "chills and fever" kept her at Arlington until after the baby, a fine boy, was born in September on the 16th.[23] The proud grandfather was highly gratified to learn that the infant had been named after him, George Washington Custis Lee.

Naturally, the new father was also elated--though intended to be humorous, his words in announcing the event to his brother Carter were strangely prophetic:

> I have got me an heir to my Estates! Aye a Boy! To cherish the memory of his Father &'walk in the light of his renown! His Mother is quite well & would never forgive me did she not think I was describing all the Beauties & rare accomplishments which she daily discovers. She thinks he has a Smile like yours.[24]

The new grandfather was indeed lonesome when later in the month Mrs. Custis left for Old Point. "I am sorry to hear you are not in good spirits," she wrote from there. "Why do you not visit your friends at Ravensworth and Georgetown?" She hoped that he would be diverted by writing more of his Recollections--"any reminiscences of dear old Chatham would be pleasant to me." Robert had taken her out riding, she told him. "His little mare...is a gentle, pretty creature. And I delighted to feel the freshness of earth and trees..."[25]

[22]Nat. Intelligencer, Aug. 15, 1832.
[23]Entry in Custis Family Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS. For Mrs. Custis' illness, see Lee to Carter Lee, Sept. 28, 1832, Wagstaff MSS, U. of Va.
[24]Sept. 18, 1832, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[25]Sept. 20, 1832, DeButts-Ely MSS.

In the dumps from having to miss all the excitement, Mr. Custis could only send a few things Mary had requested and relay what little news there was at home:

> I have received your letter & attended to Mary's request respecting the Butter &. [he wrote] I sent the peaches nicely put in a box...The sick people here are getting well. I have had gathered the few apples in the orchard, as robberies by day as well as night were taking place...I have no news, not a soul has been here, & I have not been beyond the limits of my farm...My love to all with you & I pray God to bless & protect my dear & blessed wife.
>
> Yr Affectionate Husband
> George W. P. Custis [26]

With the approach of winter, when Mary and the baby returned to Arlington, it was Lee's turn to be lonesome. "Your letter, My Dearest Mary, informing me of your safe &comfortable arrival gave me great pleasure...although it is distressing to be left so long alone...," he wrote. But before long, bad weather put an end to building operations on the fort, so Lee was able to return home for the Christmas holidays.[27]

The next two years passed quickly and followed much the same pattern. During them, Lee applied himself to mastering his profession, and whenever work slacked off, as in the winter, would bring his family home to Arlington. As usual, Mr. Custis had to give most of his attention to his estates, but found time now and then for his literary and patriotic interests. Lee was at Arlington when he wrote a friend in

[26]Sept. 23, 1832, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[27]Dec. 4, 1832, DeButts-Ely MSS. That Lee was at Arlington for Christmas is inferred from his letter to John Mackay, Jan. 23, 1833, photostat copy in records of Fort Pulaski Nat. Monument.

Savannah, John Mackay, late in January, 1834:

> Picture me to yourself surrounded by my wife and child after an absence of a month, with so many accounts to settle with the one and to learn of the other....Washington is allowed, I believe by those better acquainted with it than I am, to be duller this winter than usual. There are a few parties, but no one is decidedly the rage, nor considered a big Lion...Congress is doing nothing. They are hammering on the Tariff and make no mention of promoting modest merit in the persons of you or I. Nullification receives no quarter & I hope you will not be ordered to the scene of action. 28

This last was in reference to the nullification controversy caused by the refusal of South Carolina to accept what it termed the "Tariff of Abominations." When Lee wrote, the situation was indeed critical, for the state had threatened to secede if President Andrew Jackson attempted to enforce the act as he had vowed he would. Actually, Lee seems to have been less concerned about the dangers of the situation than annoyed by the interminable discussion. "There is nothing new here, or in these parts," he wrote to his immediate superior, Captain Talcott, only "Nullification! Nullification! Nullification!" 29

A unionist, his father-in-law took the crisis more seriously. Speaking in Alexandria on Washington's birthday, 1832, Custis minced no words as to what he thought of "the little man, the mad man," of South Carolina who threatened the union. "Yankees" might be a term of opprobrium in South Carolina, he told his audience, but to him it would always be an honorable term applicable to all Americans because of its Revolutionary War associations. "Call me Yankee while I live," he cried. "Let it be graven on my head stone!" President Jackson he described as "The Man for the Times, who will steer the National Barque in safety to the harbor of Union and the Constitution." Continuing, he criticized the opposition of the State of Virginia to moving Washington's remains

28 Ibid.

29 Same to A. Talcott, Dec. 7, 1832, quoted in part in Freeman, Lee, I, 122.

from Mount Vernon to the Capitol, where they would be "a permanent keystone to the arch of Union." He bore no ill-will towards the state, "the fatherland of my ancestors," he said, but "if I love Virginia much, I love my WHOLE COUNTRY more!"[30]

The greater conflict which came later on might have been avoided if the issue had been settled at this time, but it was not. Instead, Congress passed a compromise-tariff and South Carolina receded from its dangerous position under the impression that it had won the battle. Whether Custis approved the compromise cannot be said, though he may have been relieved, like many Americans, that worse trouble had been avoided at least for the moment.

By the time the crisis was over, the Lees were back at Fort Monroe, Robert working on the fortifications and Mary busy with their home and baby--"the most darling boy in the world," according to the father.[31]

On the whole, the Lees liked the quiet garrison life at Old Point. Robert carried on an extensive correspondence with some of his service friends, played some chess, and often went riding or bathing with Mary. His wife's amusements were equally plain: she did a fair amount of reading, did an occasional painting for one of her friends, and wrote often to her parents and other relatives.[32] Mary's father wrote regularly each Sunday, her mother even more often, besides which they frequently sent choice provisions--cheese, dried apples, and butter--down the river to Old Point. Sometimes, too, schooners from the White House

[30] Alexandria Gaz., Mar. 14, 1832.

[31] Lee to A. Talcott, Nov. 1, 1834, quoted in part in Freeman, Lee, I, 117n., 119.

[32] Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Custis, undated but c. 1833; and same to same, c. April 1, 1833, both in DeButts-Ely MSS.

and Romancock, carrying corn and wheat to Richmond or Baltimore, dropped off supplies of bacon, lard, fish and other staples for the Lees.[33]

In return, Lee was able to occasionally inspect the Pamunkey River farms for his father-in-law and relayed funds and business information between Custis and his farm managers. "Wood has been reduced so low in New York, that Grab All has withdrawn his Brig from the business & sold her," Lee wrote to Custis, for example, in the summer of 1834. Nor did he ever forget to mention his father-in-law's main interest--his tiny namesake, as when he wrote at the end of a long letter on business matters: "Your little Grand Son is growing finely, has three of his front teeth, & is in perfect health..."[34]

Mary, too, kept her parents well informed on such vital matters as her son's latest pet name--Dunkett, Bun, Bunny, Boose, Boo, and Booty. "Booty really talks well & calls every thing bybits proper name," she informed her mother in one letter. "I have fixed a cart for him out of a basket top & he rides his wooden goat which some one gave him." To this, guided by his mother's hand, was a message to Custis from his grandson: "Tell Dan Pa I should love to kiss his bald head."[35]

When Mrs. Custis spent part of the summer of 1833 with the Lees at Old Point, her husband was despondent:

> God knows I can be nowhere happier than with my dear children & precious grandson [he wrote]; and, again, the garrison and military matters, the sea-prospect, vessels, &c, all conspire to make a sojourn at the Point a most pleasurable thing to me; but a hard necessity compels me to the constant superintendence of my affairs at home....
>
> I have been requested to write a short biography of my grandmother for Longacres work, called The National Gallery of Portraits, and have consented to do it. I have written nothing

[33]Lee to Carter Lee, Sept. 16, 1833, Wagstaff MSS, U. of Va.; some to Mrs. Custis, May 20, 1833, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[34]May 23, 1833, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[35]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Custis, Apr. 11, [1834], DeButts-Ely MSS.

> and painted scarcely anything, but have read all the time. I have not been on my farm; go to bed exactly at ten, rise at six, breakfast at seven, and dine at two. I find myself often calling that darling boy in my reveries. Give him grandpa's kiss and blessing... 36

Sometimes life at the fort was exciting, as when President Jackson called on the Lees at their quarters, not long after Mrs. Custis returned home:

> The President and Genl Gratiot-all the great folks are to leave tomorrow,.../ Mary wrote her mother/ I shall be truly rejoiced when they all go & we shall have a little quiet & Robert will have a little time to be at home...The President inspected the fort yesterday on horseback & paid me a visit of a few moments ....I carried Bouse in to see the President who took him in his arms & held him some time. Bouse looked at him with a fixed gaze, put his hand over his nose but did not pull it hard & put his fingers in his eyes. The old man gave him Rachel's picture to play with, which delighted him much & then presented him with a half dollar... 37

But letters and occasional visits by her mother did not keep Mary from occasionally getting homesick. "Do give my love to all at Chantilly," she wrote her mother, who was taking a trip up to the Valley. "How I should love to be there. I do pine for a sight of those blue Mountains," And again she wrote, "I often long for a little rural scenery, but I ought not to complain of what I have not when I have so many comforts & especially that of a tender & affectionate husband who spends his evenings at home instead of frequenting the card parties which attract so many."[38]

That Mary disapproved of card-playing was due in part to her mother's influence, in part to her own experience, for she and Robert had observed how army life tended to deteriorate the character of many young officers. "From the little experience I have had of a Garrison life in time of peace,"

[36]Custis to Mrs. Custis, Mrs. Lee, July 19, 1833, in Custis, Recollections, 60.

[37]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Custis, Aug. 24, 1833, quoted in part in MacDonald, Mrs. Lee, 50.

[38]Same to same, Apr. 11, /1834/, DeButts-Ely MSS.

Lee wrote a friend, "I have seen minds formed for use and ornament degenerate into sluggishness and inactivity, requiring the stimulus of brandy or cards to rouse them to action, and apparently a burden to the possessors and perhaps an injury to their companions."[39] With their life centered on Robert's career and their little son, the Lees were little interested in social affairs, particularly formal ones. "We have been quite satiated with tea drinking lately, almost every evening an invitation somewhere," wrote Mary to her mother. "Except that we generally get some nice cake and fruit, they would be rather stupid. I suppose it is my fault, but there are not many persons here very interesting."[40]

Sundays they attended the chapel on the post, though Robert was less interested in religion than his wife. "I cannot but feel that he still wants the one thing needful without which all the rest may prove valueless," Mary confided to her mother. "We read the Bishop's pastoral letter which he pronounced excellent, but made no further comment."[41] On his part, Lee had only one complaint to make of his wife--that she was a poor housekeeper,[42] a failing about which her mother had previously warned her. "Tell the ladies," he once apologized to a friend, when expecting guests, "that Mrs. L. is somewhat addicted to laziness and forgetfulness in her Housekeeping. But they may be certain she does her best, Or in her Mother's words, 'The Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.'"[43]

In one respect, the young couple had their share of worldly vanity; they liked to dress well. Typical was the letter Mrs. Lee wrote to her

[39]Lee to J. Mackay, Feb. 18, 1833, quoted in part in Freeman, Lee, I, 122.

[40]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Custis, n. d., but c. 1833, quoted in MacDonald, op. cit., 49.

[41]Apr. 11, [1834], DeButts-Ely MSS.

[42]"I hope Robert will...tell me how you improve in order now he has you all to himself," Mrs. Custis wrote her daughter in 1831. "I shall be disappointed in my Daughter if she does not profit by example united to precept." Aug. 10, 1831, Freeman MSS, Va. State Lib.

[43]Lee to A. Talcott, Apr. 10, 1834, quoted in Freeman, Lee, I, 108.

mother in 1833: "Mrs. Huger returned on Saturday. She brought me a very nice silk dress which I had written for, & a cape & gave me the very welcome information that all stiffening was quite out of fashion, so I shall be quite a la mode myself," Nor was her handsome husband unaware of the fine appearance he made in well-cut dress uniform coats made for him by a fashionable tailor at West Point, to which he planned to add a new hat. "We shall be a grand set of fellows with our gold and silver," he wrote a friend.[44]

Christmas, 1833, Lee had to spend away from his family. "Mary & her little limb...left here about 18 days since for Arlington," he wrote to his brother Carter early in December. "I hoped to get away from here by New Year's day; but...I am afraid I shall not get to Arlington till about the 20th of Jan." Ice clogged the Potomac when his brief holiday at Arlington came to an end in February, making it necessary for him to ride overland to Old Point, "up to my ears in mud and alone," as he described the trip to a friend.[45]

Later, when the weather had moderated, Mary and little Boo rejoined him on the fort. "My time at Arlington passed as pleasantly as usual & only flew too rapidly," Mrs. Lee told Robert's brother Carter. "The Major [her father] was in his usual health & spirits & devoted his leisure from agricultural pursuits to Painting & Tragedy."[46]

[44]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Custis, n. d., but c. 1833, quoted in part in MacDonald, op. cit., 47f.; and Lee to A. Talcott, May 23, 1834, quoted in part in Freeman, Lee, I, 118.

[45]Lee to Carter Lee, Dec. 6, 1833, Wagstaff MSS, U. of Va.; and Lee to J. Mackay, Feb. 3, 1834, quoted in part in Freeman, Lee, I, 120.

[46]Apr. 14, 1834, Lee Family Papers, L. C.

The "tragedy" to which Mrs. Lee referred, was Montgomeris, on which her father had been working for some time, getting it in final form for stage presentation. The past year had been a good one for his literary creations, for though none were outstanding, all had been well received.

Early in the year, he had written an interesting account of the "Pope's Willow" at Arlington, from which all weeping-willows in America were said to be descended. In it, he told how his father had been given the original slips, from a tree growing over the grave of Alexander Pope, in England, by a British officer captured at the seige of Boston in 1775; and how he had brought them home to plant on his estate, "where grown to very superb trees, they now flourish, and often give a shade to the pensive angler and lover of rural solitude."[47] To this, the editor of the Alexandria Gazette, in which the article appeared, added:

> If any thing were wanting to give attraction to Arlington, in addition to the communicative Kindness of its proprietor, and the charms of its scenery and situation, it might be found in the idea, that the parent tree of those which give us shelter there, on the banks of the Potomac, once extended the same benefit to the immortal Pope, on the banks of the Thames.

In the spring of 1833, his effort to arouse public interest in the grave of Washington's mother at last bore fruit as the result of a chance visit to Arlington by Mrs. Lydia Sigourney, at that time the most popular woman writer in America. Having listened with interest to Custis' tales of Washington's mother as related to him by Lafayette and others, she was appalled when she went on to Fredericksburg and was hardly able to locate the grave, covered with weeds, in an abandoned field. Shocked by this neglect of what should have been a sacred spot, Mrs. Sigourney wrote a poem on the subject on her return home which was read by Silas Burrows,

[47]See Am. Spectator & Washington (D. C.), Chronicle, May 22, 1830; Alexandria Gaz., Jan. 4, 1833 and B.J. Lossing, "Arlington House," Harper's Magazine., VII (Sept., 1853), 437; and Lossing Mary and Martha Washington, 150n.

a wealthy New York merchant who greatly admired the Washingtons. Burrows, too, then visited Arlington, after which he offered to erect an imposing monument at his own expense. Custis was present when President Jackson laid the cornerstone for this in May, and of course participated in the public reception held afterwards under the famous war tent of Washington.[48]

But, as happened to so many projects of Custis', this one was also destined to fail, for the donor, because of financial reverses, withdrew his support as the memorial was nearing completion, and the rpoject was abandoned. Still it had one good result, in that it created a firm friendship between the Custises and the influential Hartford poetess, who often visited Arlington to gather information on the Washingtons for her numerous, and extremely popular works.

He had also published another chapter of the "Recollections" in the National Intelligencer in the fall, in part a brief account of Smallwood's Maryland Regiment in the Revolutionary War, the remainder a description of the uniform worn by Morgan's Riflemen in the same conflict. According to Custis, he was indebted for the first part to his neighbor, Major John Adlum--an agricultural pioneer who, among other achievements developed the first important native American grape, the Catawba.

In the "Hunting Shirt," part of the article, Custis told how it had been worn by Morgan's Riflemen, feared by the British above all other troops because of their deadly marksmanship. He quoted General Morgan as saying: "The very sight of my riflemen was always enough for a Hessian picquet. They would scamper into their lines as if the devil

[48]Lossing describes the dedication of the monument in Custis, Recollections, 148n. Burrows' visit to Arlington is mentioned in Custis to S.E. Burrows, Feb. 17, 1832, printed in Alexandria Gaz., Feb. 27, 1832. A poem Custis wrote in honor of Mrs. Sigourney appeared in Nat. Intelligencer, Aug. 14, 1833.

drive them, shouting in all the English they knew, 'Rebel in de bush! Rebel in de bush!" Why, then, asked Custis, should such a "singular and picturesque costume" as the hunting shirt worn by Morgan's men no longer be used by American soldiers? "Its fringes, wampum belts, leggins and moccassins, richly worked with the Indian ornaments of beads and porcupine quills of brilliant and varied dyes," had made it the distinctive American military costume in European eyes, as much so as the tartans and kilts of the 42nd British Highlanders. "Should not Americans feel proud of the garb," he asked, "and hail it as National," instead of borrowing their uniforms from European armies?[49]

He had also produced one new play, North Point, or Baltimore Defended--one of the few plays ever written about the War of 1812. His letter to his wife, who was away at the time, telling how he came to write it, is most revealing:

> I had promised the poor rogues of actors a play for the 12th Sept., the anniversary of the battle of North Point; but, finding myself not in the vein, I wrote them to defer it. On Monday, 9th, the manager came on from Baltimore, and entreated me to prepare something for the 12th, as it would put six or seven hundred dollars in his pocket. On Monday not a line was finished. At five o'clock I commenced, and wrote until twelve; rose the next morning at five, and by seven sent off by the stages, a two-act piece, with two songs, and a finale, called North Point, or Baltimore Defended, the whole completed in nine hours. To-morrow I shall hear of its success. 50

Nothing written in so short a time could have been very good, but the performance on the anniversary of the battle which inspired the writing of "The Star Spangled Banner" justified the author's complacency, for according to one report, it was heartily applauded by some 2300 people who had crowded into a Baltimore theatre to see it. From a notice in a local paper, it can be gathered that Custis rang all the changes to

[49] Ibid., Oct. 11, 1833.
[50] Sept. 12, 1833, printed in Custis, Recollections, 58f.

ensure the popularity of his drama,--patriotism, local and national; humor, Irish and blackface; and spectacle, including the bombardment of a miniature Fort McHenry. There was a Colonel Trueman, an heroic American officer; with a Colonel Scarlett as his opposite number in the enemy forces. O'Looney was no doubt an Irish comic and, according to Custis, Thomas D. Rice, then beginning to win fame as a comedian, "outdid his Jim Crow all hollow," in the part of Cully, a Negro veteran of the Revolution. Female heroism was represented by Marietta, who took part in the battle disguised as a rifle boy. As an additional fillip to local pride, the author also included a song from the Rail Road, "The Old Maryland Line."[51]

A second performance, in November, after Custis had rewritten the play was even more spectacular. According to the announcement, "in order to give effect to the bombardment of Fort McHenry, the Managers have at considerable expense, engaged the assistance of Mr. Houston, placing it entirely under his direction,"--an intimation that fireworks may have played a large part in the climactic scenes.[52]

The future of native drama looked bright to Custis as the year came to an end. Writing to John Howard Payne, the famous American actor who had offered to help him get his plays put on in New York, Custis termed North Point "a prodigous hit," and said that all his other plays had been "eminently successful," especially the Rail Road. "I think of writing one more Indian play," he told Payne, "viz. Tecumseh or The Last of the Braves...in which several Indian Tales and Legends will be embodied, with some fine scenery and historical illustrations. This will be my last

[51]The Republican & Commercial Advertiser (Baltimore, Md.), Sept. 16, 1833; also Custis to John H. Payne, Dec. 18, 1833, Custis MSS, N. Y. Pub. Lib. Also Commercial Chronicle & Daily Advertiser (Baltimore, Md.), Sept. 12, 1833. Also Custis to Mrs. Custis, Sept. 12, 1833, printed in Custis, Recollections, 60.

[52]The Republican & Commercial Advertiser (Baltimore, Md.), Nov. 7, 1833.

aboriginal Drama, having presented 3 successful ones." He hoped Payne, who had only recently arrived in America, would try acting in some of his plays, and perhaps interest Edwin Forrest, who was equally popular, in Tecumsah.[53]

Most of the major construction on Fort Monroe had been completed by the summer of 1834, when orders came from Washington that the remaining work was to be done by the regular garrison. Though Lee would have liked to see the work through to completion and attributed the decision to the long-standing jealousy between the corps of engineers and the artillery as to who should do the work and occupy the limited number of quarters of the post, he was glad that the question was at last settled. "I am heartily sick of it," he wrote his friend Mackay,"and am rejoiced that it is at an end."[54]

For the next month or two, Lee was in charge of the work on Fort Calhoun, a smaller fort under construction on a shoal called the Rip Raps out in the middle of Hampton Roads. Since this consisted only of piling up masses of stone in order to stabilize the foundations, the task held little interest to a young, ambitious officer, and Lee gladly accepted a position in the Washington office of General Gratiot, Chief of the Corps of Engineers, when it was offered to him in October. Much as he preferred the active life of a construction engineer to routine office work, anything was better than his present dull task. That his only promotion as yet had been a change of status from brevet second lieutenant to second lieutenant in 1832 may also have caused him to

[53]Dec. 18, 1833, Custis Papers, N. Y. Pub. Lib.
[54]Oct. 18, 1834, quoted in part in ibid., 127.

welcome the new assignment, for working closely with the commanding officer of the corps might greatly benefit his career. Besides, he and Mary would be able to live near Arlington.[55]

In November, Mrs. Custis took the steamboat down to Old Point to bring her daughter and grandson home to Arlington. Lee came on later in the month, after he had settled his accounts. Ever since it had become known that the Lees were coming to Washington, their friends had been looking forward to having them with them again. "Cousin Mary will live in Washington this winter, and we will see more of her than we have done since her marriage," her cousin Angela Lewis wrote to her fiance in New Orleans. "I wish you knew them," she continued, referring to Mary and her mother. "They are my favorite Aunt and Cousin, so good and so very intelligent."[56]

[55] Ibid., 127f. For Lee's promotion, see G. O. No. 62, Hq. of the Army, Adj.-Gen. Off., July 19, 1832, published in Nat. Intelligencer, July 30, 1832.

[56] Lee to A. Talcott, Nov. 28, 1834, Lee MSS, Va. His. Soc.; and M. E. A. Lewis to Charles M. Conrad, Nov. 16, 1834, Lewis Family Papers, Mount Vernon, Va.

CHAPTER X

"COMFORTABLE ACCOMODATIONS" AT ARLINGTON

When Lee reported dor duty in Washington late in November, 1834, he learned that he would sometimes have to work outside regular hours. With this in mind, he looked about for a house for rent near his office, but could find nothing suitable for what he could afford to pay. Therefore, he thought it best to leave Mary and the baby at Arlington and find a room for himself in the city, hoping that in the spring he would have better luck.[1]

During the winter which followed, he rode over to Arlington whenever the weather or his work permitted. Normally his office closed at three o'clock, and soon after, he might be seen mounted on a compact Virginia bay horse, riding down Pennsylvania Avenue on his way home. Though a long and tiring ride, the regular exercise increased his physical vigor and helped to develop the endurance which later on enabled him to withstand the exertions and exposures of many a hard camapign.[2]

Ordinarily, Lee had his mid-day meal at a Mrs. Ulrick's boarding-house, where several of his young army friends also resided, as well as several congressmen whose presence usually had a restraining influence on the youthful officers. But occasionally their high spirits would burst forth, as when Lee was setting out for home on his spirited bay one afternoon and spied a brother officer approaching on foot. Riding

[1]Lee to Cartar Lee, Feb. 24, 1835, Wagstaff MSS, U. of Va.
[2]Long, op. cit., 36.

over, Lee cried cheerily, "Come, get up with me," and much to the amusement of the onlookers, his friend hopped up behind him, and the two rode down Pennsylvania Avenue. But to their dismay, as they passed the White House, they recognized the Secretary of Treasury standing out in front, obviously not amused by their undignified conduct. Fortunately, he did not report the incident--much to the relief of the culprits.[3]

Lee is also remembered at this time for being extremely punctual--his arrival at Mrs. Ulrick's each day is said never to have varied more than a minute or two. He was also known for his attention to detail and his practice of expressing his appreciation of good work won him the life-long admiration of a local blacksmith named Schneider, whom he happened to observe shoeing a horse one day. Stopping to watch, Lee satisfied himself to the blacksmith's skill, and left his own horse to be shod after telling Schneider exactly how he wanted it done. Years later, the blacksmith recalled how that afternoon, when Lee returned from the office, he carefully lifted each foot of his horse, then turned and said to him: "You are the first man I have ever come across that could shoe a horse by my directions!" From then on--so goes the story--all the Arlington horses were sent over to Schneider.[4]

Except for the long ride and the extra expense of having a room in the city, Lee liked his new way of life. Mary was happy to be at home and her parents idolized their little grandson. More than ever, Lee was impressed by Mrs. Custis' warm heart and sincere piety, and while he was amused by the whimsicalities and enthusiasms of his father-in-law, respected him for his kindliness and open-handed hospitality. No stranger to Arlington to begin with, by the end of the winter Lee had

[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 38f.

become almost as much a part of the family circle as his wife.

In addition, the young couple found the social life of the neighborhood far more enjoyable than that at Old Point. To Lee, such events as the wedding of his brother Smith, were a welcome relief from the dull routine of officework. As he told his friend Talcott, about this event: "We kept agoing till Sunday and last night I attended a Bridal party in Alexandria....I will only tell that my Spirits were so buoyant last night, when relieved from the eyes of my Dame, that my sister Nanie was trying to pass me off as her spouse, but I was not going to have my sport spoiled that way, undeceived the young ladies and told them I was her younger brother. Sweet, innocent things, they concluded I was single and I have not had such soft looks and tender pressure of the hand for many years."[5] And to his brother Carter: "They had a gay wedding & have been on a routine of frolicacy ever since. Clermount, Ravensworth, Geotwn were in succession the scene of these antics. They go to Arlington tomorrow to spend the remainder of the week, when I believe they & the world, will be satisfied that they are married."[6]

Lee's father-in-law, though close to fifty-five, also enjoyed the excitement, making it his business to see everyone had a good time when the wedding party was at Arlington. Each night, he had had the big Washington punch bowl filled to the brim, allowing the company to drink until the hull of the frigate painted on the inside came in sight, after which he sent everyone off to bed.[7]

Knowing that his friends were always welcome to come for dinner or stay overnight, made Arlington seem more like home to Lee. "There will

[5]Feb. 10, 1835, Talcott MSS, Va. His. Soc.
[6]Feb. 24, 1835, Wagstaff MSS, U. of Va. The notice of the wedding appeared in Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 11, 1835.
[7]For the punch-bowl, see Long, Lee, 38; and Lossing, Mount Vernon, 317.

be one room devoted to the gentlemen," he wrote to an army acquaintance that winter, inviting him and four other young officers over for dinner--"those who can sleep three in a bed will find 'comfortable accomodations'".[8] That Mr. Custis could enter into the spirit of an occasion is shown by an anecdote which has survived from Smith Lee's wedding. As the story goes, seven young men of the wedding party were sleeping in one of the larger rooms upstairs when early one morning they were disturbed by footsteps clomping heavily up the stiars and across the bare floor, bringing wood to make fires. Annoyed, one of them called out, "Moses, why not come up on a pony?" Whereupon, the door was flung wide open, disclosing their host, who then declaimed in a sonorous voice: "Sleep no more; Macbeth hath murdered sleep!"[9]

Much as they were amused by Custis' whimsical humor, young people invariably respected his genuine reverence for his famous grandparents and his admiration for the heroes of the Revolutionary War. "Uncle Custis, who knows every one that was connected with the Revolution, speaks of your Grandfather in the highest terms," Angela Lewis, a bridesmaid at Smith's wedding, wrote her fiance.[10] Occasionally, to entertain his young friends, Custis would take up his old violin and, accompanied by the piano, play old military airs popular in his youth; and to those whom he especially liked, like Lee's friend Talcott, he would sometimes present some cherished mementoes of Washington, such as a letter bearing his signature.[11]

[8]Lee to John Macomb or Dick Tilghman, Jan. 10, 1835, quoted in part in Freeman, Lee, I, 133.

[9]Long, op. cit., 38.

[10]Mar. 14, 1835, Lewis Family Papers, Mt. Vernon, Va.

[11]For the violin, see B. J. Lossing, "Arlington House," Harper's Magazine, VII (Sept., 1853),454. The letter Custis gave Talcott, written to him by Washington Feb. 27,1797, is now in the Custis MSS, Va. His. Soc.

To Lee, being at Arlington must have been almost like living in the presence of Washington. Everything about the place bespoke the First President--portraits, dishes, furniture, silver and clothes; even some of the servants had come originally from Mount Vernon. Custis was the nearest link to the great hero, and associating with him and so many of the General's personal belongings made Washington very close and real to the young engineer, an example and influence that steadily permeated ever more deeply into Lee's own spirit and character.[12]

After Smith Lee's wedding, Arlington settled back into something resembling its former tranquility, though as always, it was usually crowded with relatives. "We have Sister Esther and her three boys, Mrs. Fitzhugh..., Miss Meade, her little neice and myself," Angela Lewis wrote from there in March. "On Monday Mr. Pettigrae dined and spent the evening and Mrs. Palmer came after dinner....Yesterday Mr. Turner and Mr. Barlow Mason dined here..., Mr. Carter who married my cousin Miss Calvert also...Today the Mason family...will call and probably dine."[13] Her only complaint, expressed in another letter, was that eligible young men never called there, now that she was engaged:

> The gentlemen in this District seldom find a Lady interesting enough after she is engaged to ride 4 miles to see her...They are always very polite when they meet them, but seldom take the trouble to pay them an especial visit, so you see I am entirely out of danger. As an instance of this fatal neglect My Cousin Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Powell (then Miss Turner) spent the winter after they were engaged here and not one of all their numerous acquaintances called once to see them. Sad! sad! is it not? [14]

[12]Freeman, Lee, I, 109f., 131.
[13]To C.M. Conrad, Mar. 21, 1835, Lewis Family Papers, Mt. Vernon, Va.
[14]Same to same, Mar. 14, 1835, Lewis Family Papers, Mt. Vernon, Va.

Lee fitted easily into the quiet family life at Arlington. When he and Mary entertained, like her parents they did so graciously, but without ostentation. Usually guests were seated at dinner with no regard for rank or social status; it was quite possible that some prominent public figure might find himself next to Mrs. Lee's dressmaker.[15]

He also enjoyed riding about the estate, or walking with Mary in the large flower garden south of the mansion which Mr. Custis had laid out for her mother years before. Both Mary and her mother were partial to roses, but the garden contained a variety of flowers and plants, some from friends with whom they exchanged seeds and cuttings. That spring, for instance, Mary's cousin, Julia Stuart, wrote to her:

> I wish while you are gardening you would raise me some young roses or any pretty flowers--you always have so many pretty varieties of flowers at Arlington. Have you not the Cherokee Rose? If you have and it is not too much trouble, I wish you would raise me one of that. I have heard it is beautiful...I intend to rival your Mother in that department. 16

Like most ladies of her class, Mary had a keen, if often uncritical interest in politics, especially those which affected the future prospects of her husband. "It is very cold and the river is frozen over for the third time this Winter; it is hard enough to bear a man's weight," Mary's cousin Angela, wrote from Arlington, late that winter. "The fourth of March is passed, and I have not heard a single debate...It is said the last days of the Session were somewhat stormy....Cousin Robert Lee will probably be over this evening and we shall then hear..."[17]

By again espousing the cause of the immigrant Irish, at a time when

[15]For the possibility of dressmaker eating with the family, see Miss Mary Custis to Mrs. Richard Lee, n.d., but c. 1829, Custis & Lee Family Papers, L. C.

[16]Julia C. Stuart to Mrs. Lee, May 15, 1833, Freeman MSS, Va. State Lib

[17]M.E. A. Lewis to C.M. Conrad, Mar. 5, 1835, Lewis Family Papers, Mt. Vernon, Va.

they were encountering the active hostility of "native" citizens, Lee's father-in-law found himself for a time in rough political waters. Extremist newspapers did their best to foster bad relations, and their pernicious influence was offset only by that of men, like Custis, who accepted the natural pride the immigrants felt in the land of their origin and sought to give them a sense of identity with their new country by sharing with them its heritage of freedom. In 1833, he had helped to revive the old "Friends of Civil and Religious Liberty," and it was as "the inflexible champion of liberty and of Ireland," that he addressed the annual Saint Patrick's Day celebration in Washington in 1835.[18]

Interestingly enough, this event took place in the Masonic Hall, showing that Custis was not alone in his views. In his speech, Custis said that he had hoped that the Catholic Emancipation Bill and the Reform Bill would improve the situation in Ireland, but since they had not, they should adopt any means, however violent, to achieve their national independence. Let them adopt as their national emblem the harp of Ireland and the rattlesnake of the American Revolution, and emulate the farmers of Lexington and Concord, who had "proved themselves to be the very best possible agitators when America's age of remonstrance had ended, and her age of resistance began."[19]

Reaction to his sentiments was immediate and partisan. "Albion" used the columns of the National Intelligencer to deplore the suggestion that arms be sent to Irish rebels; the harp and rattlesnake emblem he termed one of "the many singular conceits and incongruities which the Orator has assembled in his strange production." In turn, "Philohibernus"

[18]For his participation in the earlier organization, see Nat. Intelligencer, Apr. 29, 1833.

[19]Ibid., Apr. 6, 1835.

charged that "Albion" had "fallen into a fit of spleen," Let Albion boast of his English parentage, wrote the Irishman: "I can only say that I cannot envy his morbid temperament, but thank God that I am not an Englishman."[20]

In the early summer of 1835, Lee got a pleasant change from office work when he was assigned to help survey the boundary between Ohio and the territory of Michigan. When he left, he expected to be gone only a month, but instead it took several months to settle the disputed boundary line.[21]

Lee found working in the field most interesting, but became impatient to return home when he learned that he had a new daughter, born July 12, 1835, at Arlington.[22] His wife wrote that the baby was thriving and had been named Mary Custis Lee, but said little about her own condition.

Consequently, he was unprepared for the shock he received when he returned home in October to find her at Ravensworth, confined to her bed by a serious pelvic infection. The doctors blamed her condition on overexertion, but from the nature of her illness it seems more likely that it was the result of a dietary deficiency during pregnancy or infection received during the delivery. Thoroughly alarmed, Lee brought her home to Arlington, where her condition remained unchanged for some time. Then she began to mend slowly, although it was several months before she could walk about.[23]

"I have been too sick to answer your kind letter before, my dear

[20] Ibid., Apr. 10, 15, 1835.
[21] Freeman, Lee, I, 34f.
[22] Entry in Custis Family Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[23] MacDonald, op. cit., 59; Freeman, Lee, I, 134.

Harriet," she wrote to Mrs. Talcott in November, "& it is only for the last week I have been able to sit up at all....I have not gained strength sufficient to stand. You may suppose, after a confinement to my bed almost four months, I am much reduced & fear it will be some time before I shall be able to walk...My little Mary Custis has become very engaging & promises to be quite a beauty. She is a clear brunette with brown hair, very fine large black eyes, & a perfect little mouth & respectable nose & is perfectly fat & healthy..."[24]

Much as office work bored him, Lee felt that it was inadvisable under the circumstances to accept an assignment elsewhere. He realized that he would make little progress in his profession as long as he remained in Washington, but tried his best to be patient as the months slowly passed. To add to his burden of care, the children were often sick--"whooping, coughing, teething, etc. and sometimes all three together," he wrote to Talcott; and Mrs. Lee came down with the mumps.[25] "I never saw a man so changed and saddened," reported a cousin who saw him during the summer of 1836.[26]

Though depressed at times, Lee was encouraged by the fact Mary was able to journey to the mineral springs of Virginia that summer.[27] He also had had too much experience with sickness in caring for his mother in her declining years to let that of his family weigh his spirits down permanently. Writing to the Talcotts to reproach them for not stopping at Arlington when passing through Washington that summer, he was almost as buoyant in mood as before his wife's illness:

> But Talcott, my Beauty, how could you have served your uncle so! I know the sight of his red nose looming above the W/ashington/

[24] Nov. 21, 1835, Lee MSS, Va. His. Soc.
[25] Lee to A. Talcott, May 23, June 22, 1836, and Feb. 2, 1837; Lee MSS, Va. His. Soc.
[26] Statement of Marietta F.T. Powell, in Long, op. cit., 31.
[27] Ibid.

> wharf, would have been a grateful sight to you, and then your reception at A/rlington/ would have been so warm, for it was afterwards ascertained that the servant in preparing your room had made up a large hickory fire, the thermometer then ranging to about eighty degrees. 28

That Lee felt that his family and home were worth the worry they occasioned him is evident in the same letter:

> The country looks very sweet now, and the hill at A/rlington/ covered with verdure, and perfumed by the blossoms of the trees, the flowers of the Garden, HoneySuckles, yellow Jasmine, &c. is more to my taste than at any other Season of the year. But the brightest flower there blooming is my daughter. Oh, she is a rare one, and if only sweet sixteen, I would wish myself a cannibal that I might eat her up. As it is, I have given all the young ladies a holyday, and hurry home to her every day.

His irrepressible sense of humor shows up also in a letter he wrote to his brother Carter about this time:

> Mary has improved a little in health since the mild weather has commenced, and she has been enabled to take regular exercise. The Boo has the whooping cough, God bless him, But does not mind—whoops, falls down (not tolerably), gets up, and whoops again.... The Major /Mr. Custis/ is busy farming. His Cornfield is not yet enclosed or ploughed, but he 'is rushing on all he knows.' 29

Considering how much time Custis had given to his other interests that winter and spring, it is little wonder that he was late with his spring planting.

During most of 1835, Custis had done little with his pen except to carry on an interesting exchange of letters with historian Jared Sparks, who was collecting and editing the letters of George Washington for publication. He gave Sparks permission to have his Peale portrait of Washington copied for the book, also the bas-relief by Houdon, which he described as "large as life, and a fine classical thing with the Laurel

[28]Lee to A. Talcott, May 5, 1836, Lee MSS, Va. His. Soc.
[29]Same to Carter Lee, May 2, 1836, Lee MSS, Va. His. Soc.

wreath, after the antique..."[30] Though he would not risk sending the Peale portrait to Boston to be copied, he did send Sparks the almost equally famous Woolaston portrait of Martha Washington and the Houdon bas-relief, suggesting that they be exhibited in a Boston gallery to help raise funds for the great monument then being built on Bunker Hill.[31]

The Lees being at home, the new baby and Mary's illness may explain why her father wrote no new plays and only one chapter of his Recollections that year. The sketch of Martha Washington he had written the year before for the National Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans, was reprinted in the Alexandria Gazette for Washington's Birthday; in it he related the story of Washington's courtship and marriage, as told to him by his grandmother and some of the old servants.[32] That of General Daniel Morgan of Revolutionary War fame, appeared late in the year in the National Intelligencer. Written in the form of a conversation he had had as a boy with the old hero, it contained several of the General's statements which have an authentic ring, as when Morgan replied to the question of which of the many nationalities in the American armies made the best soldiers: "The men of all nations are pretty much alike; they fight as much as they find necessary, and no more. But, sir, for the grand essential in the composition of the good soldier, give me the Dutchman--he starves well." The old soldier had several stories to tell about his famed "Hunting Shirts," but his chief praise was reserved

[30]Custis to Jared Sparks, Feb. 19, 1835, Sparks MSS, Harvard U. In another letter, Dec. 8, 1835, he mentions that the portrait had been poorly copied by an earlier artist, who made "a little fortune" out of his engravings, copies of which had been bought by the government to give as presents to the Indians.

[31]Same to same, Nov. 11, 1835, Sparks MSS, Harvard U.

[32]Originally published in James Herring and James B. Longacre, eds., National Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans (4 vols. New York: M. Bancroft, 1834-1839), I, pt. 12.

for his old commander, about whom he was quoted as saying: "We had officers of great military talents...and officers of the most consumate courage and spirit of enterprise...One was necessary to guide, direct, and animate the whole, and it pleased Almighty God to send that one in the person of George Washington."[33]

With the turn of the year, just when his son-in-law's affairs were at their lowest, Custis was to be in the public eye more than ever before and reach the peak of his popularity as a dramatist. Though brief, it was to be an exciting period for the master of Arlington.

To begin with, the poem he had written some years before in honor of General Jackson, now set to music, was sung at the newly-erected and splendidly appointed National Theatre, at Washington, on the anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans, January 8th. It was repeated a few days later, when--according to one newspaper--"it was received with a singular exhibition of patriotic feelings, which could not restrain itself from repeatedly interrupting the song with deafening plaudits."[34]

All admirers of President Jackson were on hand a few days later, too, when the cornerstone of "Jackson City," at the Virginia end of the Potomac River Bridge, was dedicated. Promoted by a group of New York merchants, the new city was expected to rival Washington in size and importance when a bridge being planned was built across the river and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal was extended down the Virginia side of the Potomac to Alexandria. In anticipation of the day when cargoes of wheat and other commodities would be transferred from canal boats to ocean-going vessels at this point, the speculators had laid out squares and avenues, markets, an exchange, churches, and were selling lots on the

[33]Nat. Intelligencer, Dec. 14, 1835.
[34]The Metropolitan (Georgetown, D. C.), Jan. 11, 1836.

marshy meadows they had bought up.[35]

Custis disapproved of "the rage of speculation" then sweeping the country, the result of the craze for internal improvements--highways, canals and roads; but he could not resist the stirring prospect of a new city rising just south of his own estate, for if it were successful, it would not only enhance the value of his property, but also open a new era of prosperity for the entire section.[36]

Bad weather kept the dedication from being held on the appointed day, January 8th, the anniversary of the battle of New Orleans--an ill portent, as it turned out. It was still raining when the ceremony was held three days later, nevertheless Custis was on hand in the speaker's stand with his little grandson, "Boo" Lee, along with a number of Congressmen and cabinet members, and President Andrew Jackson.

After the President had officially laid the cornerstone, Custis was called upon to speak. The high wind and the surf beating noisily on the shore not far distant taxed his voice, yet he managed to make himself heard to the extreme edge of the crowd estimated at seven thousand--no mean feat for one who described himself as "an old orator whom time was warning to retire." Actually he was in top form. He was wildly applauded as he outlined the new era that was being ushered in by the great improvements in transportation. New ties were being forged between the sections, he said, and he welcomed his "Northern brethern" who were about to found a city with "their wealth, their industry, their spirit of enterprise." In passing, he reminded the President, that he had yet

[35]George W. Hughes, Report on a Survey of Jackson City, D. C... (Brooklyn, N. Y.: F. G. Fish, 1837), 1, 15. See also James S. Buckingham, America: Historical, Statistic, and Descriptive (3 vols. London: Fisher & Son, 1841), I, 372f.

[36]Custis to E. Stabler, June 25, 1836, Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Shop MSS, Alexandria, Va.; and Speech by Custis, reported in Nat. Intelligencer, Jan. 29, 1836.

another cornerstone to lay before his term of office expired--that of the monument to Washington. What could be more appropriate, he asked his audience, than to have the old hero of the "Second War of Independence" dedicate the monument to the leader of the first.

"Your orator will be there," he promised "and by the side of his grey hairs will be his little grandson who bears the venerated name of Washington..." He would suggest, he said, that instead of stone, the monument be made of earth, an enormous mound surmounted by a colossal statue of Washington. Not only would this be the most durable monument possible; every patriotic American would be able to have a hand in its building by bringing his bit of earth from some historic or hallowed spot.[37]

During the next few weeks, Custis was busy at the National Theatre, in Washington City, helping in the preparations for what promised to be the most spectacular performance of Pocahontas ever staged. This was the first time he had ever actually taken part in the production of one of his dramas, and he thoroughly enjoyed the excitement and activity that went into getting up the play, for which new scenery was being painted and authentic Indian costumes borrowed for the actors.[38]

When it opened in February, the applause it received from a packed house more than justified the effort that had gone into the production. The costumes were "magnificent," reported one newspaper; the play presented "in a more splendid and decided manner than anything we ever beheld in any theatre." According to another: "Mr. Custis has produced a very interesting drama from the materials at his command; the

[37] Nat. Intelligencer, Jan. 8, 29, 1836.
[38] The Globe (Washington, D. C.), Feb. 8, 1836.

piece was admirably got up." Afterwards, Custis was called upon to make a curtain speech--"his first appearance on the boards of any theatre," said the National Intelligencer. "He was evidently much affected with the flattering reception he met with..."[39]

Subsequent performances, one of which featured ten "Cherokee Chiefs" (according to the management), who performed "their Indian War Dance, exhibiting Hate, Triumph, Revenge, &c, and go through the Ceremony of Scalping," were equally successful. In all, Pocahontas was put on nine times that month, once for the benefit of the celecrated Edwin Booth.[40]

After such a hit, Custis knew he could get almost anything put on at the National Theatre. By working hard, he had another drama ready by the end of February, The Launch of the Columbia, or America's Blue Jackets Forever, the Columbia being a warship then being built at the local navy yard. He also took a hand in the production of this play. "I shall be engaged at the Theatre tomorrow morning and night in getting up a little National interlude...," he modestly informed some of his friends.[41] Special scenery, too, was painted for the piece, including a "View of the Navy Yard" used for a backdrop; a simulated launching was effected by some ingenious machinery. Naturally, the main characters were an assortment of sailors: Captain Steady, Ned Starboard, and a grog-tippling seaman named Crab, being the principals. A dance by the entire company and two songs, "The Sailor's Bride," and "The Land Lady," rounded out the production. And since the play opened on Washington's

[39] Ibid.; and Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 8, 1836.

[40] The Globe (Washington, D. C.), Feb. 11, 1836; and Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 6, 8, 9-19. It is said that the success of Custis' drama inspired Gen. Alexander Macomb, then in command of the Army, to write an Indian play, Pontiac, or the Seige of Detroit, performed that season at the National, for which, see Alexander Hunter and J. H. Polkinhorn, New National Theatre, Washington, D. C. (Washington, D. C.: R. O. Polkinhorn & Son, 1885), 16.

[41] Custis to J. P. Van Ness and John Boyle, Feb. 21, 1836, Misc. Pers. Papers, L. C.

Birthday,[42] a poem written by Custis in honor of that event was included.

This production, too, was well received, if less enthusiastically than Pocahontas. According to one critic: "The Ship Launch went off very well last night. The scenery was admirable, the songs good,--and the whole as a little entertaining interlude very spirited." He mentioned the author had had to make another curtain speech "in his usual felicious style, and was responded to with great applause." But most pleasing to Custis was the fact that the piece was repeated intermittently until the launching of the real vessel at the Navy Yard ended public interest.[43]

March was another busy month for Custis. He wrote another of his Recollections, "Thomas Nelson," for the Intelligencer, in which he told how, at the seige of Yorktown, Governor Nelson had ordered Allied artillery to fire on his own house because he believed the British had their headquarters in it. Surely, he said, the government should reimburse Nelson's heirs for the losses he had suffered.[44] But nothing came of his appeal.

He also addressed the Saint Patrick's Day celebration in Georgetown, was reappointed justice of the peace for Alexandria County by President Jackson, and--according to the newspapers--worked on his romantic play, Montgomerie,[45] "altering, retouching, and preparing it for the stage." This, according to a "puff" put out by the manager of the National, was

[42] The Globe (Washington, D. C.), Feb. 17, 22, 23, 1836; and Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 24, 1836.

[43] The Metropolitan (Georgetown, D. C.), Feb. 24, 1836. The Ship Launch was performed Feb. 25, 27, 29, and Mar. 6, 11, 1836, for which see Nat. Intelligencer, for these dates.

[44] "Thomas Nelson", in ibid., Mar. 3, 1836.

[45] Ibid., Mar. 14, 1836; Metropolitan (Georgetown, D. C.), Mar. 16, 1836. The appointment as justice of peace is recorded in Records of Alexandria Co., D. C. Deed Book W-2, 428f. Custis was first appointed justice of peace by President Madison in 1818; for which, see Alexandria Gaz., Apr. 20, 1810. For Custis rewriting Montgomerie, see ibid., Feb. 27, 1836.

"purely original, being founded on neither tale or legend, and written in the intervals of the employments of a country gentleman." Another said that it had been cut from five to four acts and put in a more melodramatic form by adding music and giving it spectacular scenery.[46]

Montgomerie opened at the National, April 11, 1836. Despite its claims to originality, its setting in the Scottish Highlands in the 13th Century and theme, "the spirit of that age of chivalry," show that it was inspired by the romantic English novelists popular in the South at this time. Several scenes could have come right out of one of Sir Walter Scott's novels—one in the kitchen of a castle, another in a medieval prison, and the climax of the play, in which "the Lord of the Isles" appeared in his galleys to take a Lady Marion as his bride.[47]

The fact that it was imitative rather than original, at least partly explains the difficulty in getting the play produced heretofore; and public response to it, when it did appear on the stage of the National confirmed the managers' earlier judgment. "Montgomerie failed," was Robert Lee's succinct comment to brother Carter.[48] The anti-administration Mirror, seizing the opportunity to flay a friend of President Jackson, said that same thing at greater length—"a more vapid, tedious and uninteresting production never wearied the patience of an audience."[49] But another paper said that the play had gone off with "considerable eclat;" it termed the scenery "magnificent," the acting "accomplished."

The curtain call with which the author was honored at the first

[46] Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 26, 1836; The Globe (Washington, D. C.) Apr. 11, 1836.

[47] Ibid.; and Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 26, 1836. Abholograph ms. of Montgomerie is in the Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.

[48] Lee to Carter Lee, May 2, 1836, Lee MSS, U. of Va.

[49] The Mirror (Washington, D. C.), Apr. 16, 1836. This paper was bitterly anti-administration and went out of existance later this year, shortly after the election of Martin Van Buren.

performance could only have been a tribute to his popularity, for the play had too short a run to have been a financial success.[50] At that time, Custis announced that he was writing a new play, Monongahela, but actually the time in which native dramatists like himself could get their works staged was fast coming to an end.[51] Almost all the actors and managers who had encouraged the native drama were now old or dead, and in their place were men from abroad who believed that no American playwright could rise above mediocrity and that the country itself had no history or national characteristics worthy of stage presentation. By now, New York was the undisputed theatrical capital of the country and its stars and plays were mainly English, leading Horace Greely to complain, two years later:

> Mr. Price, the autocrat and dictator of the theatrical entertainments of the United States, sits in his parlor in Regent Street, and marks out the whole business of the Park [Theatre, New York] for the season. So dictatorial is he in his edicts, that...he will tell you in London the very bill of performance at the Park on any given night. It is with foreign actors, and foreign playwrights and plays that he deals alone, and the consequence is that the Park is no more an American theatre than Drury Lane or Covent Garden. [52]

Such conditions doomed the native drama to quick extinction. Within a year or two it would be impossible for a native dramatist, such as Custis, to get a play staged. Nevertheless, he could be proud that, while the opportunity existed, he had played an important part in creating a distinctive native drama.[53]

[50] It played four times, for which see The Globe (Washington, D. C.) Apr. 11-15, 1836.
[51] The Metropolitan (Georgetown, D. C.), Apr. 13, 1836.
[52] The New Yorker, VI (Nov., 1838), 135.
[53] Quinn, op. cit., I, 232.

Other disappointments awaited. Jackson City failed when Congress refused to incorporate it on the grounds that the District already had enough cities.[54] By the time the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal was extended to Alexandria, in 1843, the project was dead; only one house marked the site of what was to have been a great city; and the cornerstone, laid with such pomp in 1836 was being used by Negroes to pound hominy.[54]

More serious to Custis was the humiliation he experienced in connection with a large painting (thirteen by eleven feet) of General Washington at the Battle of Trenton which, when finished, he placed on exhibition in the rotunda of the Capitol.[55] "The 'big Picture' has been exhibited at the Capitol, and attracted some severe animadversions from the critics, which he [Custis] says were levelled at his Politics'.," Lee explained humorously to his brother Carter.[56] Actually, there was a certain amount of truth in Custis' contention, for an artist did not need to be a master to exhibit his works in the Capitol at that time, and Custis' friend, John Trumbull could testify from experience how much politics--and spiteful wit--could enter into the critical evaluation of a picture displayed at the Capitol. In this case, Custis could only assert to the request of the superintendent of the building that he remove it, though he protested that some "excellent artists, candid, liberal men" had said the picture had "some good points, & good painting in it." He had ordered his agent to remove the picture, he informed the superintendent, "and on his return to cast it from the Bridge into the Potomac, that it may offend no more."[57]

[54]The committee hearings are reported in The Mirror (Washington, D.C.), Apr. 2, 1836. Also Ben: Perley Poore, "Waifs from Washington," Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion, IV (Mar. 19, 1853), 190.

[55]Custis describes the picture and announces his intention to display it in the Capitol in his letter to Jared Sparks, Dec. 8, 1835, Sparks MSS, Harvard U.

[56]Lee to Carter Lee, May 2, 1836, Lee MSS, U. of Va.

[57]Custis to Major Knowland, Apr. 25, 1836, Berkeley MSS, U. of Va.

For a time, he thought of going to New England to see the historic sites of the Revolution, but could not because he was building a large new mill on Four Mile Run; also some notes he held on Alexandria banks were not being honored elsewhere--a storm warning of the panic that was to strike within a few months.[58] Irish tact, on the part of his friends, Dr. Mulledy and Father James Ryder of Georgetown College, did much to restore his vanity by making him a member of the Philodemic Society of the college and requesting him to paint another large equestrian portrait of Washington for it.[59]

Lee also had had some experience with "politics" earlier that spring, when he attempted--unsuccessfully--to promote the interests of the Corps of Engineers with Congress.[60] His friend Talcott had quit the Army to practice his profession as a civilian, and Lee was tempted to do likewise in the belief that it was almost futile to stay in a service where opportunities were so limited. A promotion to first lieutenant in September, 1836, seemed picayune compared to the large salaries and responsible positions some of his former army friends were getting on "the outside."[61]

Only Mary's sickness had kept him from resigning, he confided to Talcott; any move was out of the question at a time when he could not leave her and she could not go with him. "I am waiting, looking and

[58]Custis to Sparks, June 1, 1836, Sparks MSS, Harvard U; and same to E. Stabler, June 25, 1836, Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Shop MSS, Alexandria, Va. For the mill, see Records of Alexandria Co., D.C. Deed Book W-2, 184ff. The mill was torn down about 1880, but the mill dam and race were in use in conjunction with an ice-plant as late as 1946; for which see Stetson, op. cit., 62; and D. Lee, op. cit., 115.

[59]Custis to Prof. J. Ryder, Aug. 15, 1836, Georgetown U. Archives.

[60]Freeman, Lee, I, 135.

[61]Ibid. Lee was promoted to first lieutenant, Sept. 21, 1836.

hoping for some good opportunity to bid an affectionate farewell to my dear Uncle Sam," he wrote, "and I seem to think thatvsaid opportunity is to drop in my lap like a ripe pear, for d...l a stir have I made in the matter....You may think it remarkable that a man of my standing should not have been sought after by all these companies of internal improvement, but I assure they have never even consulted me as to their best measures."[62]

By the spring of 1837, when his wife had regained her health and Lee could look about for bigger opportunities, it was too late. The great panic that struck that year brought most construction projects to an abrupt halt. Mary's parents probably would have been most happy had he resigned to take over some of the responsibilities of managing their scattered properties. Indeed Mrs. Custis seems to have convinced herself that Lee was cut out to be a farmer. "I think your Father would have been glad in the earlier years of his married life to exchange his profession for that of a farmer if circumstances had permitted," she would tell Custis Lee, some years later.[63]

Probably this was nothing but wishful thinking, for there is no indication that Lee had such a yearning, then or later. He liked his profession and would have remained in it, either in or out of the army, and agricultural conditions in his section at this time were hardly tempting.

The economic storm that kept Lee in the Army, also gave the native drama its quietus. Early in the year, the 8th of January was performed

[62]Lee to A. Talcott, Feb. 2, 1837, Lee MSS, Va. His. Soc.
[63]Mrs. Custis to G. W. C. Lee, Dec. 5, 1851, DeButts-Ely MSS.

three times at the National Theatre in Washington, Pocahontas twice.[64] The first named was advertised as having "new music, scenery, and machinery," but Pocahontas lacked the extravagant scenery of the previous year. Indeed, it was the heavy expense of staging such productions that caused many companies to drop them from their repetoire as the depression deepened and theatre after theatre closed. Even the New York theatres were hard hit, causing Horace Greely to remark: "True we have seen no one who has visited a theatre in many a day."[65] The situation was far worse in Washington where the practice of giving fashionable balls and parties during the theatre season cut into theatre attendance. Only one of its two theatres survived the panic, only to go under five years later for lack of patronage.[66]

It was to be many years before native dramatists would again have the opportunity to have their nationalistic work produced. By that time, plantation society in the South would be more static, more under the influence of the romantic tradition inspired by English novelists, and there would be proportionately less stimulus for creative minds.[67]

Even now, Custis felt himself growing old. He would soon be fifty-six, he told Jared Sparks, in June, 1837. He wanted to visit New England in the near future, he said. "I shall [then] return satiated with gratification to my retirement, my Recollections, & my dear little Grandchildren."[68]

[64]For the 8th of January, see The Globe (Washington, D. C.), Jan. 7-10, 1837. For Pocahontas, see ibid., Feb. 11, 1837, and The Metropolitan (Georgetown, D. C.), Feb. 1, 1837.

[65]Rees, op. cit., viii; William B. Wood, Personal Recollections of the Stage (Philadelphia: H. C. Baird, 1855), 391, 403, 406; and Reese D. James, Old Drury of Philadelphia (Philadelphia: U. of Pa.; 1932), 67f. The quotation is from the New Yorker, III (Apr., 1837), 95.

[66]George Walterson, A New Guide to Washington (Washington, D. C.: R. Farnham, 1842), 145f. Also Nat. Intelligencer, Apr. 15, 1842.

[67]Vernon L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thoughts (3 vols. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1939), II, 30.

[68]Custis to J. Sparks, June 12, 1837, Sparks MSS, Harvard U.

At the time he wrote, the number of the latter had just been increased to three by the arrival of another little Lee, a boy born at Arlington on May 30, 1837, and named Henry Fitzhugh after Mrs. Custis' deceased brother.[69] The mother was doing well, the father wrote his friend Talcott a few weeks after the event: "Her little lamb is as ugly as ever, though she still thinks his nose is to subside, his mouth contract, eyes to open, hair to curl, etc, etc, and in fact to become a perfect beauty."[70]

Lee was light-hearted, not only because of the new baby, but because he was about to leave for St. Louis, there to take charge of the work of clearing the Mississippi River of sand bars and mud flats which threatened to destroy the river commerce of that city. He was in high spirits at the thought of the stimulating and important project that lay ahead. "You know I was sick of the duties of the office and wished to get away," he confided to another friend.[71]

With both mother and baby doing well, he was able to leave Arlington by the end of June. "I shall leave my family in the care of my eldest son, who will take them over the mountains somewhere this summer, and his grandmother along with them," he wrote to Talcott.[72]

After years of patient drudgery, his first big opportunity had come at last.

[69]Entry in Cu[illegible]mily Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS. Also Freeman, Lee, I, 137.
[70]Lee to A.[illegible] June 29, 1837, Lee MSS, Va. His. Soc.
[71]Lee to Mac[illegible]. 12, 1837, quoted in Freeman, Lee, I, 139.
[72]Lee to A.[illegible] June 29, 1837, Lee MSS, Va. His. Soc.

CHAPTER XI

JOURNEY TO THE WEST

Lee's elation with his new assignment was tempered with regret as he travelled west, accompanied by a young lieutenant only recently graduated from West Point, Montgomery C. Meigs. From Baltimore, where the two stopped for a short time, Lee wrote of his misgivings to Mary. "I must tell you how distressed I was to leave you," he said, in part, "and the dear children and Mother and all, to go so far away in a comparatively wild country, with none to protect you and none to comfort me, But I hope it is all for the best..."[1]

It happened that the Washington war tents and other Arlington relics were then on exhibition at a "Museum" in Baltimore, so Lee went to see them. "Tell your Father that the tent looked very well," he told Mary. "It is pitched in a fine large room and makes a Handsome Show, with the bust of Washt. at the middle of the farther extremity and a flag one each side, one bearing the inscription--Surrender of Yorktown--and the other, The Heights of Dorchester. It appears to be in a Safe and good Situation..." Referring to some plumbing being installed at Arlington, he continued: "Tell Mother I was going to day to see about her pipes, but on a further consideration I thought she would not be able to compass the matter unless I was there, as they would have to be laid with care, and the joints in Lead, and that she might go to some expense, and

[1]Lee to Mrs. Lee, July 12, 1837, Freeman MSS, Va. State Lib.

this not answer after all. So I thought she had better give it up for the present."[2]

Heeding her husband's advice that she and the children "be off to the Spring the first week in August, not to return till October," Mrs. Lee passed the summer in visiting relatives and friends at "Ravensworth," "Chantilly," "Kinloch," whose master, Thomas Turner, had been Lee's guardian after his father's death, and "Audley," the home of her cousin, Lorenzo Lewis. It was fall when she and her brood returned to Arlington.[3]

Reading and sewing, caring for her little ones, entertaining friends or occasionally visiting them--such was the round of Mary Lee's days while her husband was away. Her long, chatty letters kept him informed on happenings at Arlington, while his kept her posted on the progress of his work. He never failed to ask after the children whom he sadly missed, and usually there was some message for them, as when he wrote soon after his arrival in St. Louis:

> Tell Boo that I have closely inspected all the little boys on my journey, and have looked long and wistfully to see if any were like him. It was all in vain and my feelings each time were sadder than before....Now that the anxiety and excitement of the journey are over my thoughts return more forcible and longingly to all at Dear A/rlington/.[4]

A month later, from a camp on the Illinois shore of the Des Moines River, he wrote:

> I am very anxious, My dear Mary, to get back to see you all ....I dream of you and the dear little children nearly every night, and our last romp together was a race on the hill, in which the little woman flew like a gazelle, and far outran the Boo--Even I had some difficulty in keeping pace with her....Tell Mr. Boo I see plenty of Indians paddling their canoes along the river, dressed in all their finery and blankets, and some not dressed at all....Tell him I can find no ponies, though I see quantities of

[2]Ibid. Some remains of ante-bellum plumbing in the house have been attributed to Lee.

[3]For her itinerary, see MacDonald, op. cit., 62.

[4]Lee to Mrs. Lee, Aug. 5, 1837, DeButts-Ely MSS.

squirrels, partridges, hares, prairie hens &c as I pass along the banks and shores... [5]

Though far away, he was much interested in the "improvements" that were being made from time to time on the house or farm. "I suppose the Major's enclosures have been sometime finished, and Gates up, which will be a great comfort to the whole establishment," he wrote, in October. "Arlington must now look beautiful, and you and your Mother much engaged with your improvements." [6] Occasionally, he would add a postscript to "my Dearest Father," usually on a subject he knew would particularly interest him, such as how well Jared Spark's Washington was selling in St. Louis. [7]

He was greatly concerned that Mary now had to rear the children alone. Someone had led him to believe that their eldest boy was being spoiled by relatives and servants, and Lee sought to aid her by his advice: "I suppose from your letter you have all returned to Arlington by this time," he wrote, "you will now be able to put them under a proper restraint, in which you were probably obliged to relax while visiting among Strangers...Our dear little Boo seems to have among his friends a reputation of being hard to manage, a distinction not at all desirable....I pray God to watch over and direct our efforts in guarding our dear Son, that we may bring him up "in the way he should go." [8]

It may be that the boy was being spoiled by his grandparents, who thought of him as the future master of Arlington. Still, the five-year old lad seems to have already acquired something of his father's strong sense of responsibility. According to one story, Lee is said to have told him, on parting, to "look after mother"--words the little boy took

[5]Same to same, Sept. 10, 1837, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[6]Same to same, Oct. 16, 1837; both in DeButts-Ely MSS.
[7]Same to Custis, Aug. 25, 1837, Wagstaff MSS, U. of Va.
[8]Same to Mrs. Lee, Oct. 16, 1837, DeButts-Ely MSS.

so seriously, he could always be brought around whenever he became difficult by a gentle reminder that his father had left the family in his care.[9]

Never since their marriage had the Lees been apart at Christmas, and as that of 1837 neared, everyone hoped that Lee would be able to return home for the holidays. Fortunately, he was able to do so, travelling by steamer to Wheeling, then by road to Frederick, where he took the new Baltimore and Ohio Railroad into Washington. The cars were drawn by horses part of the distance, but nevertheless the new method of travel was comparatively rapid, and Lee was probably able to reach Arlington by Christmas, where he spent part of the winter on leave and the rest on duty in the Engineer's office in Washington.[10]

Therefore, he got to read another of his father-in-law's Recollections which appeared in the National Intelligencer, in January. Entitled "Washington's Life-Guard," the article described the uniforms and composition of the special body of elite troops which guarded Washington's headquarters during much of the Revolution and told in some detail of an engagement near Philadelphia in 1778, in which it had fought under the command of Lafayette.[11]

He also got to read the interesting correspondence Custis published in March concerning the beautiful marble mantel which is the salient feature of the banquet hall. Some question had arisen as to its origin, and therefore Custis had written to the three surviving children of the donor, an English merchant named Samuel Vaughn, to learn what they knew

[9]Joseph L. Howe, "George Washington Custis Lee," Va. His. Mag., vol. 48 (Oct., 1940), 316.

[10]Freeman, Lee, I, 147f., Long, op. cit., 42.

[11]Jan. 30, 1838.

about it. Their answers, giving the detailed history of the mantel, he then published in the National Intelligencer, together with two letters Washington had written to the donor telling him of the mantel's safe arrival and thanking him for the magnificent gift. The editor explained that Custis would have preferred to deposit the letters in the "archives" of Mount Vernon had there been such, but since there were none, had decided that the columns of the Intelligencer was the next best means of ensuring their preservation.[12]

Lee was also at Arlington when his father-in-law braved the intermittant rain and snow on Saint Patrick's Day to speak at the gala dinner in Washington in honor of the patron saint of Ireland. According to the newspapers, his speech was "eloquent and amusing speech,...replete with revolutionary anecdotes and classical allusions breathing a most liberal spirit towards the adopted citizens..."[13]

When spring was not far off, Lee prepared to leave for St. Louis with his family, except little Mary who would stay behind with her gramdparents.[14]

The Lees were busy packing for their journey about the time that a young artist, Peter Anderson, came over to Arlington to sketch the view from the portico. The finished drawing, published as a lithograph a few months later, was expertly done, though some prominent features of the scene were not depicted accurately. Houses and barns down on the Farm

[12]Nat. Intelligencer, Mar. 14, 1838. Until these letters were brought to light by the author, it was believed that the mantels had been purchased new by Vaughan to present to Washington, for which, see Worth Bailey, "George Washington's New Room," in Journal of Soc. of Architectural Historians, X (May, 1951), 18.

[13]Nat. Intelligencer, Mar. 19, 1838.

[14]Lee to A. Talcott, Mar. 17, 1838, Misc. MSS, N. Y. His. Soc.

were drawn carefully, and a vignette of the mansion shows that no changes had been made as yet on the exterior of the house. No doubt the print sold well, for the view from Arlington was then considered one of the finest in America. "Those who have visited Arlington," read a "blurb" for the picture, "have never failed to admire the beauty, variety and magnificence of the prospect that opens before them. We have seen nothing in the United States to surpass it. The Capitol, the President's House, the broad and winding Potomac, the entire City, with the glorious amphitheatre of the hills beyond, are before the eye of a spectator as on a map."[15]

On their way west, Mary and Robert stopped over in Baltimore to have their portraits made by a young American artist, William E. West. Robert was reluctant to delay their journey, but Mary induced him to send back to Arlington for his dress uniform. This is the first portrait for which Lee is known to have sat, and it shows him in the full-dress uniform of a lieutenant of engineers. His thick hair is glossy black, with a pronounced wave, and he is wearing the side-whiskers fashionable at the time. His bearing is dignified and his eye candid, although lacking any sign of his usual good humor. Mary's portrait shows her in a fashionable gown and emphasizes her fine eyes and long nose. Mary liked both portraits, so much, in fact, she wanted her parents to come to Baltimore and have West do theirs. "It will only cost you $500," she wrote.[16]

Robert, too, wrote to Mrs. Custis from Baltimore, on a more important subject--his reasons for staying in the Army:

[15] Christian Statesman (Washington, D. C.), Apr. 3, June 29, 1838. The lithograph, in the N. Y. Public Library is reproduced in I. N. Phelps Stokes and Dan C. Haskell, American Historical Prints, Early Views of American Cities, &c. (New York: N. Y. Pub. Lib., 1933).

[16] Lee and Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Custis, Mar. 24, 1838, DeButts-Ely MSS.

> We were much grieved My dearest Mother to part with you and the Major, and I sincerely wish that our absence may be a short one. If our own interest or welfare were alone concerned I am certain we should not have done it (I mean that I should not have sought to have left Wash.) But I think it my duty to make a sacrifice, and even a greater one, to try and advance myself in any profession, and be thereby enabled to give our dear children such an education and standing in life as we could wish. Of all things in this world, the most bitter reflection to me in after life, should I be spared to see them grow up, would be that I had given them reason to think I had preferred my own ease and comfort to their welfare and interest and not improved such opportunities I might possess for their advantage. Shoulf I fail in my attempts which is equally probable, I should have nothing to reproach myself with, or they to regret. You may be sure that we shall always be anxious to return to you, and shall lose no opportunity of so doing, will dwell with delight upon your pure affection and kindness and should you be visited with sickness or trouble will leave every thing to come to you. That God in his great mercy may long spare and forever bless you both is our earnest and constant prayer....
>
> Your Afft. Son
> R. E. Lee [17]

From Baltimore, the Lees went to Philadelphia and thence to Pittsburgh, where they had to wait a week for a steamer down the Ohio to Louisville. The delay may have influenced Lee's unflattering description of the place--"the darkest, bleakest place I ever put foot in. Even the snow, milk and everything intended by nature to be white, not excepting the rosy cheeks of the pretty grils, partake of its dingy nature, and I am afraid my complexion is ruined."[18] They bought some furniture in Cinncinnati, but luckily did not take the boat for Saint Louis in which it was shipped, for it blew up and sank en route, taking all their belongings with it.[19]

It was a long trip, but the Lees found it pleasant enough despite the "crowding, squeezing, and scrambling," that especially annoyed Mary.[20] Even after the Lees were settled in their new quarters, river life continued to fascinate the boys. "As drumming was the mania at Old Point, riding and driving at Arlington, now steamboating is all the rage here,"

[17] Ibid.
[18] Lee to Mrs. A. Talcott, May 29, 1838, Lee MSS, Va. His. Soc.
[19] Freeman, Lee, I, 149.
[20] Quoted in part in MacDonald, op. cit., 71.

Lee wrote the Talcotts from St. Louis. "They convert themselves even into steamboats, ring their bells, raise their steam (high pressure), and put off. They fire up so frequently, and keep on so heavy a pressure of steam, that I am constantly fearing they will burst their boilers."[21]

Lee had expected to be away from his family much of the time while supervising the work of clearing the channel of the upper reaches of the river, but high water prevented much being done before winter, so he was seldom away from the city. He was also engaged in building a dike to clear the silt out of the river channel in front of the city, and was greatly pleased when it began to accomplish its object even before it was entirely completed. He was gratified, too, with his promotion to captain as of August 7, 1838, though he had some misgivings as to the effect it might have in keeping him permanently in the army. "I do not know," he told a friend, "whether I ought to rejoice or not....as in all my schemes of happiness I look forward to returning to some quiet corner among the hills of Virginia where I can indulge my natural propensities without interruption, and I suppose the more comfortably I am fixed in the Army, the less likely I shall be to leave it."[22]

Though she missed her little daughter, Mrs. Lee was happy to be with her husband and the boys, caring for whom made the time pass rapidly. Their rooms were clean and pleasant, with a good view out over the river, and for diversion, there were frequent walks and outings and an occasional visit with some of their acquaintances in the city. She also had time to read from the wide selection of English novels and poems she had brought from Arlington, from whence, too, occasionally came news and

[21]Lee to Mrs. Talcott, May 29, 1838, Lee MSS, Va. His. Soc.

[22]Freeman, Lee, I, 150-153; and Lee to Mrs. H. Hackley, Aug. 7, 1838, Lee MSS, Va. His. Soc. For Lee's promotion, see G. O. #23, July 12, 1838, A. G. O., W. D. Records, Nat. Archives.

packages, brought by Army friends who had called there when in Washington.[23]

As she had at Fort Monroe, Mary kept her parents well posted as to all events, great and small. She also succeeded in getting her mother to have West paint her portrait and that of little Mary, though Mrs. Custis was somewhat dissatisfied with the portraits the artist had made of the Lees. "I am glad you like my portrait better," wrote Mary to her mother, that fall. "I did not like either of them altogether, but I had only a moment to look at them after they were finished....You have no idea how much company yours is for me & the likeness grows upon one."[24]

As usual, too, Mrs. Custis kept the Lees informed on all that occurred at home, also Mary's father, though he wrote less frequently. It may be expected that she enclosed newspaper clippings of interesting events in which Mr. Custis participated, such as the presentation, on the 4th of July, of a silk flag, to the Potomac Dragoons and his address at the Georgetown College commencement dinner later in the month.[25] Typical was the letter she wrote from Woodlawn, in November. Her sister-in-law's house, she said, was even colder than Arlington; and she mentioned, among other items of interest, that her husband had put a fence around "the old tree,"--which was either the famed Arlington Oak at the Spring, or the equally famed "Pope's Willow" behind the house, and that she had then planted ivy about it.[26]

During the winter months, Lee had little to do but make plans and estimates for the next season's work. To divert himself, he studied his ancestry, a subject in which he had recently become interested. "I

[23]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Custis, n.d., quoted in part in MacDonald, op. cit., 73.

[24]Same to same, n. d., quoted in part in ibid., 73; and same to same, also n. d., ibid., 74ff.

[25]For the 4th of July speech, see Nat. Intelligencer, July 9, 1838. For the commencement, see ibid.; July 27, 1838.

[26]Mrs. Custis to Mrs. Lee, Nov. 28, 1838, Freeman MSS, Va. State Lib.

begin in my old age to feel a little curiosity relative to my forefathers, their origin, whereabouts, etc.," he wrote his cousin, Cassius Lee, asking for a copy of the family's coat of arms from which he could have a seal cut to pass on to his children.[27]

Lee of course understood his relationship to the other Lees of northern Virginia and his general line of descent, and Cassius Lee sent along a sketch of the family prepared by William Lee. This apparently was all Lee ever knew concerning his family. Still, it was enough to make him conscious of the family tradition of honor, loyalty and public service, ideals which he was to make his own.[28]

Another baby was expected in June, so Lee prepared to take Mary and the boys home to Arlington at the first opportunity. He finished his work in January and was free to leave, but the rivers were still closed to navigation, so they had to wait patiently until the steamboats began running in the spring.[29]

So long had it been since any of Custis' plays were performed, the news that The Indian Prophecy had played at the Tremont Theatre, Boston, in February, must have come as something of a surprise to the Lees. From the notices, the production seems to have been more of a tableau than a play, featuring "a series of living pictures on a raised stage...within a massive frame 18 feet by 16, illustrative of some of the principal scenes in the Revolution."[30] This was the last time any of Custis' plays

[27]Lee to A. Talcott, Aug. 7, 1837, Lee MSS, Va. His. Soc.; and Same to Cassius F. Lee, Aug. 20, 1838, quoted in Fitzhugh Lee, op. cit., 29f.
[28]Freeman, Lee, I, 159, 169.
[29]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Custis, Jan., n. d., 1839, quoted in part in MacDonald, op. cit., 78.
[30]Evening Transcript (Boston, Mass.), Feb. 22-26, 1839.

were ever performed, but he seems to have been momentarily encouraged to hope that Monongahela, written three years before and as yet never performed, might be put on at the same theatre. He sent the manuscript to his Boston friend, Edward Everett, but evidently was unable to interest anyone in it.[31]

In the course of his usual St. Patrick's Day address, the following month, Custis predicted that someday the Irish would find a leader to make their country free as Washington had America, for the influence of American liberty was spreading throughout the world. "Give the People light," he said, "and those antiquated systems, hoary with the wrongs of ages, will be leveled with the dust, while from their ruins will arise a proud and massive structure, founded upon the adamantine bases of equal rights and equal laws!" In England, for example, the people were demanding the repeal of the Corn Laws which starved them to enrich a "graceless oligarchy." Closing, he expressed the hope that when in time his prediction of freedom for Ireland did come true, "a son of Erin may make a pilgrimage to the prophet's grave.../ and/ plant a shamrock there, exclaiming as he went on his way, 'Peaceful be his rest, he was the friend and orator of Ireland.'" According to one newspaper: "Many sons of Erin went up to the orator and shook him by the hand, assuring him that by Irishmen he would never be forgotten."[32]

The reference to the Corn Laws was not inadvertent, inasmuch as they restricted the importation of grain from America, thereby diminishing Custis' return from his farms. Their effect on his fortunes was the more serious, for ever since the panic two years before he had been over-drawing his account with the manager of his Pamunkey River plantations. Lee, aware

[31] Custis to E. Everett, June 17, 1839, Everett MSS, Mass. His. Soc.
[32] Nat. Intelligencer, Apr. 10, 1839.

of the seriousness of the situation, urged his father-in-law to do everything possible to correct it. "Every effort should be made to reduce the expenses of the Establishment to the revenue," he wrote Mrs. Custis, in the spring of 1839. "So long as it exceeds it, the Major will have no peace or quiet, and be constantly harassed by little debts."[33]

Lee was hopeful that his father-in-law would get a good price for the Arlington land which would be used for the extension of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal to Alexandria, work on which had recently been resumed, though he expected that the canal-building itself would lure the slaves from their work, diminishing the return from that estate. "The whole place will be exposed to the depredations of the public, his own people will have more opportunity for gossip and idleness, and greater temptation and inducement to appropriate the small proceeds of their labor to themselves..," he warned Mrs. Custis.[34]

Doubtless, Mrs. Custis also informed the Lees of the movement underway to erect a statue of Washington in the City Hall, across the river. Her husband had been asked by the city fathers to help them decide what was the best likeness of the First President, a subject on which probably no one was better informed, as his answer shows. Custis suggested that the head be modelled after Gilbert Stuart's famous portrait, but not the body--Stuart had made Washington round and plump after the English fashion; and the body as depicted by John Trumbull--tall, lean, with wide shoulders and exceptionally large hands and thick wrists. He also suggested that the General's uniform be the old Continental blue and buff.[35]

[33] Mar. 20, 1839, DeButts-Ely MSS,
[34] Ibid.
[35] Custis to T. Carberry, Apr. 7, 1838, Wash. Monument Soc. Records, Nat. Archives.

For some reason--probably lack of funds--the statue was never made, but from this time on Custis would often be consulted by artists and writers regarding Washington's personal appearance.

On May 1, exactly one year from the day they had arrived there, the Lees left St. Louis on a steamboat bound for Wheeling. From there, they travelled in a private stage to Frederick, Md., and thence to Arlington, making the trip as leisurely as possible because of Mrs. Lee's condition. Nevertheless, she found it very tiring, and Lee was happy when he at last had her safely home and in her mother's care again. He was also pleased that the whole trip had been accomplished in only eleven days.[36]

Lee would have liked to have waited at Arlington until the baby was born, but could not because work was about to resume on the river project at St. Louis. Therefore, about May 25, he set out alone, going by way of Staunton to a little town on the Ohio River where he boarded a steamboat bound for Cincinnati. As the boat sped all too swiftly down the river, his thoughts kept turning to Arlington. Homesick, he wrote to Mary from Louisville:

> You do not know how much I have missed you and the children, my dear Mary. To be alone in a crowd is very solitary. In the woods I feel sympathy with the trees and birds, in whose company I take delight, but experience no pleasure in a strange crowd.
>
> I hope you are well and will continue so, and therefore must again urge you to be very prudent and careful of those dear children. If I could only get a squeeze at that little fellow turning up his sweet mouth to 'keese babe!' You must not let them run wild in my absence, and will have to exercise firm authority over all of them. This will not require severity or even strictness, but constant attention and an unwavering course. Mildness and forbearance, tempered by firmness and judgment will strengthen their affection for you, while it will maintain your control over them. [37]

[36]Lee to P. Chouteau, May 7, 1839, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[37]J. William Jones, Personal Reminiscenses, Anecdotes, and Letters of Gen. Robert E. Lee (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1875), 369. This work is cited hereafter as Jones, Reminiscenses.

Not many days after he reached his destination, word came that he had a new daughter, born at Arlington, June 18, 1839, and named Anne Carter Lee. Relieved to learn that everything had gone alright, Lee wrote to Mrs. Custis:

> I have not yet thanked you, My dearest Mother, [he wrote Mrs. Custis] for your two kind letters telling me of the birth of little Raspberry and the progress of Mother & Child in the road to health & strength. I was truly thankful for the intelligence and sincerely grateful for the event. Before this I suppose both have been down stairs....I am very anxious to see this little one as none of the descriptions I have had yet, have satisfied my paternal longings,....We have a nice little panel of them now Mother, and God grant that they may all be preserved to us and grow to be our joy and comfort. [38]

Difficult as it was to do so at such a distance, Lee did his best towards bringing up four active little children by offering Mary his counsel in frequent and often lengthy letters. He was particularly insistent that Mary and the children should not remain at Arlington during the summer, when there was always much sickness in the neighborhood. Heeding his advice, Mrs. Lee took her brood to Kinloch, Fauquier County, Va., when the new baby was little over a month old, where they remained until fall. "At night Mrs. Custis and Mrs. Lee (her daughter), with a squad of children, negroes, horses, and dogs arrived," Edward Carter Turner, the master of Kinloch noted in his diary, the night they arrived.[39]

Mary's father, of course, remained at Arlington, supervising the estate. "I hope the Major has kept well this Summer," Lee wrote Mrs. Custis in July.[40] Custis missed the companionship of his wife and daughter, and above all, his grandchildren. For diversion, he worked away on his paintings, one of which he presented to an Irish leader in the

[38] Entry in Custis Family Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS.; and Lee to Mrs. Custis, July 26, 1839, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[39] Entry for July 27, 1839, quoted in MacDonald, op. cit., 80.
[40] Lee to Mrs. Custis, July 26, 1839.

city, F. Callan, as a mark of his affection for the nationality "whose interest & happiness, I have long since adopted."[41]

He also turned out another of his Recollections, entitled "The Battle of Princeton, and Death of General Mercer," for a Washington newspaper.[42] Based on reminiscenses of the battle given him by Col. John Fitzgerald of Alexandria, the article described Washington's reckless courage in rallying his troops after they had been scattered by the murderous, measured volleys of the British. At a critical moment, when Washington was caught between the opposing lines, it appeared that he would surely be killed. Fitzgerald, unable to watch, pulled his hat down over his eyes. But to his amazement, when he again raised it a moment later, he saw that the General was unharmed and the enemy retreating from the field. "Thank God! your excellency is safe," he had cried when he reached the General. Calmly and affectionately, Washington had taken his friend's hand for a moment, saying: "Away, my dear Colonel, and bring up the troops--the day is our own!"

By this time, the number of those who had fought with Washington or otherwise been close to him was decreasing rapidly as death took its toll. Lee had finished his work for the season at St. Louis and was about to come home onmleave when he received word that Lawrence Lewis had died at Arlington, November 20, 1839. The old gentleman, who was then seventy-three, had caught cold on his way home to Woodlawn from Audley, where he and Nelly had been visiting their son Lorenzo Lewis. Brought to Arlington, he had expired there a few days later, after assuring his grieving wife: "I shall be perfectly resigned to have lived to a great age, and have cause to be thankful to the Almighty." Always a kindly man and open-handed,

[41]Custis to F. Callan, Nov. 24, 1839, Misc. MSS, N. Y. His. Soc.
[42]Nat. Intelligencer, Oct. 19, 1839.

Lawrence had been well liked by the Custises, who no doubt attended his burial at Mount Vernon.[43]

Travelling overland, Lee arrived home just in time for Christmas. After being away seven months, Virginia looked good to him even in winter. "I suppose you have heard of my escape from the West," he wrote his cousin, Hill Carter. "I felt so elated when I again found myself within the confines of the Ancient Dominion that I nodded to all the old trees as I passed, chatted with the drivers and stable boys, shook hands with the landlords, and in the fulness of my heart--don't tell Cousin Mary--wanted to kiss all the pretty girls I met."[44]

Seeing his new baby, Annie, in her cradle and playing with his other three children, the oldest of whom was now eight, made him feel patriarchal for a man only thirty-three years old. An incident which probably occurred that winter illustrates the seriousness with which he viewed his family responsibilities. He and little Custis had gone for a walk in the snow, the boy following behind while his father broke the way. Preoccupied, the father failed to look behind for some time, and when he did, saw that his son was setting his feet carefully in his father's footprints. "When I saw this," Lee said later on, "I said to myself, 'It behoves me to walk very straight, when the little fellow is already following in my tracks."[45]

Lee had expected to return to St. Louis in the spring, bringing Mary and the children with him, but Mrs. Custis, who was in poor health, opposed the plan. Some months before she had urged her son-in-law to get an

[43]Mrs. L. Lewis to E. G. W. Butler, n. d., Lewis Family MSS, Duke U.; also Georgetown (D. C.) Advocate, Nov. 25, 1839.

[44]Lee to J. H. Castle, Dec. 21, 1839, Drier MSS, His. Soc. of Pa.; and same to Hill Carter, Jan. 25, 1840, quoted in Freeman, Lee, I, 177.

[45]Long, op. cit., 34.

assignment near Washington, and to this he had replied with his usual banter: "As I see but little prospect of the U. S. undertaking any work around Washington upon which I would be placed, and enable us to live with you, suppose you and the Major break up and campaign with us!" Later on, he felt it necessary to state his position more emphatically:

> I have thought much on the subject of our coming out here next Spring and have yet seen no 'impropriety' in the step; but on the contrary it has appeared to me highly proper to be as much as possible with my wife and children. I see much that is disagreeable in this measure, and the most so is that of parting from you and the Major and all our dear relations and friends in Virga.... But we cannot live where we please. If we could and you would permit it, we would locate ourselves at Arlington and I would have $20,000 a year to put everything in apple-pie order and make us all comfortable....You see then , Mother, I am not blinded to at least some of the disagreements of our future location. But what is to be done? I cannot give up my profession nor can I hope for improvement without experience and study--I am getting all of these here, and may in time do better.... [46]

But after he was home, Lee found that Congress was in no hurry to appropriate the funds needed to continue work on the St. Louis project. Waiting to see what it would do, he stayed on at Arlington until midsummer, part of the time on leave and the rest on duty in the office of the chief engineer.[47] He enjoyed to the full the opportunity thus afforded him to be with his family, and the months passed quickly and happily, for all that the winter was an unusually severe one. "The Bridge has gone & has cut us off almost entirely from Wash.--for the ferry is almost impassible," he wrote his brother Carter, in February. "There is nothing new, except that the Major held forth yesterday (22nd) in Alexandria."[48]

Beside the speech Lee mentioned, Custis signalized the day by publishing one of the most interesting of his Recollections, "The Battle of

[46]Lee to O. Waite, Jan.6, 1840, Lee Letter Bk. #1, DeButts-Ely MSS; and some to Mrs. Custis, Mar. 20, Nov. 7, 1839, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[47]Freeman, Lee, I, 178
[48]Lee to Carter Lee, Feb. 23, 1840, McGregor MSS, U. of Va.

Monmouth," basing his account on reminiscenses given him by Lafayette, Dr. Craik, and Washington's valet, Billy, all of whom had been present at the battle.[49]

Though Custis' purpose in writing about this battle was to demonstrate that Washington was an aggressive general, instead of simply being an expert at defensive or delaying tactics, the article was remarkable mainly for the fascinating anecdotes it contained. It gave several examples of Washington's coolness under the stress of battle and told how the Indian prophecy regarding Washington's charmed life had been borne out in this battle when a shell struck close to the feet of his horse and bounded harmlessly past, much to the amazement of the General's staff. Another incident concerned Billy Lee, the General's valet, who with a group of his fellow servants was standing on a conspicious knoll surveying the enemy through a big telescope. Chancing to notice them, the General remarked to some officers nearby: "The enemy will fire on them to a certainty." True enough, a British six-pound shell whistled over the corps of valets a moment later, causing them to disperse so rapidly even Washington was forced to smile.

But the anecdote Custis first put into print at this time, and the one longest remembered, was the story of a gunner's wife named Molly who became the heroine of the battle. According to Custis, it was an extremely hot day and Molly was fetching water to the soldiers when her husband fell lifeless by his gun. "Lie there, my darling, while I revenge ye," she is said to have cried; whereupon she took his place at the gun, ramming and sponging until the battle ended at nightfall. Next day, according to the story, General Green presented her to Washington who gave her a gold coin and made her a sargeant, the rank her husband had held. Questioned at first, but now generally accepted, the story had long since become part of the folk-lore of the Revolution, firmly embedded in

[49] Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 22, 1840.

the patriotic tradition.[50]

Custis had an equally interesting anecdote to tell in his address on St. Patrick's Day, 1840. The people of Ireland, he said, needed a "national air" like "Yankee Doodle" to give them heart in their fight for freedom. To illustrate his point, he told how the regimental band of a British regiment, passing through a hamlet on its march to Lexington in 1775, struck up "Yankee Doodle" to show its contempt for Americans. Instead of being impressed, a small boy perched on an outhouse broke out in laughter as Earl Percy, the commander, rode by. Indignant, the officer reined his horse in to inquire the cause of the merriment, to which the brash youngster replied: "Why your music is now playing Yankee Doodle in contempt of the poor Yankees, but I guess before yon sun shall set, they will change your tune to Chevy Chace!"[51]

To Washington Custis, nationalism was a sovereign remedy, not only for the Irish, but for Americans as well, a formula which he hoped would relieve the internal stresses that periodically threatened the nation. He also tried to enlist others more gifted than himself in the same cause. When he learned that the famous Twickenham willow at the grave of Alexander Pope had died and that even its roots had been dug up to be made into relics for those who honored the great English poet, it occurred to him that the Pope's willow at Arlington, the direct descendent of that at Twickenham, could be used the same way to stimulate pride in American literary achievements. Accordingly, in the spring of 1840 he had slips from the Arlington willow put up in handsome cases for presentation to Washington Irving, Mrs. Sigourney, and John K. Paulding. In turn, each of the recipients was to

[50]There are many conflicting accounts of Molly Pitcher, but that she existed and served as a gunner at the Battle of Monmouth is not questioned. The best short account of Molly's life is found in D. A. B., XI, 574.

[51]Nat. Intelligencer, May 8, 1840.

give individual slips "to the most worthy of the literateurs, male and female, in the United States," but whether or not they did cannot be said, although the scheme was widely publicized at the time.[52]

Congress having adjourned late in July without appropriating any funds for the St. Louis project, Lee perforce had to return there and close it out. After a hard trip, most of it overland, he reached his destination near the middle of August. When he saw how well the half-completed projects were already achieving their purpose, he felt the more frustrated at not being able to complete them, but could do nothing but put the boats and machinery used on the work up for sale at public auction.[53]

His sense of futility was sharpened by homesickness and concern for Mary who was expecting another baby. Seeing other people's children reminded him of how much he missed his own.

> A few evenings since, feeling <u>lonesome,</u> as the saying is, & out of sorts, [he wrote Mary] I got on a horse & took a ride. On returning through the lower part of town, I saw a number of little girls all dressed up in their white frocks & pants & their hair plaited & tied up with ribands, running and chasing each other in all directions. I counted 23 nearly the same size. As I drew up my horse to admire the spectacle, a man appeared at the door with the 24th in his arms. 'My friend,' said I, 'are all these your children. He said 'Yes, & there are <u>nine</u> more in the house & this is the youngest.' Upon further urging, however, I found that they were only <u>temporarily</u> his, & that they were invited to a <u>party</u> at his house. He said, however, he had been admiring them before I came up, and just wished that he had a million dollars and that they were all his in reality. I do not think the eldest exceeded 7 or 8 years old. It was the prettiest sight I have seen in the West, and perhaps in my life. 54

[52]<u>Evening Transcript</u> (Boston, Mass.), Apr. 1, 1840. The Pope's Willow in a pencil sketch, made about 1854, in the DeButts-Ely MSS; and in a photograph made in 1864 by Mathew Brady, now in Nat. Archives. According to B. J. Lossing, "Arlington House," <u>Harper's Magazine</u>, VII (Sept., 1853), 437, after the parent tree at Twickenham died, slips from the Arlington willow were sent to England to replace it.

[53]Lee to Mrs. B. C. Mason, Aug. 9, 1840, DeButts-Ely MSS; and Same to J. Mackay, July 23, 1840, quoted in part in Freeman, <u>Lee</u>, I, 178f.

[54]Lee to Mrs. Lee, Sept. 4, 1840, DeButts-Ely MSS.

As she always did when her husband was away, Mrs. Lee kept her four little children to a routine that varied little from day to day. Little Annie was still in her cradle, but the others habitually rose at an early hour, breakfasted with their mother and grandparents, then went with them into the parlor for family prayers. The short service over, the two older children would then go to their lessons, Mrs. Lee serving as their teacher, while little "Rooney," as Fitzhugh Lee was nicknamed, would go with his grandmother, perhaps out into her flower garden. Often when there was company, they would have boys and girls their own age with whom to play while the mothers sat in the portico sewing and chatting, or if it were too hot out in the big hall inside.

The arrival of the mail bag was the high point of each day, and if there chanced to be a letter from Captain Lee, Mrs. Lee would read it through, then read aloud such portions of it as were directed to the children or her parents. In the late afternoon, the family and servants would again gather in the parlor for prayers, after which came a story hour for the children, usually conducted by Mary's father who loved especially to tell them tales of his childhood at Mount Vernon or deeds of heroism performed in the Revolution. Later, when the children were in bed, Mrs. Lee would read or sew, or write to Robert, while her father read in his favorite armchair or retired to his study to answer his voluminous correspondence or work on his paintings. In this quiet way the days passed swiftly by while the family waited patiently for Lee to return home.[55] Their patience was rewarded in October when they learned that Lee had written his final report and was on his way home.

Despite the fact that Lee had to leave the St. Louis project unfinished,

[55]This account of the home life at Arlington is derived from references in letters and other sources too numerous to be cited individually.

he returned to Washington with an established reputation as an engineer. Unfortunately, he had to leave again almost at once to inspect some forts under construction in the Carolinas, and so missed the excitement in Washington at election time when William Henry Harrison won the presidency.[56]

This was the first election in which his father-in-law had had an active part since leaving Mount Vernon, and the hurly-burly and enthusiasm engendered by this famous campaign delighted him. He went all-out for the Whig candidate to swell the chorus of "Tippecanoe and Tyler, too." In reward, he was invited to make the principal address at the "Great Jubilee and Illumination" which took place in Alexandria when the results of the election became known.[57]

Lee spent Christmas at home, and was there during the rest of the winter while he worked in the Chief Engineer's office, writing up his reports on the forts he had inspected.[58] During the election campaign, the Whig candidate, William Henry Harrison, had advocated more internal improvements, highways and canals, and this must have caused Lee to take some interest in the gift Mr. Custis gave the aged general the day before he took office, a walking stick, made from a piece of the old Mount Vernon coach.[59]

Lee also was probably amused at the criticism implied in the comments of the National Intelligencer regarding the absence of his father-in-law at the St. Patrick's Day celebration that spring. There was a strong temperance movement in the city at this time which had resulted in the

[56] Freeman, Lee, I, 181f.
[57] Nat. Intelligencer, Nov. 25, 27, 30, 1840.
[58] Freeman, Lee, I, 186.
[59] Nat. Intelligencer, Mar. 5, 1841.

formation of a Catholic Temperance Society and--after considerable dissension--a decision that the customary dinner should be a dry one. Custis disapproved of the excessive use of liquor, but saw no harm in moderation. Hence, he was one of those editor Seaton (one of the tee-totalters) listed by name as having been invited, but who "were prevented from attending the festival by indispensible engagements, indisposition, or other causes."[60]

On the other hand, Lee must have been greatly interested in the latest of his father-in-law's Recollections which had appeared in Seaton's newspaper a little earlier. In it, Custis showed how discipline had saved the day for the British at the Battle of Germantown after they had almost been routed by Washington's surprise attack; seizing every defensible position, including the famous Chew house, the British line had finally held, then thrown back the Americans, driving them from the field. The "undisciplined character" of the American troops, he said, plus a series of accidents had deprived Washington of what should have been a decisive victory. He went on to tell of the kindness and sympathy Washington showed his starving men at Valley Forge during the ensuing winter, and reading this, his son-in-law must have seen Washington in a new light, in a new relationship with his men.[61] Years later, when he would find himself with an army in much the same circumstances, Lee may have recalled Washington's example.

But if Lee had much thought of the future that spring, it was mainly concerned with his career and his family, which had been increased by another girl, Agnes, who arrived at Arlington February 27, 1841.[62] As usual, Lee did his best to accept the inevitable with good grace, and it

[60] Ibid., Mar. 19, 1841. For the Catholic temperance movement in Washington at this period, see Catholic Encyclopedia (15 vols. New York: D. Appleton Co., 1912), XIV, 489f.

[61] Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 22, 1841. Custis had published another chapter, "The Surrender of Yorktown," the previous fall in ibid., Oct. 19, 1840.

[62] Custis Family Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS.

was in this spirit he wrote to his friend Mackay:

> Among the things that then distracted my attention was the arrival of another little Lee, whose approach, however long foreseen, I could have dispensed with for a year or two more. However, as she was in such haste to greet her Pa, I am now very glad to see her. 63

There being no construction, other than a few coastal forts, under way that spring, Lee had to choose between going back to North Carolina to supervise improvements being made on two forts there or taking a similar assignment in New York City, where four forts were being built to defend the water approaches to the city. Neither assignments involved other than routine construction, but since the New York harbor forts were the more important, Lee decided to go there. The New York project was also expected to last several years, which would enable him to have his family with him.

Grateful for this compensation, he set out in April, 1841, for his new assignment.[64]

[63] Lee to J. Mackay, Mar. 18, 1841, quoted in Freeman, Lee, I, 180f.
[64] Ibid., 186f.

CHAPTER XII

DOLDRUMS-AND A PILGRIMAGE

"I hope to have my dame & five children on in about a month if there is no rebellion in the family," Lee wrote Talcott from New York.[1] He had the quarters assigned to them at Fort Hamilton ready when Mary and the children arrived in the early summer, but they had hardly gotten settled down when they had to relinquish their quarters to officers of the regular garrison and rent a house off the post. This made it rather inconvenient for them to do much entertaining, though they attended the post chapel regularly. Lee's work involved little more than routine construction and repairs, but since it continued well into the winter, it is unlikely that they got back to Arlington for Christmas, 1841.[2]

As usual, Mary's mother kept them well posted on events back home, for instance the Saint Patrick's Day celebration, at which the customary toasts were served--the "Friends of Temperance and Ireland" having decided to hold a separate celebration. Probably she also sent them a copy of a poem, "An Ode to Young Ireland," which her husband wrote for the occasion.[3]

In May, Custis praticipated in the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the first settlement of Maryland at St. Mary's as the guest of the Philodemic Society and faculty of Georgetown College. For once he was not called upon to speak, but he figured in an incident that was long remembered. He had composed a poem for the occasion, to be sung to the tune of the "Star

[1] Apr. 11, 1841, Lee MSS, Va. His. Soc.
[2] MacDonald, op. cit., 84f.; Freeman, Lee, I, 187ff.
[3] Nat. Intelligencer, Mar. 23, 30, 1842.

Spangled Banner," and as the day was drawing to a close, took his place before the gathering and began:

> Oh bright was the morn, and the spring breeze was sighing
> When proudly there rode, on Potomac's broad wave,
> The barks of the pilgrims, their gay pennons flying;
> While on their decks, shone the pious and brave.
> Then their landing began,
> And they bore in their van,
> The ever blest sign of salvation to man.
> They plant it rejoicing, and proclaim the decree,
> That Mary's fair land 'be the land of the free!

When the crowd demanded an encore, he got his friend, Father George Fenwick of Georgetown College, and a granddaughter of Charles Carroll to assist him, and together the three sang the ode--an appropriate finale to a most interesting day. It was the kind of patriotic occasion, charged with emotion and enthusiasm, that Custis loved best--"a happy pilgrimage," he termed it in a letter to a friend.[4]

On the 4th of July, he had a different sort of an experience, when the speaker's stand in Georgetown, on which he was sitting with other dignitaries, collapsed without warning. A moment later, he found himself on the ground in a tangle of timbers and flooring, but fortunately uninjured.[5] Even oratory, it seems has its occupational hazards.

Sometimes his memory was in error in describing some event or object associated with the Washingtons in his "Recollections." But even then, they served to arouse public interest in the subject. A case in point was a short article, "The Battle Sword" which he wrote for a local newspaper that fall. In it, he described the sword Washington had habitually worn during the Revolution, and said that he dimly recollected being told

[4]Custis to W. G. Read, May 13, 1842; The Sun (Baltimore, Md.), same date; both printed in William G. Read, Oration Delivered at the First Commemoration of the Landing of the Pilgrims of Maryland...(Baltimore: J. Murphy, 1842), 38. Custis' "Ode" is reprinted in the same work, p. 39. Also, Nat. Intelligencer, May 10, 25, 1842.

[5]Ibid., July 6, 1842.

that Washington had given it to General Nathaniel Greene, who lost it, with other belongings, when the ship carrying it to Charleston was lost at sea.[6] Another Virginian, who said that the sword had been given, not to Greene, but to a nephew of Washington's whose son, Samuel Washington, now had it in his possession and might be induced to place it on exhibition in a public building at Washington. The upshot was that the historic blade was placed on display in the Patent Office not long afterward.

Work stopped on the New York harbor forts when the weather grew cold late in 1842, so the Lees spent the winter at Arlington, where they arrived a few days before Christmas.[7] Mrs. Lee and the children therefore helped decorate the house for the holidays with boughs of cedar and pine, though her father, as usual, selected the great Yule log which blazed on the hearth in the family parlor.

Lee went back to New York in March, leaving Mary, who was not feeling well, at Arlington, with the children. Having become accustomed to having his family with him, he missed it now that his only companion was a little black-and-tan terrier, named Speck, whose mother Lee had rescued from the channel off Fort Hamilton into which she apparently had fallen from a passing ship. Lee could not hide the fact that he was lonesome when he wrote Mary, in March, 1843:

> Speck and I sit each side of the hearth every night, I with my book & he napping & admiring me. In this last occupation he spends most of his time. I wonder what he thinks of me!.... Bless the children, I wish we were fixed down with them some-

[6] Ibid., Oct. 19, Nov. 15, 1842. The history of the "Service Sword" is given in General Washington's Swords and Campaign Equipment (Mt. Vernon.: Mount Vernon Ladies Assoc., 1948), 7. It is now in the National Museum.

[7] Freeman, Lee, I, 190.

> where never more to separate,.....Give much love to Mother, your father, to Boo & all the children. I have been obliged to write several letters on business tonight. It is very late & I am very tired, so I will bid you good night. You must write soon my dear Mary. I hope you are well again & that you will soon return. I feel very forlorn without you & the house is very cold & Cheerless. [8]

Happily, Mrs. Lee was able to rejoin him, with the children, the following month, at which time she no doubt brought him up to date on the progress of the Georgetown to Alexandria Canal which had been constructed across Arlington and was expected to be ready for use by the end of the year. She probably told him, too, that her father had braved a driving snow-storm to participate in the celebrations of St. Patrick's Day. She may even have brought a newspaper clipping from her father's favorite newspaper, the National Intelligencer, which read in part: "No blue or pinched looks were to be seen....Beneath the green banner on which was emblazoned the ancient harp of Tara, they formed a procession headed by the venerable CUSTIS...and after marching round the ample hall of the Assembly Room, they descended to an excellent dinner."[9]

Such affairs gave needed zest to Custis' life at a time when financial difficulties oppressed him. "The times have been so out of joint, & I so out of joint with them, I have been unable to attend to any literary matters at all," he wrote in answer to an inquiry about the Washington tents. He had published an account of the tents on Washington's Birthday, and the smaller of the two was being exhibited then in Pittsburgh, after which it was to be erected, on the 4th of July, at either the site of Braddock's defeat in 1775 or at Fort Necessity.[10]

[8] Lee to Mrs. Lee, Mar. 24, 1843, Drier MSS, His. Soc. of Pa.

[9] For the canal, see Nat. Intelligencer, Mar. 17, July 4, Dec. 2, 1843; for the St. Patrick's Day celebration, ibid., Mar. 20, 27, 1843.

[10] Custis to S. J. Campbell, July 3, 1843; Soc. Coll., His. Soc. of Pa. Also Baltimore (Md.) Patriot, reprinted in The Atlas (Boston, Mass.), June 22, 1843. Also, Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 22, 1843, and U. S. Gazette (Philadelphia), July 4, 1843.

Lee, too, was aware of his father-in-law's situation and sympathized with him. Mary, who was again expecting, had looked forward to having her parents spend the summer with them in New York, but to her disappointment, they could not afford to make the trip.[11] Early in the fall, she and the children returned home to Arlington, where her sixth child, a boy, was born October 27, 1843. "About a month ago a young Robert E, Lee made his appearance at Arlington, much to the surprise and admiration of his brothers and sisters," Lee informed a friend in St. Louis. "He has a fine long nose like his father, but no whiskers."[12]

Closing out his work for the season kept Lee from seeing his new son until early in January. The remainder of the winter he worked in the Engineers Office, and though the work was prosaic, he was content to be with his family.[13] In April, he returned to New York with his family.

Sometimes when orators get carried away, they are guilty of otherwise unaccountable lapses. Thus Washington Custis, long accustomed to being termed "the old man eloquent" and "the venerable Custis," described himself as having "the snows of more than seventy years" upon his brow, in his St. Patrick's Day Address, 1844.[14] Actually, he was remarkably fit for a man of his age, sixty-three, because of his taste for the out-of-doors. Long used to tramping about his estate, gun-in-hand, hunting small game, he customarily set a stiff pace for much younger men. An

[11]Lee to Carter Lee, Jan. 21, 1843; Lee Letter Bk. No. 1, DeButts-Ely MSS; and same to same, July 24, 1843, McGregor MSS, U. of Va.

[12]Same to H. S. Kayser, Jan. 15, 1843, quoted in part in Stella M. Drum, "Robert E. Lee and the Improvements of the Mississippi River," Missouri His. Soc. Collections, VI (Feb., 1929), 169. The birth date is from the Custis family Bible, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[13]Freeman, Lee, I, 191.

[14]Nat. Intelligencer, Mar. 20, 22, 1844.

excellent shot, he killed only what could be used for the table or added to his collection of trophies. One of the latter, a New York rail, the only one ever found in the District up to that time, he presented to the National Institution for the Promotion of Science, the forerunner of the Smithsonian Institute.[15]

That year, too, he parted with one of his most prized relics, the smaller of the Washington tents, giving it to the nation. Displayed in the Patent Office, he thought it would serve to recall the founding of the Union.[16] For the same reason, he denounced "the language of disunion which had lately beenbheard in the South," in speaking at the Georgetown College commencement that summer. On the 4th of July he participated in the Whig "Festival" at Alexandria wearing a badge of Revolutionary buff and blue.[17]

To some extent, his political views may be attributed to the distinct difference between his economic situation and that of planters further South. Like them, his capital was tied up in slaves and land, but his estates were more like Northern farms than southern plantations. Instead of tobacco, corn and cotton, wheat was his principal crop. He also received a considerable income from other grain crops, lumber, livestock and fish, and by practicing the strictest economy, was able to keep his head above water at a time when farms in the vicinity of Arlington were selling for as little as three dollars an acre.[18]

How much he profited, directly or otherwise, from the Arlington Spring,

[15]Decker and McSween, op. cit., 36f.; and Nat. Institution for the Promotion of Science Papers, 1840-1846 (Columbia, S. C.: 1846), No. 9,319f.

[16]Records of the National Museum, Washington, D. C., where the sleeping tent is now on display.

[17]Nat. Intelligencer, July 3, 26, 1844.

[18]George Lewis, Impressions of America and the American Churches (Edinburgh: W. F. Kennedy, 1845), 93, comments on the depressed value of land in Fairfax Co., Va., at this date.

cannot be said. Owners of similar resorts customarily sold refreshments, food and entertainment, and since these were available at Arlington Spring, it is reasonable to suppose that he, too, made something from them. He may have received something from the ferries which ran daily during the summer months. Otherwise, he would not have had the money to erect several buildings for the accomodation of visitors at the Spring, supply them gratis with such things as ice, and provide slaves to wait on the guests and maintain the grounds and buildings--all of which he did in 1845, and mentioned in a "puff" he wrote for the National Intelligencer.[19]

In this, the best description of the spring extant, he tells of the "copious fountain of pure and delicious water" gushing from the roots of "an aged and majestic oak," and "a rude pavilion," furnished with an excellent floor for dancing, nearby. He also mentions "the proprietor exchanging kindly greeting with one and all," the families picnicing in the shade, couples dancing to the music of a German Band, the large crowd enjoying clam chowder in the new dining pavilion, and the "sports in the open air"--blindman's buff and the like--after dinner. The article concludes:

> At dusk lights are placed on the pavilion, and the scene becomes strikingly picturesque, the figures of the dancers as they flit along the lights glowing upon the foliage of the 'brave old oak' that throws its great arms over the pavilion....
>
> Strongly relieved against the western sky is seen a train of horses drawing a large canal boat; they are twenty feet above the heads of the dancers, while the boatmen pause in their voyage to contemplate the joyous scene below them....
>
> The hoarse voice of the captain of the boat called out, "The tide is falling; ladies and gentlemen will please remember the tide is going." Shawl and bonnet was now the word, and soon the whole party was embarked, and gliding over the placid surface of the Potomac...A pause, and then is heard from the barge, 'avast pulling, and stand by to cheer.' Three more cheers are given; the chant of female voices is sweetly borne on the night breeze; it fades in the distance; the measured plash of the barge's oars are heard no longer; the light in the pavilion are extinguished; 'tis done. Good night, good night!

[19] Aug. 28, 1844.

Undoubtedly, the spring owed much of its popularity to his friendliness. Normally there were usually from fifty to two hundred visitors each day, and usually he was on hand to greet them at the little dock, the arched entrance that separated the spring from the rest of the estate, or at one of the pavillions. Dressed in old fashioned knee breeches and ruffled shirt he seemed almost a figure out of the past, but so engaging was his personality, strangers soon felt like old friends.[20] As one guide-book put it: "The fine manners and instructive conversation of the venerable proprietor often adds to the life and social enjoyments of those who seek from the dust and crowds of the city a few hours' relaxation and retirement amid the charms of this cool and quiet spot."[21] The only restriction was on the use of intoxicating beverages.

Financial considerations were incidental to the pleasure Custis received from mingling with the throngs at the spring. His influence in arousing a greater sense of patriotism in the thousands who met and talked to him cannot be measured, but was certainly considerable. Years later, when the harsh hand of war had caused the spring to be abandoned, oldsters would dwell affectionately on their youthful outings at Arlington Spring, and recall--as did one--"the shabby old man with angular features and thin grey hair, who would come down from the mansion, violin in hand, and amuse the children by the hour with his skillful playing..."[23]

[20]Sarah E. Vedder, Reminiscences of the District of Columbia (St. Louis, Mo.: A. R. Fleming Co., 1909), 68; Mackall, op. cit., 50; Packard, op. cit., 15.

[21]Morrison, op. cit., 123f.

[22]Casimir Bohn, Handbook of Washington (Washington, D. C.),: C. Bohn, 1856), 113.

[23]Osborne, op. cit., 17.

Meanwhile, in New York, the Lees were having a quiet, enjoyable summer. Little work was being done on the forts, and for the first time in many years Lee had a little leisure. He and Mary took advantage of it to enter into the social life of the post, or visit friends stationed on Governor's Island. They were returning home late one night when--as Mary described their experience to her mother: "We heard afar in the stillness of the night the rolling of immense paddles in the water. We stopped on the bank to listen, & presently a gun & then a rocket announced the arrival of the Great Western. How the monsters of the deep must have been amazed at the commotion raised on their elements by these great steamers."[24]

Mary also enjoyed shopping in Brooklyn and New York, where she occasionally bought things to send home to Arlington--a carpet for her mother, perhaps, or a greatcoat for Daniel, the coachman. Other than a visit by her Aunt Lewis, the summer was broken only by a trip Lee made to West Point in June to help conduct the final examination at the Military Academy.[25] This was something of a distinction, but the duty was even more important in that it brought him to the attention of Major General Winfield Scott, who soon was to become commanding general of the army. From this time on, Scott's influence was to be a major factor in Lee's career.[26]

The general was not the only officer to be favorably impressed by Lee at this time. One young lieutenant, Henry J. Hunt, who was also stationed at Fort Hamilton at this time, would recall him as being "as fine-looking a man as one would wish to see, of perfect figure and strikingly handsome. Quiet and dignified in manner, of cheerful disposition, always pleasant

[24]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Custis, Oct. 27, 1844, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[25]Ibid.; and same to same, July 11, July 27, 1844, also in DeButts-Ely MSS. For Tyler's visit, see MacDonald, op. cit., 86.

[26]Freeman, Lee, I, 191f.

and considerate, Lee seemed to me the perfect type of a gentleman."[27]

That fall marked the renewal of the friendship between the Lees and Martha Custis Williams, Mrs. Lee's first cousin and a more distant cousin of Robert. "Markie," as she was familiarly known, was the daughter of Captain William George Williams of the U. S. Topographical Survey and America Pinckney Peter of Tudor Place, who had died only the year before. Not having seen her for some years--her father had been stationed at Buffalo--the Lees were surprised to find her a quite grown up young lady of eighteen. The Lees kept in touch with her after she went on to Tudor Place.[28] Robert's letters abounded with good-natured banter, as when he chaffed Markie about a new bonnet Mary had bought her:

> She also desires me to tell you that your last letter arrived too late, [he wrote] as your bonnet was finished & in the House & will not change its beautiful drab complexion for the spotless satin of your taste, nor can she prevail upon the drooping plume to give place to the bursting rose buds. I am afraid Markie that your present associations have put these bridal notions in your head, as no young ladies in N. York display such colours in broadway until they can shew the papers to entitle them to hoist them. Drab or some grave couleur are the only colours worn by the young. Yours is of drab lined with a delicate couleur de rose & a weeping willow plume of a cherubino air. You will look charming in it... [29]

He and Mary saw their cousin again at Christmas, when they returned home to Arlington. During the winter, Lee again worked in the Chief Engineer's Office--and found it as tiresome as ever:

> Could you see my list of correspondents among whigs, democrats, congressmen and officers, you would [not] wonder at my horror at the sight of pen, ink and paper, [he wrote Mackay] and with what perfect disgust I pick up my hat between 4 and 5 P. M. with the firm determination of doing nothing until the next morning,

[27] Statement by Hunt, quoted in Long, op. cit., 66f.

[28] Avery Craven, ed., "To Markie," The Letters of Robert E. Lee to Martha Custis Williams (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. Press 1934, v), hereafter cited as Craven, "To Markie," For biographical and genealogical information of Markie and her family, see introduction and notes by Clayton Torrence, ed., "Arlington and Mount Vernon in 1856: As Described in a Letter of Blanche Berard," Va. Mag. of His. & Bio., vol. 57 (Apr., 1949), 143-146.

[29] Lee to Miss Markie Williams, Dec. 14, 1844, Craven, "To Markie," 7.

except to go home, eat my dinner, play with the little Lees, and rest. At 8 next morning I am again in the saddle to go through the same routine. [30]

Part of his leisure he devoted to getting his affairs in order, among other things, hiring out his slave, Gardner, to Hill Carter. He also arranged to hire out Judy, one of his wife's servant girls, who was to get her freedom at the end of six years.[31] The ownership of some old pictures from Mount Vernon was in dispute, and Lee seems to have taken an active part in assisting his father-in-law to get possession of them.[32]

Gardner
Judy

The pictures may have been involved in the final settlement of the Washington estate, which had been held up in the courts for several years by a claimant. "I have been badgered as a witness at court in a great Will-Case for most of the last week...," Custis had complained earlier. Still, it was to be another two years before the case was finally decided, disposing of the Washington estate, and Custis' responsibility, as the sole surviving executor, for it.[33]

Three boring months in the office of the Chief Engineer were enough for Lee, and he was glad to return to Fort Hamilton early in the spring of 1845. Nothing of importance remained to be done there, only some minor construction, but at least he would not be chained to a desk. This time he was accompanied only by Mary and three of the children. Custis Lee, now twelve had been entered for the spring term at an academy, Fairfax

[30]Freeman, Lee, I, 194; and Lee to J. Mackay, Mar. 18, 1845, quoted in ibid., I, 194.

[31]Lee to Hill Carter, Feb. 1, 1845, and same to A. S. White, Feb. 21, 1845; both in Lee Letter Bk. No. 1, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[32]Custis to W. W. Corcoran, in William W. Corcoran, A Grandfather's Legacy (Washington, D. C.: W. W. Corcoran, 1879), 50.

[33]Same to "Col. Humphreys," Nov. 18, 1844, printed in Henry C. Humphreys, "Who Built the First United States Navy?" Pa. Mag. of His. & Bio., vol. 40 (1916), 390f. For the so-called "Hammond Appeal," see Trussing, op. cit., 364-370.

Institute, not far from Arlington, and Mary and Annie had remained behind ith their grandparents, in charge of a governess.[34]

For all they were far from Arlington, there was no escaping some of its problems. Four ex-Arlington slaves were then living in New York, and two of them, Lily and Eddison, were doing well. But the other two, Cassy and her husband Louis, had fallen on hard times, and sought Mrs. Lee's help. She suggested that they return to Washington, where they would at least be among friends, but Cassy refused. "She said she was very anxious to go to Arlington," Mrs. Lee explained to her mother, "but that she could not leave Louis, and he did not want to go home unless 'he could go as he ought to do'". She continued:

> It seems that there is a good deal of pride in the matter. She says I must tell her Mammy she does not wish all the servants to know they are not in prosperity.....I told her that was all nonsense, & to tell Louis for me that I thought the best thing he could do would be to go at once to the District;...that he could lodge as cheaply in Washington as New York, till he was well enough to get employment; and that Cassy could stay with her Mother till then, where he could see and hear from her... She is to write and let me know...I gave her a little money, some few things, as many as she could carry back with her. [35]

The incident illustrates the strong sense of responsibility some slaveowners such as the Custises and the Lees felt towards their servants, even after they had been given their freedom. It also explains why they were often reluctant to free them, knowing that some would be unable to fend for themselves.

While the Lees were in New York, Mary's father followed his usual round of managing his farm, seeing that visitors enjoyed themselves at

[34] Freeman, Lee, I, 194; and J. Lewis Howe, "George Washington Custis Lee," Va. Mag. of His. & Bio., vol. 48 (Oct., 1940), 318.

[35] Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Custis, Sept., n.d., 1845, quoted in ibid., 91ff.

Arlington Spring, and working at home on his paintings or writings. For Washington's Birthday, 1845, he wrote an article on Alexander Hamilton for the National Intelligencer. "These 'recollections' become every year more interesting, as the day recedes in which the facts which he relates were impressed upon his memory under circumstances more advantageous than could have been enjoyed by any other man, living or dead," said the editor, in a brief introduction. Significantly, the sketch closed with Hamilton's warning that the future of the country depended on the binding force of the Constitution. "Now mark my words," Custis quoted him as saying. "So long as we are a young and virtuous people, this instrument will bind us together in mutual interests, mutual welfare, and mutual happiness; but when we become old and corrupt, it will bind us no longer."[36]

No doubt he echoed sentiments whenever he was called upon to address any of the fraternal or military organizations--the Washington Light Infantry, the National Blues and the Falcon and Gazelle Boat Clubs, among others-which came over to Arlington Spring during the summer. Attendence at the Spring was greater this year than ever before, partly because a small steamer, the George Washington, was making three trips daily--fare 25 cents, no liquor sold on board, and no free Negroes or children unaccompanied by their parents allowed on board.[37]

The summer also promised to be a good one financially because of the strong demand for foodstuffs, especially wheat and flour, in Europe and South America. As the price of these commodities rose steadily, Custis' section enjoyed a degree of prosperity it had not had in years. It also enabled farmers to improve their lands with new types of fertilizers then being advocated by Edward Ruffin. Appreciating the importance of Ruffin's

[36]Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 24, 1845.
[37]Ibid., May 5, June 27, 1845.

discovery that lime and other fertilizers could restore fertility to lands long since thought to be worn out, Custis bought large quantities of marl and plaster of Paris for the Pamunkey River estates. He also was using Peruvian guano on his lands, though this type of fertilizer was very costly and had been introduced into the country only two years before. The fact that such fertilizers were expensive and required careful supervision in their use was soon to establish a trend towards smaller farms and intensive methods of cultivation. But even on the larger estates such as Arlington, their use was to have spectacular results.[38]

Better times enabled Custis to make his oft-deferred "pilgrimage" to the great scenes of the American Revolution in New England--a trip which turned out to be one of the highlights of his life.

He found New York, when he arrived there with Molly in August, vastly different from what it had been when he last saw it as a boy, fifty-four years before. Then it had been a bustling little city of about thirty thousand; now its population numbered half a million. To him, the change seemed the fulfillment of his expectations he had long held regarding the future greatness of his country.

New York, too, remembered its earlier days, and the arrival of the ward of the First President did not go unnoticed. He was the guest of honor at a reception sponsored by the city, and afterwards enjoyed a triumphal tour of Manhattan in company with Mayor William F. Havemyer. Even more memorable was the reception held in his honor at the home of Alderman Peters, a few days later, to which Molly, Mary Lee and twelve-year

[38]Custis to unknown, Feb. 16, 1845, Misc. MSS, N. Y. Pub. Lib.; sale to F. Nelson, Aug. 29, 1845, Custis MSS, W. & M. College. Also Craven, op. cit., 131, 134, 142-155.

old Custis Lee accompanied him. Old days, old times lived again as several hundred aged contemporaries of Washington gathered to meet Custis and exchange reminiscenses. Describing the affair, a local newspaper observed: "In the most easy and delightful manner imaginable, Custis deeply engaged the attention of the groups around him by many fine and touching anecdotes of Washington and his contemporaries."[39]

Early in September, he set out alone for Boston, where he was depressed to find no sign of the old entrenchments on Bunker Hill. "In vain, with patriotic pride, is the eye of the American cast around him from the Heights of Charlestown, seeking to rest upon some reminiscence of the past," he observed sadly in an account of his journey written for the National Intelligencer. Seeing streets and houses covering almost every battle site made him regret that the New England states had not preserved some of them for future generations:

> Fifty years since, [he wrote] the assessment of one poor cent per head upon the people of New England would have obtained and forever possessed the ground rendered sacred by the blood and still containing the remains of many of her gallant sons. Not an inch of that soil, so venerable to liberty and dear to all the Americans should have been desecrated by streets and houses...The Heights of Charlestown should have remained as nearly as practicable as they were on the 17th of June 1775, to 'point a moral and adorn a tale' to future generations. Could monumental brass or marble, though towering to the skies, ever convey the lesson to the mind, or leave the impress on the heart, of that old battle-scathed, time-worn, time-honored redoubt?....
>
> The Heights of Charlestown should have formed a park for the capital of New England, and a patriotic...place of sepulture for the brave, who fought and fell on the day of the great battle.
>
> Wandering over such an interesting park and cemetery, the pilgrim and the patriot would find ample subjects for pride and contemplation. Tablets of bronze would mark the localities of the conflict; here the entrenchment that flanked the redoubt; there, the renowned rail-fence from whose partial shelter was dealt death, and with no sparing hand; and there again the spots where the brave Knowlton and the men of Connecticutt gave their last and withering fire, checking their enemy, and covering the retreat of the Americans from the redoubt. [40]

[39] Journal of Commerce (New York), reprinted in Nat. Intelligencer, Aug. 15, 1845.

[40] Ibid., Feb. 25, 1846.

His visit to Lexington, where the first shots of the Revolution were fired, was more satisfying. "Things here are as they should be," he wrote, "but little changed from the olden days." To his great pleasure, he found an old man who had witnessed the battle and saw a door to a blacksmith's shop which had been pierced by British bullets. "Each of us reverently laid his hand upon the mark of the shot," he recalled, "as possibly, on the day of the massacre, it may have passed through a patriot's bosom."

He also visited Concord--"a neat and thriving New England village, the inhabitants actively engaged in useful pursuits, every one employed, and every thing in order"--where he stopped to admire "the neat, durable, and imposing monument" standing near the bridge where the fight commenced. On his return to the city, he was especially happy when he located some of the old entrenchments on Dorchester Heights. Walking on the old ramparts, where perhaps his father and stepfather had walked so many years ago, he paused to dream of "the olden time" when the heights swarmed with American soldiers. Then, having concluded his "pious and patriotic duties," it was time for him to return home.

"No Palmer, plodding his weary way to Palestine, or pilgrim to shrine of patron saint," he observed, "ever felt more devotional zeal in the progress, or joy in the accomplishment of their labors, than did the American in his pilgrimage to the shrines of liberty in his own country." The tour had renewed his patriotism, his devotion to his country, but he feared that the scenes of these great events, and the events themselves, would soon be forgotten if schools and colleges continued to neglect the teaching of American History:

> It is most true [he wrote] that while in our colleges and public schools of all sorts, the young Americans are literally crammed with every thing that relates to other people and countries, they learn nothing touching their own. Not a history of the American Revolution is to be found in any school in the United States. The

> young American can tell you of the Punic War, and knows nothing of the war of the Revolution. He is conversant with the fame of Scipio and Epaminondas, with Carthage and Mantinea, but has yet to learn of Lexington and the Heights of Charlestown. 41

In advocating the preservation of historic sites and the teaching of American history, Custis was once more well ahead of his time. Yet, his appeal was not without significance, for to it and others like it, may be traced the present-day movement to preserve historic sites and structures.

On his return, Custis spent a few days with the Lees at Fort Hamilton before going on to Arlington. His arrival there was noted by the National Intelligencer, in a brief item:

> The hospitable and much respected proprietor of Arlington House has lately returned, in fine health and spirits, to his beautiful residence on the banks of the Potomac. He is most delighted with his late visit to the North, where he was received with honor and respect by the New Yorkers and Bostonians. 42

Even more cheering was a check for a little over a thousand dollars that he found awaiting him for part of the White House corn crop which had been sold while he was away. Better yet, his farm manager informed him that he could expect a bumper crop of wheat--2500 to 3000 bushels. "It is better than has been done on my Estate for many a long year," Custis wrote at once to his manager, Francis Nelson. "I am truly rejoiced that 'old things are becoming new,' and wish to aid you all I can in your present prosperous course of improvement. You must say what plaister, & clover you will want this year, & it shall be furnished..." 43

Mrs. Custis, who had stopped over with the Lees, arrived home two

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., Sept. 22, 1846.
43 Custis to F. Nelson, Aug. 29, 1845, Custis MSS, W. &. M. College.

weeks later, and brought with her little Mary Lee and her brother Custis, who was to again attend the Fairfax Institute. "It is a sad parting and we ahve enjoyed their Compy. a long time," Lee wrote to Markie Williams of their visit.[44]

By now, Lee had come to be regarded as an expert on coastal defenses, and for this reason was appointed a member of the board of engineers for the Atlantic coast forts, an important step forward in his career. As such, he would now have the opportunity of planning and locating forts as well as building them.[45]

He had planned to take Mary, who was again expecting, home to Arlington in the fall, but now could not because of his new duties. Therefore, he arranged for an army friend to escort her home, and Mary was ready to leave, near the end of November, when eight-year-old Rooney suffered a mishap which cost him the tips of two fingers and forced his mother to defer her departure. At fault was a small boy's curiosity and a straw-chopper in the barn. "We may probably lose his fingers, and be maimed for life," the father wrote to Custis Lee. "You cannot conceive what I suffer at the thought." In the hope that the finger tips would reknit, the doctor had sewn them back on, and since it was imperative that Rooney not disturb the dressings, Mrs. Lee kept him company in the daytime, reading to him and telling him stories, while his father sat by him at night. Eventually the ends had to be removed because they would not knit to the stumps, but fortunately the fingers healed so well that few persons ever

[44]Lee to Markie Williams, Sept. 17, 1846, quoted in Craven, "To Markie," 13-17.

[45]Freeman, Lee, I, 195f.

would realize that Rooney had suffered such an injury.[46]

Rooney's fingers kept Mrs. Lee at Fort Hamilton until after Christmas, much to the disappointment of the children who had anticipated spending the holiday at Arlington and playing in the "house" Custis Lee and Mary had built in the "Park" not far from the mansion. Still they had a happy Christmas where they were. Lee gave his wife a pretty mosaic breast pin, and the children found their stockings bulging with presents on Christmas morning.[47]

Those at Arlington had to wait for their presents--among them a tool chest for Custis Lee and a book, The Christmas Annual, for little Mary--until Mrs. Lee came home early in January. Left alone at Fort Hamilton, Lee had only their pets for company:

> I am very solitary & my only company is my dog & cats, [he wrote Mary] But Speck has become so jealous now that he will hardly let me look at the cats. He seems to be afraid that I am going off from him & never lets me stir without him. Lies down in the office from 8 till 4 without moving & turns himself before the fire as the side from it becomes cold. I catch him sometimes sitting up looking at me so intently that I am for a moment startled. Tell your father if he could see my cat he would turn his out of the [house]. 48

When Lee returned to Fort Hamilton from New Bedford, Conn., where he had gone to procure stone for the forts, he found a letter from Mrs. Custis awaiting him. From it, he learned that the new baby had arrived February 10, 1846, and had been named Mildred Childe, after his younger sister in Paris. He also gathered that things had not gone so well as usual this time, so his feelings alternated between joy at the safe arrival of the baby and concern for Mary's health. "Do write and tell me how

[46]Lee to Custis Lee, Nov. 30, 1845, quoted in Jones, Life and Letters, 37f.; and W. H. F. Lee to Custis Lee, Dec. 18, 1844, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[47]Ibid.; and Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Custis, Dec. 25, [1845], DeButts-Ely MSS.

[48]Lee to Mrs. Lee, Jan. 14, 1846, DeButts-Ely MSS.

she is," he wrote Mrs. Custis, "and what that little miss promises to be... ut I beg you my dear Mother to urge her at this time to be prudent and careful of herself. You know how much she has suffered from following her own course..."[49]

No doubt he repeated the advice, to Mary, when he got home in April, and also urged her to get away from Arlington before the warm weather. He brought the matter up again, in a letter he wrote shortly after he returned to Fort Hamilton:

> My animals & the garden are flourishing, & the latter notwithstanding the difference of latitude I think is equally as forward as Ephraim's...I hope you will make your trip up the country at once, & then come on as soon after as you can. I am very lonesome & solitary & want to see you all very much. Besides those 'chillen' can't do without their Papa. [50]

Such separations caused Lee to be concerned with the way the children were growing up with little in the way of a father's guidance. He knew that Mary needed his help in rearing them, especially the boys, yet because of his profession could do little but offer his guidance in the form of long letters to his sons.[51] The moralistic tone of much of his advice must sometimes have defeated its purpose, yet these letters do reveal Lee's deep sense of responsibility for his children.

Hardly had Lee settled back into the routine of his work at Fort Hamilton, when word came in May, 1846, that American and Mexican forces had clashed along the Rio Grande. A few days later Congress declared war.

[49] Entry in Custis Family Bible; also Lee to Mrs. Custis, Feb. 14, 1846; both in DeButts-Ely MSS.

[50] Same to Mrs. Lee, May 3, 1846, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[51] For an example of which, see his long letter to Custis Lee, Mar. 31, 1846, quoted in Jones, Life and Letters, 39f.

"I wish I was better satisfied as to the justice of our cause," Lee confided to his wife, voicing the same misgivings that were also troubling another young army officer by the name of Ulysses S. Grant, "but that is not my province to consider, & should my services be wanted I shall promptly furnish them." Regardless of the merits of the cause, his duty was clear and would govern his actions--a decision he would arrive at on another and infinitely more important occasion fifteen years later.[52]

For a time it appeared that his services might not be wanted. Most line officers could expect to be sent with their commands as soon as a plan of operations was decided upon at Washington. But some of the engineers might be kept working on the coastal defenses indefinitely, in which case events--and the chance to distinguish themselves in the field--would pass them by. While he waited to see if he would be called, Lee grew ever more restless as he watched Army friends readying their commands. Telling Markie of the activity on Governor's Island, he tried to mask his concern with an attempt at lightheartedness:

> There is nothing but preparation for battle: The Sharpening of swords, the grinding of bayonets & equipping for the field occupy all thoughts & hands. Even the benign countenance of its gallant adjutant is obscured by bristles, & the coral of his lips is shaded by a warlike mustache. The Major (Smith) is to assemble at his quarters on tuesday (10th) all the ladies and gentlemen of the Island to take leave of each other & bury their greif [sic] at their separation in strawberries & cream. I take it for granted they will be lightened for the term by the Majors champaighn, but you must remember them in your orisons Markie, for it is no less certain that we neer shall look upon them all again. 53

But finally, on August 19, 1846, the order arrived for which he had long been waiting. In it, he was instructed to turn over his work to another officer, and then to proceed via Washington to San Antonio de

[52]Same to Mrs. Lee, May 12, 1846, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[53]Lee to Markie Williams, June 7, 1846, in Craven, "To Markie," 17-20.

Boxar, Texas, there to join the staff of Brigadier General John E. Wool.[54]

Seventeen years had passed since Lee had left West Point, years in which there had been little opportunity to distinguish himself. He was still only a captain. Now he would have the chance to prove his worth on the field of battle.

[54]Freeman, Lee, I, 202.

CHAPTER XIII

"MUSKET BALLS & GRAPE:" LEE IN MEXICO

As soon as their furniture was packed and he had arranged to sell their house, Lee turned over his work to his successor and set out for Washington.[1]

There, after filing his accounts, he made his will. Dated August 31, 1846, it stipulated that Mrs. Lee was to have all his property for life, after which it would be divided among the children.[2] Since Mary would take care of their modest business affairs in his absence, he directed a Philadelphia bank to pay the interest on a bond to her. "I am on my way to join the army in Mexico," he wrote the officials.[3]

With his personal affairs in order, it was time to say goodbye to Arlington. Swiftly--by horseback, by steamboats, and then horseback again--he travelled to Texas, arriving at San Antonio on September 21.[4] Hardly a month before he had been at Fort Hamilton, wondering whether the war would pass him by. Now he was where he had wanted to be--with an army preparing to take the field.

Twenty-two months were to elapse before he saw Arlington again. For

[1] Lee to Mrs. Lee, Sept. 13, 1846, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[2] Ibid.; Freeman, Lee, I, 202. Lee never changed his will, even after the Civil War. It was filed in Rockbridge County, Va., in 1870, and is printed in full in Prussing, op. cit., 497f.

[3] Lee to T. Biddle & Co., Sept. 1, 1846, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[4] Freeman, Lee, I, 203.

his family, they would be months of patient waiting, weary months relieved only by the long letters Lee would write whenever he had the opportunity. They, too, would write him scores of letters, hoping that at least some of them would reach him. Other than that, they could only pray for his safety each morning and evening, follow the progress of the war in the newspapers, and trust that some of his army friends, returning to Washington, would bring additional news of their loved one.

Of all the household, Mary's father was the busiest at this time and so the least affected by the tedious wait for news. Managing his affairs, supervising his farm and seeing to it that everything went well at Arlington Spring kept him fully occupied that fall. In addition, he was one of the officials appointed to supervise a referendum which was to decide whether or not the Virginia part of the District of Columbia would be returned to Virginia, as authorized by a recent act of Congress.[5] Years before, he had opposed "retrocession" on the grounds that it would diminish the importance of the national capital as conceived by Washington. By now, however, he had come around to the opinion that the section would benefit more from being again part of Virginia. Therefore, he was well pleased when it was held in September, for retrocession won a substantial majority in the special election, in September. At least now he would be able to vote.[6]

The favorable outcome of the referendum made him feel less keenly the loss of the Arlington Belle, a brand-new steamer of moderate size, built especially to run between the city and Arlington. In anticipation

[5]Wilhemus B. Bryan, History of the National Capital (2 vols. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1916), II, 262n.; also Lee to Carter Lee, Sept. 1, 1846, McGregor MSS, U. of Va.

[6]For Custis' position regarding retrocession in 1824, see Nat. Intelligencer, Mar. 17, 1824; for the results of the referendum, see ibid, Sept. 3, 1846.

of a good season at the Arlington Spring, Custis had added row boats for hire and free fishing tackle to its attractions, and had arranged for a Washington caterer to provide food and refreshments in the dining pavilion.[7] The Arlington Belle had proved most popular--and presumably profitable--almost from its first voyage. Therefore, its destruction by fire was a loss Custis could ill afford.[8]

Though distressed by this setback, Custis was heartened by the rapidity with which his section was developing. A steam packet boat was already operating on the Alexandria Canal, and a section of Samuel Morse's new-fangled electric telegraph, which would eventually connect Richmond with Washington, was to be constructed along the canal within the next few months.[9]

Even more encouraging was the improvement in farm prices due to the war and the recent repeal of the English Corn Laws. At long last, it seemed, American agriculture was about to enter a new era of prosperity and expansion.

Custis had long awaited this opportunity, and now sought to make the most of it by increasing the productivity of his farms. He kept the manager of his Pamunkey River plantations informed on market conditions and the latest developments in crops and livestock, and to improve the White House flock, bought a full-bred South American ram. Berkshire and Chinese pigs were becoming popular because of their ability to fatten faster on less feed than other breeds, so he bought some of them for the estate, also a fine Durham bull, whose parents had been imported from England. Corn was becoming popular in Europe as an article of food, so he directed that more

[7] Ibid., June 25, 1846.

[8] Ibid., Sept. 2, 1846; and Lee to Carter Lee, Sept. 1, 1846, McGregor MSS, U. of Va. Custis apparently owned, or was part owner of the Arlington Belle, judging from Lee's comments. For the accomodations at Arlington Spring, see Nat. Intelligencer, June 23, 1846.

[9] Ibid., Mar. 5, Nov. 20, 1846.

of it be planted, and also some of the new yellow corn which was said to withstand shipment to distant parts better than the white.[10]

However, he had to leave the detailed management of the Pamunkey farms to his manager, Francis Nelson, an energetic and highly capable farmer, who habitually kept abreast of the latest developments in agriculture. Apparently he had only one serious failing in that he was a poor bookkeeper, a serious deficiency for anyone responsible for the business affairs of two large and valuable farms. He also failed to keep his employer well posted on conditions at the White House and Romancock. "Not having heard from my Estates for nearly half a year, I naturally feel anxious to hear from them," Custis complained to Nelson early in 1846.[11]

When he finally received an answer to this letter, it proved most heartening. According to Nelson, the wheat crop looked good and 600 barrels of spring corn were already for market. The fishery had brought in almost a thousand dollars, which led Custis to urge Nelson to expand his operations next year. "Fisheries are becoming of increasing value," he wrote. "The demand, owing to the facilities of rail road, & Canals with the interior, is greater every day. Fish will never be low priced again. I flatter myself you will find the White House fishery after this, one of the best crops."[12]

Though Custis' main dependence was on his distant plantations, his farm at Arlington was far from small or unimportant, and was often remarked by strangers. "Mr. Custis has a beautiful farm on the other side of the Potomac," one wrote in his diary that summer.[13] To ride about his estate, Custis probably used the mare his son-in-law had left in his care.

[10]Custis to F. Nelson, May 9, 1846, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.
[11]May 2, 1846, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.
[12]May 9, 1846, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.
[13]Entries for July 8, June 15, 1846, respectively, in Daniel Willard, "Memo-Book," 1846, Misc. D. C. Papers, L. C.

"I hope your father will consider her his own," Lee had earlier written to Mary. "I should very much like to keep her for you, Mother [Mrs. Custis] & the children, but...there are too many more important demands for money & I never expect to have again a horse for pleasure alone."[14]

That fall the war came close to Arlington, when word came that Markie's father, Captain William G. Williams, had been mortally wounded while leading a storming party into the city of Monterey. In the same local newspaper which announced hisvdeath another article told of General Wool's march deep into Mexican territory. Reading that her husband was leading a corps of pioneers in advance of his army must have given Mrs. Lee considerable anxiety.[15]

Actually, there was no cause for alarm. Wool penetrated more than three hundred miles into enemy territory, but the enemy refused to give battle. Christmas eve found Lee in his tent near the little town of Saltillo, thinking of home:

> I hope good Santa Claus will fill my Rob's stockings tonight [he wrote to his two eldest boys, Custis and Rooney] that Mildred's, Agne's, and Anna's may break down with good things. I do not know what he may have for you and Mary, but if he only leaves for you one half of what I wish, you will want for nothing. I have frequently thought if I had one of you on each side of me riding on ponies, such as I could get you, I would be comparatively happy. 16

Next morning, he had just finished his breakfast when great clouds of dust were sighted in front of the enemy's position. But soon it was learned that it was from an American cavalry patrol, so Wool's troops put aside their arms and resumed their preparations for Christmas dinner.

[14]Dec. 25, 1846, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[15]Nat. Intelligencer, Nov. 4, 1846.
[16]Lee to Custis and Fitzhugh Lee, Dec. 24, 1846, printed in Fitz Lee, op. cit., 34.

Tables, food and drink were pooled by the staff for a feast at which General Wool was to be the guest of honor. A long table was decorated with pine boughs, eggnog was prepared, and chickens and turkeys roasted. A set of Washington's knives and forks Custis had given his son-in-law to carry with him into the field was placed by the commanding officer's plate. "They were passed around the table with much veneration & excited universal attention," Lee wrote to Mary, later that night. He continued:

> I assure you I was surprised myself at the handsome appearance of the feast under the indulgent colouring of candlelight, nor did Mr. Alpine's pine leaf ever appear brighter to the eyes present, than when it wreathed a basket of sweet oranges flanked by three bottles of the genuine anchor brand formed into a center ornament. How in the world the latter were produced, I am entirely at a loss to conjecture. We had however an ample supply of the Panas wine & the whole coming upon so differently from our expectations of the morn & in so pleasing a shape added much to our enjoyment. We drank many patriotic toasts, nor were our wives & sweethearts forgotten & the evening passed off very pleasantly.

Alone in his tent, the stillness of the sleeping camp broken only by the occasional footstep of a passing sentinel, Lee's thoughts turned to other holiday seasons when he and Mary had been together:

> We have had many happy Christmas' together, & this is the first time that we have been entirely separated at this holy time since our marriage, & though I have been absent on two or three other occasions on the day itself, yet have not been far distant & always arrived during the holy days. We have therefore nothing to complain of & I hope it has not interfered with your happiness, surrounded as you are by father, Mother, children & dear friends. I therefore trust you are well & happy & that this is the last time ' shall be absent from you during my life. May God preserve & bless you till then & forever after is my constant prayer. 17

Three weeks later, Wool's bloodless campaign came to an end, and Lee was transferred to the staff of General Scott, at Brazos, where an expeditionary force was being assembled to assault the city of Vera Cruz from the sea. In January, just before his fortieth birthday, he set out on "Creole," the best of his three horses, and in company with a party of

17Lee to Mrs. Lee, Dec. 25, 1846, DeButts-Ely MSS.

officers and men, made the journey of more than 250 miles without incident. Aware that staff officers had few opportunities to distinguish themselves in battle, Lee could hardly have hoped for, let alone expected the fame he would win in the coming campaign.

During the following weeks, Lee kept those at Arlington informed on the progress of the expedition. He told of sailing from Tampico on the steam-warship Massachusetts; of the arrival of the expedition off Vera Cruz, and of the debarkation of the land forces that quickly invested the city.[18] His brother Smith was in charge of a large gun brought ashore from his ship, the Mississippi, and Lee was greatly concerned for his safety during the bombardment which ensued. "No matter where I turned, my eyes reverted to him," he wrote after the city had capitulated, "and I stood by his gun whenever I was not wanted elsewhere. Oh! I felt awfully and am at a loss what I should have done had he been cut down before me. I thank God that he was saved...."

He was deeply impressed by the effectiveness of the guns he himself directed for a time--the first he had ever aimed at an enemy in eighteen years of service as an officer. Telling of the havoc they wrought, he wrote: "Their fire was terrific, and the shells thrown from our battery were constant and regular discharges, so beautiful in their flight and so destructive in their fall. It was awful! My heart bled for the inhabitants. The soldiers I did not care so much for, but it was terrible to think of the women and children."[19]

[18] For the sailing of the expedition see same to Custis and Fitzhugh Lee, Feb. 27, 1847, in Jones, Reminiscences, 371f; and undated letter quoted in Fitz Lee, op. cit., 36f.

[19] Ethan A. Hitchcock, Fifty Years in Camp and Field (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1909), 243.

Characteristically, he said nothing to his family about the recognition he received for his excellent work in emplacing the battery and directing its fire. Nor did he say anything of a narrow escape from death when, returning from a reconnaisance, he was fired on by a nervous American sentry--the ball passing between his left arm and body. He tried to minimize the incident when it was reported to General Scott, explaining that the sentry had mistaken him for a Mexican, but the General refused his plea that the sentinel go unpunished.

After the fall of Vera Cruz, while preparations were under way for the long march inland to Mexico City, some of Lee's mail probably caught up to him. No doubt Mary told him of the misadventure that had befallen her father on Washington's Birthday, on his way home from Alexandria. He and some of his friends were returning home by boat late that night, when they were caught by a storm which drove their craft ashore, wrecking it. By then it was four o'clock in the morning, and there was nothing to be done but walk home, soaked to the skin, a distance of four miles. Surprisingly enough, considering that he was sixty-six, he suffered no serious after-effects.[20]

In anticipation of another prosperous year, Custis planned to visit his Pamunkey River plantations in the spring to see that everything was being done to make the most of it. So far, the previous year's corn crop at the White House had netted him well over a thousand dollars; and since the price of corn was still rising, he hoped to get that much for the thousand bushels as yet unsold. "I hope this letter may reach you in

[20]Custis to F. Nelson, Feb. 25, 1847, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

time," he wrote Nelson, early in February, urging him to wait for a higher price, before selling. "A great loss, indeed, it would be to a man who needs money as much as I do, & who always unlucky in hitting prices, has now a chance that will not happen again in a life time, of selling a good crop, at a high price."[21]

He was much interested in the experiments Nelson was making to determine the comparative value of oyster shells and marl as fertilizer, also plaster and clover. A railroad was about to be built from Richmond to the head of navigation on the Pamunkey, he informed the farm manager, and it was expected to pass through the White House estate. "It will make every shad you catch worth 12 1/2 cents. Vast quantities of fresh shad go from the Potomac to New York by Rail Road."[22]

In April, while her father was getting the spring crops in, Mrs. Lee made a trip up to the Valley, to "Audley," to visit her aunt Eleanor Lewis, who was now living there with her son Lorenzo. She also took some of the children whose high spirits and exuberance proved something of an inconvenience after the party arrived to find Lorenzo seriously ill.[23] With her usual cheerful competence in such situations, Mrs. Lee at once took over much of the management of the disrupted household and helped Lorenzo's wife nurse her stricken husband. She also wrote his will for him, a fortnight before he died.

"Audley"

"Dear Mary Lee was a most tender & Efficient nurse & a source of great comfort to him," the saddened mother wrote to a relative. "Her pure unaffected Piety had great influence in preparing him for a life beyond the grave--in his delirium he always submitted to be[ing]

[21]Same to same, Feb. 2, 1847, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.
[22]Same to same, Jan. 27, Feb. 25, 1847, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.
[23]Mrs. E. P. Lewis to C. M. Conrad, Apr. 17, 1847, Lewis Family Papers, Mt. Vernon, Va.

controlled by her."[24]

While Mrs. Lee was comforting her dying cousin, her husband was gaining distinction on the battlefield of Cerro Gordo, a mountain pass held by a Mexican army opposing Scott's march inland to Mexico City. Making a daring reconnaissance, Lee discovered a route by which the Mexicans could be attacked, and in the battle which followed, on April 18, 1847, more than 3,000 of the enemy were captured and the rest driven headlong in retreat. For his part in the victory, Lee was commended by General Scott and also by the several commanding officers with whom he served during the battle.[25]

Though he had demonstrated that he was aggressive and fearless in action, Lee could not harden himself to the misery and suffering of a battlefield. At one place he came across a dying Mexican soldier, under whom was a Mexican boy--a bugler or a drummer--whose arm was shattered. A little girl, nearby, seemed to be imploring someone to help them. "Her large black eyes were streaming with tears..." Lee wrote his eldest son a few days later. "Her plaintive tones of 'Mille Gracias, Senor,' as I had the dying man lifted off the boy and both carried to the hospital still lingers in my ear." Continuing, he described his sensations while under fire: "I thought of you, my dear Custis, on the 18th in the battle, and wondered, when the musket balls and grape were whistling over my head in a perfect shower, where I would put you if with me to be safe. I was truly thankful that you were at school, I hope learning to be good and wise. You have no idea what a horrible sight a battlefield is."[26]

As the American Army pressed on into the interior that summer, until

[24]Mrs. E. P. Lewis to C. M. Conrad, Apr. 28, 1847, Lewis Family Papers, Mt. Vernon, Va.; also MacDonald, op. cit., 100.

[25]Freeman, Lee, I, 247f.

[26]Lee to Custis Lee, Apr. 25, 1847, in Fitz Lee, op. cit., 40f.

finally it reached the lovely valley in which stood its goal, Mexico City, Lee's reputation for competence, coolness and bravery continued to grow. Although he did not know it as yet, he had been promoted to brevet major for his service at Cerro Gordo, and would soon be made brevet lieutenant colonel for his part in the battles of Contreras and Cherubusco, on the approaches to the city.[27]

Meanwhile, back at Arlington, his father-in-law had experienced one reverse after another. Grain prices, instead of going up as he had expected, had dropped off sharply when a depression hit Europe in the spring. During the summer, they continued to decline, with the result that Custis had to unload, for what ever he could get, the corn and wheat he had held back from the previous year. Though not as hard hit as most Americans shippers, many of whom were ruined, by August he was so deeply in debt he had to borrow money for living expenses.[28]

His situation was improved somewhat by the bumper crop of wheat on the Pamunkey farms. The corn crop also promised to be a good one, though his return from it would hinge on the outcome of the English harvest. "This has tended in some measure to alleviate the very heavy & gloomy impression on my spirits..." he wrote his overseer. Having misjudged the market so badly that spring, he was reluctant to question Nelson's judgment in the future. "[You] will hereafter sell the best way you can," he wrote. "I am really so unfortunate, that I am unwilling to risk my own judgment, but will seek the best advice."[29]

[27]He was brevetted major, Aug. 24, 1847, to date from Apr. 18, 1847; lieutenant colonel, to date from Aug. 20, 1847; for which, see Freeman, Lee, I, 248, 272.

[28]Custis to F. Nelson, Aug. 25, 1847, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

[29]Same to same, July , 1847, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

By fall, things looked better. By selling more of the White House wheat and corn, he was able to extricate himself from the worst of his financial difficulties. In addition, several orders were received from New York shipbuilders for ship-timber from what was called the "Devil's Shipyard," a forest of ancient oaks on the Romancock farm. Grain and flour were also rising in proce, but Custis' financial position was still far from sound. As a result, he lacked the heart--and the money--to travel to New York to take part in laying the cornerstone of a great monument to Washington. As he wrote Nelson: "I was too out of sorts, both in health & spirits, to undertake the journey."[30]

He was greatly disappointed at not being able to spend as much as he had planned on improving the White House farms. "I am happy to hear of the Oyster shells, there is no mistake in them whatever," he wrote their manager. "I sincerely regret that I cannot afford you larger means for the purchase of that article, that in a few years will make a new world of Pamunkey lands. Should I happily see better days, I shall delight to share every dollar I possibly can for the purchase of lime."[31]

While his father-in-law was struggling to weather the bad times, Lee again distinguished himself in battle, this time at the storming of Chapultepec, a military academy which had been converted into a fortress to guard the best entrance into Mexico City. Lee reconnoitered the place in preparation for the assault, located and emplaced several batteries to bombard it, and on September 13, 1847 accompanied the troops who scaled its walls under a heavy fire. Though he had been wounded slightly and

[30] Same to same, July 21, Sept. 28, and Oct. 26, 1847, Custis MSS, Va. & Mary College.

[31] Same to same, July 21, 1847, Custis MSS, Va. & Mary College.

had had no sleep for two days, he had still to determine the best avenue into the city after the fortress was taken. This he did, and reported it to General Scott; then he fainted for the first time and only time in his life. After a night's rest, he felt well enough to accompany the first troops into the captured city. Again his courage and enterprise won him the commendation of General Scott and a recommendation that he be made a brevet colonel.[32]

During the months which were to pass before a treaty of peace was signed on February 2, 1848, there was little for the army to do. Rather than be idle, Lee occupied himself by mapping the defenses of the city and much of the countryside about it. In this way, he managed to keep aloof from the controversy that broke out among the senior officers as to which had been chiefly responsible for the final victory. For himself, Lee wanted no more recognition than that to which he was justly entitled. Fearing that his father-in-law might try to press his claims at Washington, Lee wrote to dissuade him:

> I hope my friends will give themselves no annoyance on my account, or any concern about the distribution of favors [he wrote in April]. I know how those things are awarded at Washington, and how the President will be beseiged by clamorous claimants. I do not wish to be numbered among them. Such as he can conscientiously bestow, I shall gratefully receive, and have no doubt that those will exceed my deserts. [33]

Thoughts of returning home to his family, rather than military honors, occupied Lee's mind that spring, while the army waited for the peace treaty to be ratified. There were presents to be bought and dispatched to the children, such as the white pony, "Santa Anna," which he bought for little Rob, together with a silver-mounted bridle and saddle. Once the treaty was at last signed, in May, Lee was impatient to leave, but nevertheless

[32] Freeman, Lee, I, 273-283.
[33] Lee to Custis, Apr. 8, 1848, in Fitz Lee, on. cit., 44.

insisted that Mary go ahead with her plans for the summer. "I can soon join you wherever you are...," he wrote.[34]

He then had the sad duty of writing to Markie Williams whose father would never return home. To console her, he was sending her father's belt buckle, he said. "I know it will be a prized relic to you, of one who loved you dearly...." Referring to her brother Lawrence, who had received an appointment to West Point, he wrote: "Do impress upon him the necessity of application & strict attention to duty & the regulations. It would be a great distress to us all if his fathers son does not acquit himself worthy of the expectations we are entitled to from him, & do credit to the Institution he so much loved. I shall watch his course with much anxiety."[35]

At Arlington, while Lee's family waited eagerly for his arrival, the skies were clearing for his father-in-law. The Pamunkey fishery had been a good one, and there would probably be enough cash to tide both Arlington and the White House over until the last of the previous year's corn crop went to market. Even this slight encouragement was enough to make his spirits rebound, and he set about enclosing more of his famed "pocosin," the marshy land along the Potomac. He estimated that the project, most of which would be done by contractors, would coast almost $2500, but thought it worth the money because it would add from eighty to ninety acres of extremely fertile land to the Arlington farm. If everything worked out right, corn would be planted on the reclaimed land in June, and timothy later on.[36]

[34]Same to Mrs. Lee, May 20, 1848, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[35]Same to Markie Williams, May 21, 1848, in Craven, "To Markie," 30ff.
[36]Custis to F. Nelson, May 13, and same to same, n.d., but evidently c. Feb., 1848, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

Watching blue-clad volunteers, back from Mexico, march over from Georgetown to celebrate their return at Arlington Spring, must have made the Lees impatient for the return of their own hero.[37] No doubt Mr. Custis was there to greet them, and perhaps make an extemporaneous speech on the subject of an earlier war and its great hero. During the winter, he had written another of his "Recollections," about Washington's last years at Mount Vernon, and he now hoped to get them published in two volumes embellished with engravings of some of the Washington relics at Arlington. He also planned to include letters he had exchanged with Washington, and those of his father.[38]

He was highly gratified, in May, to be invited by the Washington National Monument Society to be present at the laying of the corner-stone for the monument which today is the principal landmark of the national capital. "I hope you may live to see it, complete in height, with your beloved Arlington," wrote Elisha Whittlesey, president of the society, in extending the invitation--a sentiment echoed by Custis in his acceptance.[39]

In June, about the time his son-in-law was boarding a ship at Vera Cruz for his return home, Custis went over to the city to help pull the massive 12-ton, marble cornerstone from the freight yard to the monument site. "The citizens turned out in great numbers," a newspaper reported, "and manifested the deep interest they felt in the erection of the proposed monument by spiritedly dragging the stone to its destined place. Among these was observed the venerable G. W. P. Custis, who seemed to be

[37]William A. Gorden, "Recollections of a Boyhood in Georgetown," Columbia His. Soc. Records, XX (1918), 129.

[38]"Washington's Retirement After the Peace of 1783, & Bishop, the Old Body Servant," appeared in Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 22, 1848. Also The Virginia Historical Register, I (Apr., 1848), 175.

[39]E. Whittlesey to Custis, May 16, 1848; and Custis to Whittlesey, May 16, 1848; both in Washington Nat. Monument Soc. Records, Nat. Archives.

inspired by the same enthusiasm which animated the patriotic citizens who assisted on the occasion."[40]

"I cannot tell what day I shall arrive, but hardly think I can reach W/ashington/ before the end of the month," Lee wrote to Mary in June, as his ship steamed up the Mississippi to New Orleans, where he planned to take a river boat to Wheeling. Like all soldiers bound home from distant battlefields, he resented the slowness of his homeward journey. "As I approach I become more and more impatient," he continued, "& look forward to the long trip up the river with great dread."[41]

While Lee was enduring the tedious voyage up the Mississippi and the Ohio to Wheeling, everything was being made ready at Arlington for his arrival. Even his summer clothes, newly washed and pressed, were laid out ready for him to put on. To make better time, Lee left his baggage and "Grace Darling," his mare, at Wheeling in care of his orderly, Jim Connally, and came on alone by train to Washington, where he arrived on June 29, 1848.

A carriage had been sent over to the station to meet him, but for some reason he missed it, and instead borrowed a horse to ride home. Knowing that he was to arrive home that day, everyone at Arlington had been on the lookout. Waiting anxiously for a glimpse of the carriage, no one noticed the lone horseman ascending the road up the hill, and not until "Speck" rushed out barking joyfully did they realize that their soldier was home.

Great was the excitement in the hall as he embraced his children,

[40] Nat. Intelligencer, June 10, 1848.
[41] Lee to Mrs. Lee, June 14, 1848, DeButts-Ely MSS.

then Mary and her parents. His error in mistaking a friend's little boy for his youngest son, Rob, added to the hilarity. Telling Smith Lee about their happy reunion, he wrote next day:

> Here I am once again, my dear Smith, perfectly surrounded by Mary and her precious children, who seem to devote themselves to staring at the furrows in my face and the white hairs in my head. It is not surprising that I am hardly recognizable to some of the young eyes around me and perfectly unknown to the youngest, but some of the older ones gaze with astonishment at me, and seem at a loss to reconcile what they see and what was pictured in their imaginations. I find them too much grown, and all well, and I have much cause for thankfulness and gratitude to that good God who has once more united us. [42]

No doubt he looked older, but he was no less handsome. Before the war there had been little in his bearing to distinguish him from his fellow-officers; but now he had the indefinable air of a man who had demonstrated his ability and was destined for greater achievement.

The change was noticed by a lady who visited Arlington that winter. Lee was reading to his family assembled about the table one night. "I looked up and my eye fell upon his face in perfect repose," she recalled years later, "and the thought at once passed through my mind 'You certainly look more like a great man than any one I have ever seen.'" [43]

More and more, others would get the same impression in the years to come.

[42] Freeman, Lee, I, 301; R. E. Lee, Jr., op. cit., 3f.; and Lee to Smith Lee, June 30, 1848, in Fitz Lee, op. cit., 49f.

[43] Statement of Mrs. Marietta F. T. Powell, July 17, 1886, quoted in Andrews, Scraps, 199f.

CHAPTER XIV

"THE FARMER OF ARLINGTON"

During the summer of 1848, Lee worked in the engineer's office at Washington, mostly on the maps he had started in Mexico. For once he found his work interesting, and in addition was pleased when he received his brevet commissions for service in Mexico. Henceforth, he would be "Colonel Lee," according to the army custom.

By the time he had unpacked and stored away his large camp chest and other luggage, the children had lost their shyness and were eager to have him join in their fun.[1] They were especially impressed by "Grace Darling," the large chestnut mare that their father had bought on his way out to Texas and had ridden all through the war, and their eyes widened as Jim Connally pointed out the scars that, according to him, marked where she had been wounded seven times by bullets. "My father was very much attached to and proud of her," little Rob would recall later on, "always petting her and talking to her in a loving way, when he rode her or went to see her in her stall."[2]

Lee probably took the family over to the city July 4th, as planned, to see the cornerstone of the Washington Monument laid.[3] His father-in-law did not speak at the ceremony, but must have been pleased when his

[1] For the camp chest, see Long, op. cit., 467.

[2] R. E. Lee, Jr., op. cit., 5. The mare, regarded by those at Arlington as Lee's favorite war horse, is not mentioned in any of his letters from Mexico. She may have been the "Creole" mentioned in his correspondence, and been given the name "Grace Darling," by the children, after the famous European heroine of that name.

[3] Lee to Smith Lee, June 30, 1848, Fitz Lee, op. cit., 49f.

friend, Robert C. Winthrop of Massachusetts, retold the story of the "Indian Prophecy" in his address. The New Englander could hadrly have been impressed by the equeatrian portrait of Washington painted by the master of Arlington, which decorated the banquet hall of the National Hotel for the grand dinner held in honor of the occasion. But he shared the artist's veneration for Washington, and the two were to become, if they were not already, good friends.[4]

Marshall

A few days later, the boys accompanied their father to Baltimore, where he went to visit his ailing sister, Mrs. William Marshall, and incidentally pick up the pony he had bought in Mexico. Little Rob especially was disappointed when he first saw it, bedraggled and miserable after its long voyage en route. But good feed and care soon restored the pony's health and spirits, and when Rob had learned to ride him, "Santa Anna" became the pride and joy of his life. For years, he firmly believed the tales Jum Connally told about the pony, such as the one about Santa Anna and himself being the first to scale the walls of Chapultepec.[5]

A few weeks later, Lee was assigned to superintend the construction of a new fort to defend the port of Baltimore. But since he did not have to report there until November, he was at Arlington during the presidential election that fall, in which his father-in-law was an enthusiastic campaigner for "Old Zack" Taylor, the hero of Buena Vista.[5]

According to the newspapers, old Mr. Custis was a most effective speaker, with a "rich, full-toned voice." In his speeches, which were more historical than political, patriotic rather than partisan, he made much of the fact that he, a grandfather, would cast his first vote in the

[4]Nat. Intelligencer, July 6, 1848; and Custis to William Seaton, July 3, 1848, in Seaton, op. cit., 179.
[5]R. E. Lee, Jr., op. cit., 5.
[6]Freeman, Lee, 303, I.

coming election, and that vote for General Taylor, who in his opinion, was much like George Washington. To most of those who heard him, he seemed less a politician, than a living memory of those earlier, more heroic times which he loved to describe. Consequently, he was honored out of all proportion to his actual importance, as when, for example, that fall a fine new schooner, built in Connecticutt, was named Arlington in his honor.[7]

Significantly, he was especially well liked by young people, who usually see through and resent an insincere pose. Thus, when the Falcon Boat Club visited Arlington Spring the following summer, he greeted the boatmen and their young ladies on their arrival, shared a picnic lunch with them, and took part in a little ceremony in which a pretty young lady formally presented a flag to the coxswain of the club. Called upon to speak, he complimented the young ladies on their flag, then cautioned "his boys," as he termed them, to treasure their flag if they valued their "old Daddy's favor." Then dancing was resumed in the pavillion to the music of a German band, and continued until it was dark and time to be returning home. Years later, when Arlington had acquired an even greater, but far different fame, many of these young folks must have recalled the song they sang as they rowed away that summer night, the last verse of which went:

> No! no! in our hearts we will bless them,
> And pray that in life's darkest hours,
> A thought of those pleasant excursions
> May come like the fragrance of flowers;
> For to us, so oft as the moonlight
> Shall flood the blue waters o'er,
> Will rise ever bright to our vision
> Our picnics to Arlington Shore. [8]

[7] Nat. Intelligencer, Sept: 29, Nov. 1, 1848.
[8] Ibid., Sept. 18, 1849.

Rainy days, or at night when the Lee children were in bed, Custis worked on a large equestrian painting of General Washington at the Battle of Monmouth, in the foreground of which was the famous "Captain Molly," loading the cannon of her dead husband. Though he was not much of an artist, his paintings were of considerable interest because they faithfully portrayed not only events, but also the uniforms, arms, and equipment of the period, even though they were done almost entirely from memory. "I hope to make a good picture," he wrote John Speare Smith, of the Maryland Historical Society, in October, 1848. "The old Orator, you know, boasts of having Two Religions (most people have but one & many none) while I have the Religion of Christianity & the Religion of the Revolution!"[9]

It was his reputation as an authority on the American Revolution which brought the New York artist-historian, Benson J. Lossing, to Arlington House one wintry day that December. Lossing had just begun his monumental work, The Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution, in which he describes this first visit. "Mr. Custis received me, though a stranger, with cordiality," he recalled, "and when the object of my visit was made known, the 'Washington treasures of Arlington House' were opened for my inspection." From his host, the historian garnered a wealth of information about the Revolution--people, events, uniforms, and special units like Washington's Life Guard. He found him to be an interesting conversationalist and surprisingly active for a man of his

[9]Custis to J. S. Smith, Oct. 13, 24, 1848, Misc. MSS, Md. His. Soc., printed in full with introductory remarks by the author in Mil. Collector & Historian, III (March, 1951), 21f.

age. "With books and pencil, in the bosom of an affectionate family, Mr. Custis...is enjoying the blessings of a green old age," wrote Lossing. He was also deeply impressed by Mrs. Custis' piety and her solicitude for her servants, noticing for instance, how she assisted "Nurse" to kneel and rise during the family prayers.[10]

Such was the beginning of what was to be a close friendship, not only between the historian and his host, but also with the Lees.

Soon after Lee officially took over his new assignment at Baltimore, in November, he made a short trip to Boston for the board of engineers. On his return, he went out to Soller's Point, where Fort Carroll, as it was to be called, would be built. After examining the situation, he decided that construction could not be started until spring, and therefore returned home to Arlington a few days before Christmas.[11]

This time his stay was short. Early in January he set out for Florida as one of a party of officers who were to decide which federal lands in that state should be retained by the government for fortifications. The assignment promised to be an interesting one, and in order to make it he declined an offer of civilian employment which would have sorely tempted him a few years earlier. He appreciated their interest, he explained to officials of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad who wanted him to lay out the right-of-way for the railroad, but he expected to be in Florida all winter and had other duties waiting for him in the spring.[12] From the firmness of his polite refusal, it is apparent that he had now definitely decided that his future lay in the military

[10]Lossing, Revolution, II, 120n., 413. Also Lossing, Mary and Martha Washington, 210n.

[11]Freeman, Lee, 303f.

[12]Lee to W. L. Powell, Jan. 10, 1849, DeButts-Ely MSS.

service.

The trip was a leisurely one, so he had many opportunities to write home. In his letters, he described their voyage along the west coast of Florida in the schooner Phoenix, his visit to an old Spanish fort at St. Mark's, and the rough weather encountered on the next leg of the trip, to Cedar Keys. This was his first experience with a storm at sea, and after they made port he wrote Mary a vivid account of it:

> We got over the Bar [at St. Mark's] about 2 P. M. Saturday evg. with a fair wind & made a very good run during the night. Next morg. the wind died away, & during the night, a Norther set in with great violence, & raged all day. We had to lay to under a treble reefed foresail, the waves pitching us about as if we were an egg shell, & our little Schooner proved herself a fine sea vessel. I have never been to sea in a small vessel before, & though we get all the benefit of the motion & water, yet it is beautiful to see her, sitting the waves like a gull. Our party kept their berths, pretty much all day. I did as long as I could stand it, & then sat on deck, watching the big waves tumbling around us. Nothing could be cooked either for the men or ourselves, the bursting of the waves over her deck, obliged them to keep the hatches closed & then the water dashing down the stove pipe, extinguished the fire. By this morg. the Storm had very much subsided, & we succeeded in reaching the north of this Harbour. [13]

Key West he described to Mary as a "long, narrow low island, containing a small village, apparently composed of wreckers & those calculated for the wants of the shipping driven here by distress of some kind." Still it had a good harbor, and its situation close to Cuba and the West Indies made it advisable to complete the fort under construction there.[14]

In February, when the Phoenix was sailing up the east coast of Florida, his name was associated for the first time with one that not many years hence would stand in direct contrast to it. A "National Inaugural Ball, without distinction of party," was to be held March 5th in honor of President Taylor, and Lee's name appeared among the 230 honorary "managers"

[13] Same to Mrs. Lee, Feb. 13, 1849, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[14] Same to same, Feb. 22, 1849, DeButts-Ely MSS.

listed in the announcement of the event. Further down the list, among the Congressional sponsors, was another name, one also destined for enduring fame--that of the "Hon. A. Lincoln, Ill."[15]

The ball had long since been held when Lee reached home in April. Much against his inclination, he had to leave almost at once for Baltimore to start work on the new fort on Soller's Flats. "The pain of leaving Arlington is much increased at my being unable to bid you adieu," he wrote cousin Markie just before his departure.[16]

Lee liked army life, and so was happy that his son Custis, now seventeen, wanted to follow in his footsteps. Hence, he was highly pleased when President Taylor promised to give the lad an appointment to West Point. As Taylor explained to the boy's great-aunt, Mrs. Lawrence Lewis, with whom he was well acquainted: "The son of Col Lee, whose father has done so much in Mexico in contributing to our success there, and who deservedly stands so high with all who knew him as a soldier, a man and a gentleman, is unquestionably entitled...to an appointment at the Military Academy..."[17]

In Baltimore, Lee rented a three-story brick house on Madison Avenue, The house was almost new, but the rooms were small in comparison with those at Arlington. His bedroom, Lee told a friend, was "hardly big enough to swing a cat in." But for some reason--perhaps the press of work in getting construction of Fort Carroll under way--it was decided that the family would not join him until early in the fall. Consequently, Lee had the place to himself for several months, his only company a pair of yellow kittens he was raising. "They are quite wild yet & have made

[15] Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 20, 1849.
[16] Apr. 1, 1849, in Craven, "To Markie," 22f.
[17] Z. Taylor to Mrs. E. P. Lewis, Apr. 12, 1849, Lewis Family Letters, Mt. Vernon, Va.

themselves at home under the house, whence they only issue at their own pleasure," he wrote Mary. "I hope to tempt them out in time with some nice mice."[18]

It may have been this spring that Mrs. Sigourney, the New England authoress, brought a young lady with her to Arlington, who later wrote of her visit:

> I remember that we drove to Arlington one sunny afternoon, late in May, a delicious day, and we found the ladies, Mrs. Custis and Mrs. Lee expecting us. We had tea in the Washington teacups, and Mrs. Lee took me into the tangled neglected gardens, full of rose-buds, and allowed me to pick my fill of the sweet dainty Bon Silene variety, which she told me blossomed all winter....Mrs. Lee had the face of a genius: a wealth of dark hair, carelessly put up, gave her fine head the air of one of Romney's portraits. She was most lovely and sympathetic. Her mother, Mrs. Custis, was a woman full of character....George Washington Parke Custis was an oddity, an eccentric....He showed us a handsome portrait of his ancestor Parke, a favorite of Queen Anne, who had given him her picture set in diamonds. 'Sly fellow,' said Mr. Custis, 'he kept the portrait but he sold the diamonds.' [19]

To the prim young lady from Boston, the place looked neglected. A plow was rusting in the garden; pieces of plaster had fallen off the columns of the portico. She also thought the proprietor was too easy on his slaves. Had she been more observant, she might have noticed that the Arlington fields, unlike those of many other farms in the neighborhood, were fertile and well-kept, not gullied and over-grown with brush. And if she could have seen what her host wrote to his White House overseer that summer, she would have understood why the portico had not been repaired:

> I am an economist in every thing, [the letter read] The only money I have spent after absolute necessaries for my family, is an expenditure of guano manure, to improve my Estate here, from

[18] Packard, op. cit., 158; Freeman, Lee, I, 305; and Lee to Mrs. Lee, June 25, 1849, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[19] Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Wilson Sherwood, "Washington Before the War," in Lippencott's Monthly Magazine, vol. 54 (Aug., 1894), 261.

> the use of which I have made in the last three years very great improvements at the place. I have denied myself even the purchase of a saddle horse, and walk my 5 or 6 miles a day, no small matter for a man who is approaching his 70th year. [20]

She might also have learned something about his character if she had seen a letter he wrote that summer to a local newspaper, telling of a widowed mother from Harper's Ferry who had turned up at Arlington, foot-sore and distraught, seeking her eleven-year old son whom she had lost in the city. She was staying for the time being at Arlington, the letter said, where any information concerning the missing boy would be grate-fully received.[21]

She might also have had a better appreciation for humane slave-owners like Custis who would not endanger the health of his slaves by overwork-ing them, if she had seen some of his letters concerning them. "I hope in God you may have no occasion to make use of this remedy," Custis wrote overseer Nelson that summer, enclosing a supply of camphor and laudanum with directions for their use in case of an outbreak of cholera among the White House slaves. Later, he would write with relief: "We have had dysentery & diarrhea here a good deal, but thank God have lost no one."[22]

Not only the slaves, but everyone at Arlington were in danger during the sickly warm months, so Lee, when he returned to Arlington for a short time in June, urged Mary to take the family up to the Valley as soon as possible. Nor was he being over-solicitous. Since winter, Mary's father

[20] Custis to F. Nelson, Sept. 12, 1849, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.
[21] [Custis] to W. Seaton and J. Gales, Sept. 9, 1849, printed in Nat. Intelligencer, Sept. 11, 1849.
[22] Custis to F. Nelson, June 17, Sept. 12, 1849, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

had been afflicted with an intestinal disorder, and Lee himself came down with malaria in July. After convalescing at Ravensworth, he returned to Arlington, where he was concerned to find Mary and the children still there--perhaps because Mrs. Lee wanted to care for her ailing father. "I hope you will all keep well, but my fears to the contrary are very great," he wrote Mary from Newport, R. I., where he went in August, to see about some new buildings for Fort Adams. "I pray that you may all be preserved. I should much prefer being at A. with you than here."[23] He was much relieved when the summer passed without any of his family becoming seriously ill.

Illness prevented Custis from having a new chapter of the "Recollections", "Washington: His Home and Household," ready for Washington's Birthday. When it finally did appear in the National Intelligencer two months later, the author announced that the "Recollections"would not be published as a book until all of them had appeared first in the newspapers, that being the best means of reaching "the masses of the people in the cheapest and most diffusible manner practicable."[24]

His illness would have been more aggravating, had not his spirits been buoyed up by a marked improvement in farm prices. Corn and wheat had both gone up, and in August, when he sold the White House crop of red wheat, he received almost a dollar a bushel for it, which more than repaid him for the cost of the lime and marl with which he had enriched the White House fields. A bumper crop of corn was also expected, which when sold would enable him to pay off all his debts--something he had not been able to do for years. Grateful, he wrote manager Nelson, in his old-fashioned, stilted way: "I have to assure you, my Dr Sir, of

[23] Lee to Mrs. Lee, June 23, Aug. 15, 24, 1849, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[24] Nat. Intelligencer, Apr. 20, 1849.

my grateful acknowledgements for the great services you have rendered me in the administration of my affairs,-greater & better than my Estate have ever experienced since I owned them, a period of 47 years."[25]

Lee was to have gone from Newport to the Brooklyn Navy Yard to examine a drydock that was not working properly. But his malaria still hung on, so instead he went over to West Point, and thence to Baltimore, where he arrived early in September.[26]

Sometime in October, about the time sculptor Clark Mills was at Arlington making a plaster cast of the Houdon bas-relief of Washington, Mrs. Lee and the children joined him there. This time the servants who usually accompanied them were left at home, for Lee thought it unwise to expose them to the influences of the abolitionists then active in the city.[27]

The Lee's had many family connections in Baltimore, and through them soon made many new friends. Whenever their parents were going out on some social engagement, the children could stay up to see them off, and Robert, the youngest, would later recall how handsome his father appeared in his dress uniform on such occasions. Usually Mrs. Lee was late in getting ready, and her husband "would chide her gently, in a playful way and with a bright smile." When they were ready at last, "He would then bid us good-bye," Robert remembered, "and I would go to sleep with this beautiful picture in my mind, the golden epaulets and

[25] Same to F. Nelson, June 9, 17, Aug. 25, Sept. 12, 1849, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

[26] Freeman, Lee, I, 306; and Lee to Mrs. Lee, Aug. 31, 1849, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[27] Nat. Intelligencer, Oct. 10, 1849; and Lee to Mrs. Lee, Sept. 25, 1849, DeButts-Ely MSS.

all--chiefly the epaulets."[28]

Pres Taylor

President Taylor had as yet not kept his promise to appoint Custis Lee to West Point, so when they returned to Arlington for the Christmas holidays, Lee looked about for someone else who could get the lad into the Academy, but with no success.[29]

His failure may be attributed, in part at least, to the controversy which had arisen over the question of extending slavery into the vast territory recently wrested from Mexico. Ever since the Compromise of 1820, the balance of power between the slave and free states had been maintained in an uneasy balance, but now California was demanding admission to the Union as a free state. Defenders of the South's "peculiar institution" maintained that slavery was inevitably doomed to extinction if kept out of the new territory, while Northerners believed their section would be hemmed in, if not threatened, if slavery was permitted to expand. A compromise was the only practical solution, but extremists on both sides were making it almost impossible to arrive at one, thereby causing a crisis which threatened to split the Union.

Lee and Mr. Custis were of much the same opinion on the issue. They disliked the abolitionists, whom they considered impractical and dangerous agitators; likewise, they disliked the secessionists, whose rashness they felt, endangered the Union.[30] Both admired President Taylor and trusted that he would find a compromise solution to the question, meanwhile preventing any attempt at secession.

The situation was critical when, in February, Custis accompanied President Taylor and a number of officials to Richmond to dedicate a

[28] R. E. Lee, Jr., on. cit., 5, 8.

[29] Lee to Gen. W. Scott, Feb. 5, 1850, DeButts-Ely MSS. Also, Freeman, Lee, I, 308.

[30] Custis expresses his opinion of abolitionists in a letter to R. R. Gurley, n.d., Soc. MSS, His. Soc. of Pa.

monument to Washington on the anniversary of his birth. As their steamboat passed Mount Vernon, the President had Custis point out the mansion and tomb of the First President.[31] His speech at the dinner which followed the dedication was short, but to the point. In brief, he would carry out the laws and seek the best policy irrespective of party. The implication that he would use force, if necessary, was clear, and many of those present did not applaud when he had finished. Whether Custis was one of the latter cannot be said for his toast after dinner--"May Old Virginia never tire in her defence of constitutional liberty and our glorious Union"--is somewhat ambiguous.[32]

That Custis had a certain amount of sectional pride is apparent in a letter he wrote later in the year to one of the more extremist Virginians, Henry A. Wise, in which he offered to rent Smith's Island at a low rate to Wise and some of his friends who planned to establish a summer resort for Southerners in Virginia. Besides listing the natural advantages of the island for such a purpose, Custis stressed that here Southerners would not be subjected to the insults they commonly received from free Negroes at such northern resorts as Newport and Saratoga. He also praised Wise for being "every inch a patriot & a Southerner..."[33]

Still, as the crisis persisted into the summer of 1850, he clung to the hope that the issue would be settled without disrupting his beloved Union. Powerless to affect the outcome in any other way, he sought to turn public attention to the bonds of common interest and history that united the North and South. "Surely in these perplexing times the reminder of that glorious & happy part, & of the Brave Old Days of '76 should

[31] Z. Taylor to Mrs. E. P. Lewis, c. Mar. 1, 1850, Z. Taylor Papers, L. C.

[32] Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 26, 1850.

[33] Custis to H. A. Wise, Oct. 15, 1850, Armour MSS, Princeton U.

come 'friendly o'er all our senses,'" he wrote an editor of a local newspaper, concerning a new chapter of his Recollections. Again, in presenting a writing portfolio once owned by George Washington to President Taylor on behalf of the Washington Monument Society, he urged Taylor to follow Washington's example and "steer the good old ship Constitution into the haven of peace, of union, and of national aggrandizement."[34]

Whether, by harking back to the Revolution, he helped to cool the heated passions of the moment cannot be said. At least his friend, William Seaton, editor of the National Intelligencer thought it worth a try. "On this Anniversary of the Independence of the United States, circumstances are not particularly favorable to a retrospection of the history of the past year...," Seaton editorialized on the 4th of July. "Whilst we hope for the best, we cannot speak favorably either of the present aspect of public affairs, or of the probabilities of the future....For any speculations of our own pertinent to the present day, we cannot perhaps do any thing more agreeable to our readers than to substitute the subjoined article, from the pen of our venerable friend, G. W. P. Custis."[35]

In this article, entitled "Mount Vernon," Custis narrated the historic events that had taken place there and lauded the Constitution, "this masterwork of virtue," which had transformed the old Confederation into "a young and glorious empire." Patriotic citizens, he said, might well expect it to endure for centuries.

To his vast relief, it gradually became apparent that some compromise on the extension of slavery would be reached, though the actual legislation was not passed until September. Custis admired the firm resolution and practical wisdom President Taylor had shown during the crisis, and

[34]Custis to T. Donoho, Apr. 15, 1850, Custis MSS, L. C.; and Nat. Intelligencer, Apr. 1, 1850.

[35]Ibid., July 4, 1850.

was therefore highly pleased when the President stayed on after the regular ceremonies at the Washington Monument on July 4th to hear him dedicate the Washington City stone. Taking a handful of earth taken from the famed Kosciusko mound at Cracow, Poland, Custis placed it on top of the marble block so that it might enter into the cement and form part of the monument. He thendelivered his usual "patriotic and eloquent" speech, according to the newspapers.[36]

It was a blazing hot day, and when the ceremony was over everyone left for refreshments. The President imprudently drank iced milk and ate some poorly cooked food at the White House, and that night suffered a severe attack of cholera-morbis from which he died a few days later.[37] Custis, as honorary pallbearer at his funeral, was much distressed by his death. Lee, too, had had the utmost respect for Taylor, and when he learned of his untimely end, wrote with some bitterness to Mrs. Lawrence Lewis:

> I could hardly realize that he, so strengthened by labour & hardened by exposure, who had so often met death face to face, could in a time of peace & surrounded by safety, be taken from his Country to which he was so necessary & so dear. But he had always endeavoured to do his duty; he was ready to die! Too truthsul to dissemble: Too poor a politician to serve a party. Too pure a patriot to neglect his Country. Too honest to favour individuals at the expense of right: He was not too selfish to become a Martyr. Had he continued in the Army, whence he was drawn unsolicited, he would probably have lived 15 years to come. But the atmosphere of politicians and the breath of Party, possessed no life for him. His broken hearted family are now in this City. [38]

The crisis over, the Lees like almost everyone else turned with relief

[36] Ibid., July 6, 1850.
[37] Ibid., July 9, 10, 1850. Also Foote, op. cit., 167; and D. A. B. XVIII, 353.
[38] Lee to Mrs. E. P. Lewis, July 29, 1850, Lee Letters Bk. No. 1, DeButts-Ely MSS.

from the subject of slavery. The work on the Soller's Point fort progressed so well that in October it was officially named "Fort Carroll," in honor of Charles Carroll of Maryland, the last signer of the Declaration of Independence to survive. Custis Lee, who had finally gotten his appointment to West Point, was doing well there, and Anne and Agnes were with their grandparents at Arlington.[39] The other children werewwith their parents at Baltimore. Remembering his father in those days, young Rob would later recall:

> He was always bright and gay with us little folk, romping and playing, and joking with us. With the older children, he was just as companionable, and I have seen him join my elder brothers and their friends when they would try their powers at a high jump put up in our yard. The two younger children he petted a good deal, and our greatest treat was to get into his bed in the morning and lie close to him, listening while he talked to us in his bright, entertaining way. [40]

With disunion no longer threatening the country, Mr. Custis was able to enjoy the fine fall weather with an untroubled mind and improved health. In October, he presented a block of Vermont marble on behalf of the Washington Light Infantry to the mayor of Washington for the Washington Monument. The following month he escorted Edmond Lafayette, grandson of the Marquis, to Mount Vernon, where he showed him about and told him tales of the old days there.[41] Benson J. Lossing also visited Arlington that fall to copy Custis' "Battle of Monmouth" for his book on the Revolution. Emanuel Leutze, then working in Germany on his "Washington Crossing the Delaware," the most famous American historical painting of its kind, consulted Custis on the subject about this time. "Your precise and comprehensive descriptions have assisted me so much that the labor seemed

Edmond Lafayette

Lossing

[39] The two grils are listed as living at Arlington in Oct., 1850, in the U. S. Census, 1850, II (Alexandria County, Va.,), 817f., original return in Va. State Lib.

[40] R. E. Lee, Jr., op. cit., 9.

[41] Custis to F. Nelson, Dec. 11, 1850, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College; and Nat. Intelligencer, Oct. 21, 24, Nov. 15, 1850.

pleasure," the artist wrote. He promised to send a drawing or daguerrotype of the painting when it was finished.[42]

He made it a practice to answer all inquiries about Washington and the Revolution. "It will give me pleasure to furnish you with any further information you may desire," he wrote to a New York merchant that winter. "Should you journey [here] I shall be most happy to make you welcome to my house."[43]

Lee had to go to Boston in December, but got back in time to take his family to Arlington for Christmas. Their visit was shorter than usual for work was resumed on Fort Carroll shortly after the holidays.[44]

This year, to his disappointment, the work did not progress as rapidly as he would have liked, partly because of the nature of some of the construction, but mostly because of lack of funds. By May, he was becoming discouraged by the slow progress, and a note of frustration, even of despondency, crept into a letter he wrote to cousin Markie:

> My days are spent pretty much at Fort Carroll (Soller's Point); My thoughts are engrossed with driving piles & laying stone; & my imagination is exercised in the construction of cranes, Diving bells, Steam Pile drivers, &c. Poor subjects for a correspondence with young ladies. If it were not for my heart Markie, I might as well be a pile or stone myself, laid quietly at the bottom of the river. But that has no hardness for you, & always returns warmth & softness when touched with a thought of you. 45

He was also worried because his son, Custis, had not been doing too well in his studies at the Military Academy, and was happy when the lad assured him he was working harder. "I cannot express my pleasure at

[42]Lossing, Revolution, II, 361n.; and E. Leutze to Custis, Nov. 10, 1850, printed in Nat. Intelligencer, Dec. 5, 1850.

[43]Custis to H. C. Moore, Jan. 6, 1851, Custis Family Papers, Mt. Vernon.

[44]Freeman, Lee, I, 314.

[45]Ibid.; and Lee to Markie Williams, May 10, 1851, in Craven, "To Markie," 26.

hearing you declare your determination to shake off the listless fit that has seized upon you, and to arouse all your faculties into activity and exertion." In the same letter he also sent news of Custis' irrepressible brother, Rooney, who was seeking to prepare himself for the Academy:

> I got a message from Mr. McNally yesterday, saying that Rooney was one of the hardest workers in the school....He is growing wonderfully. I do not know when he will stop if he goes on at this rate. His feet and hands are tremendous, and his appetite startling. There is a great deal of good and energy in him, if it only gets the right direction... His anxiety is still to go to West Point, and thinks there is no life like that of a dragoon. He thinks he might get through the Academy, though he would not stand as well as Boo. I tell him he would get over two hundred demerits the first year, and that would be the end of all his military operations. [46]

True to his pledge, Custis Lee worked hard at his studies and his academic standing rose steadily as he neared the end of his first year at the Military Academy. Then, late in May, an incident occurred which threatened for a time to terminate his military career. He and his roommates protested that they were not responsible for some liquor found in their room; nevertheless they were placed under arrest while the matter was investigated. Fortunately, the evidence proved inconclusive and they got off with only a few demerits. Lee was much upset by the incident, though he kept his feelings to himself. "He never once adverted to the subject in my presence," Mrs. Custis wrote her grandson, "so I knew how painful it was to him." [47]

At this time, the summer of 1851, Lee was living alone in the Madison Avenue house. His wife's beloved Aunt Eleanor, ill at Audley, was failing fast, and Mrs. Lee had taken the children home to Arlington so that she might be with her. With his family away, he had time to read a book on

[46] Same to G. W. C. Lee, May 4, 1851, in Jones, Life and Letters, 71ff.
[47] Freeman, Lee, I, 310; and Mrs. Custis to G. W. C. Lee, n. d., but evidently c. Oct. 1, 1851, Freeman MSS, Va. State Lib.

the recent war written by a fellow engineer, Major Issac I. Stevens. He was particularly pleased that the author, to whom he wrote a word of appreciation, gave due credit to General Scott and General Taylor at a time when they were politically unpopular.[48] Eleven years later, Stevens would die, a major-general, leading his troops against part of Lee's army at Chantilly, Virginia.

With Molly also at Audley; Washington Custis was kept occupied by his farms, his correspondence and various patriotic celebrations. His plantations on the Pamunkey were prospering as never before. According to the census of 1850, Romancock, the less valuable, consisted of 2700 acres of improved land and 1300 of unimproved, and had a cash value of $30,000. On it were 140 swine, 27 milk cows, 56 "other cattle" (presumably beef cattle), 29 oxen, 18 mules, 2 horses, and 67 sheep, valued at $2800. In its barns were stored 2,000 bushels of wheat, 7,000 of corn, and 300 oats, also a considerable quantity of peas, beans, and potatoes--Irish and sweet. There were also a 400-pound bale of ginned cotton, 300 pounds of wool, and half a ton of butter. "Home manufactures" (clothing & blankets for the slaves) were assessed at $100; animals slaughtered at $500.[49] From these figures, it is apparent that this, his second most important estate, was doing extremely well.

Still, he had had too many setbacks to put much faith in the current prosperity. Not even the public improvements coming to the area--a steamboat line on the Pamunkey and York Rivers, a plank road between Richmond and the Pamunkey, and a railroad from Hanover Courthouse to the

[48] Lee to Markie Williams, May 10, 1851, in Craven, "To Markie," 26; and same to Maj. I. I. Stevens, Aug. 15, 1851, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[49] U. S. Census, 1850, Agriculture, vol. "Hanover to Madison," 313f., original returns in Va. State Lib.

Pamunkey--could despell his pessimism. "These are pleasing prospects," he wrote Nelson in December, 1850, but I fear like most other pleasing prospects of Improvements in Virginia, they will be a long time in arriving at completion."[50]

With the Pamunkey farms doing so well, he planned to concentrate on improving Arlington during the forthcoming year. "Any funds that can be spared," he wrote Nelson, "I shall be glad to receive, as the season has arrived when I make my purchases of Guano, clover seed & Plaister of Paris, for altho' I began many years too late (to my shame, I acknowledge it) to improve this Estate, I am making great changes and improvements in it now,"[51]

Seeing his fields beginning to flourish, as in the old days, must have given him a deep sense of satisfaction; now in his old age he was at last beginning to live up to Washington's example in the practice of scientific agriculture.

As usual, he was called upon to disprove some lyths about Washington from time to time, for instance that he had been born in England. This Custis corrected by publishing an account of his birthplace at Wakefield, to which he added an appeal that the grave of Mary Washington be marked with a suitable monumentppthough again nothing came of his plea.[52] No doubt he was inclined to agree with another Virginian who complained to the National Intelligencer, a few months later that his fellow-citizens had no "ancestral veneration" or respect for either the remains or the records of their glorious history, as witness the "ruin at Jamestown"

[50]Custis to F. Nelson, Dec. 11, 1850, Apr. 3, 1851, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

[51]Ibid.

[52]Alexandria Gazette, Apr. 5, 16, 1851; and Custis to C. Brown Apr. 24, 1851, printed in New Eng. His. and Gen. Register, XI (Jan., 1857), 1-6.

and "the desecration and desolation at Yorktown."[53]

Still, he was happy to see the progress being made on the Washington monument across the river. On July 4th, in company with President Fillmore, General Scott, and a number of other distinguished guests, he witnessed the presentation of the Pennsylvania block.

Later in the day, he accompanied the President to the Capitol, to see the corner-stone of the Capitol extension put in place. Listening to Daniel Webster, who displayed much of his characteristic brilliance in his dedicatory address though he had not long to live, Custis fell to dreaming of bygone days. The knowledge that of all the thousands gathered for the ceremony only himself and two other men had been present fifty-eight years before when the cornerstone of the Capitol was laid, made him realize how old he had become. And as he reflected on the vast changes those years had wrought, his heart filled with pride at the present greatness of his country.[54]

In September, 1851, Custis made one of his infrequent trips away from Arlington to spend a few days with the Lees in Baltimore. Unfortunately, the weather was too hot for him to go out much, so he stayed only a few days.

He did get out to Fort McHenry, however. Because of the heat, work on Fort Carroll was almost at a standstill, which enabled Lee to take Custis there to visit old General Walback, then eighty-five, whom he had known in his youth. "The General embraced your Grd.father very warmly,"

[53] Nov. 22, 1851.

[54] Ibid., July 4, 1851. Also, Washington (D. C.) News, July 7, 1851; and L. A. Gobright, Recollections of Men and Things at Washington (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1869), 118-121.

Lee wrote his son Custis, "and they had a long talk of by-gone days, when they were together at Harper's Ferry, as young dragoon officers." Lee also went with him to a meeting in Monument Square which had been called to petition the government to intercede in behalf of some Irish nationalists confined in the English penal colony in Australia. Lee was impressed, he told his son, by the size of the crowd and the attention and applause it gave "the old orator of Ireland," when Mr. Custis addressed it.

Naturally there was some discussion, during the visit, of Custis Lee's recent trouble at West Point. "Your Grd.father mentioned with great pleasure having received a letter from you, and dwelt with much satisfaction upon your standing at the Academy," Lee told his son. "He and I talked much about you and interchanged our mutual hopes for your happiness and success. Much of our future happiness depends upon you."[55]

Mrs. Custis felt otherwise, having long hoped that the Lee boys--and their father, too--would some day choose to be farmers like their grandfather. A letter she wrote to Custis Lee, in December, reveals how she and her husband differed in regard to their son-in-law's profession:

> There is a great talk of an 'Agricultural bureau' at Washington /to/ foster and improve the science of agriculture, /she wrote/. I hope by the time you come to be a farmer it will have done great things. I trust soldiering a few years will content you, my dear Son. I think your father would have been glad in the earlier years of his married life to exchange his profession for that of a farmer if circumstances had permitted. Your Grandpa says when I tell him so 'He would not then have gained so much glory,' but I think happiness is better than glory....If he were settled down on a farm he could have his children all about him and train them up to industry, and I know he would be as good a farmer as he was and is a soldier....You would come home to see farming carried on in a attractive and first rate style and learn to love it-and my Granddaughters might avoid the dangers of City life. I do not know how it is with others, but rich people in town seem to me to live to no purpose but to shew off fine furniture and fine dress, and build fine houses, and how they can coop themselves up to such destiny I know not when all the world is before them. [56]

[55] Lee to G.W.C. Lee, Sept. 14, 1851, in Jones, Life and Letters, 74ff.
[56] Mrs. Custis to G. W. C. Lee, Dec. 5, 1851, DeButts-Ely MSS.

From her letter, one gathers that Mr. Custis was carrying out his plan to improve Arlington as much as possible that year. New steps had been built around the portico, hexagonal bricks were being made for its floor by a Washington brick company. In an earlier letter she had mentioned that a new roof was to be put on the stable; also that the Arlington Mill, on Four Mile Run was being extensively repaired. "You will hardly know the old place when you get back," she said.[57]

No doubt her husband had a personal, if not a financial interest, in a small steamer bearing his name which was launched at Captain Page's Washington shipyard that November. Ten years later, this "snug little steamer," as a newspaper described it, would win considerable fame as the world's first balloon-carrier. Expressly designed to navigate the shallow waters of the Potomac off Arlington, the trim little steamer was one hundred and twenty feet in length and only fourteen in beam, and being flat-bottomed, drew only one foot of water. With a temporary engine and paddle wheels, installed while the vessel was on the stocks so that it could make a trial run as soon as it was launched, the Custis dropped down to Fort Washington, sixteen miles distant, then sped back in sixty-five minutes, a most creditable performance. Once it got its own boiler and engine, it was expected to be one of the fastest boats on the river.[58]

The repairs on the Arlington Mill kept Custis from journeying down to the Pamunkey that fall to see the record corn crop at the White House. "I learned enough of it from various quarters to assure me that it was one of the finest crops of corn grown in Eastern Virginia," he wrote farm manager Nelson. He also requested that Nelson convey his appreciation

[57] Same to same, n. d., but evidently c. Oct. 1, 1851, Freeman MSS, Va. State Lib.

[58] Nat. Intelligencer, Oct. 20, Nov. 12, 1851.

to Edward Ruffin, whose experiments and teachings were responsible for the improvements; perhaps Nelson and Ruffin could even collaborate on a short paper on the White House improvements. "Such a publication from so distinguished & well known an Agriculturalist as Mr. Ruffin would do a great deal of good," he wrote. "I am proud of the great improvements you have made upon my Estates; indeed it may be fairly said that Old Virginia is rising from the Dead."[59]

Mrs. Lee wanted her parents to come to Baltimore for Christmas, but when they would not--perhaps because of Mrs. Custis' poor health--the Lees made the journey to Arlington. It turned out to be a memorable holiday, not because it was one of the happiest they had ever enjoyed together, but because it was to be the last they would celebrate with Mrs. Custis. Except for Custis Lee, at West Point, the family circle was complete, and to him, Lee wrote a long account of the festivities:

> We came on last Wednesday morning. It was a bitter cold day, and we were kept waiting an hour in the depot at Baltimore for the cars, which were detained by the snow and ice on the rails. We found your grandfather at the Washington depot, Daniel and the old carriage and horses, and young Daniel on the colt Mildred. Your mother, grandfather, Mary Eliza, the little people and the baggage, I thought load enough for the carriage, so Rooney and I took our feet in our hands and walked over....The snow impeded the carriage as well as us, and we reached here shortly after it. The children were delighted at getting back, and passed the evening in devising pleasure for the morrow. They were in upon us before day on Christmas morning, to overhaul their stockings. Mildred thinks she drew the prize in the shape of a beautiful new doll; Angelina's infirmities were so great that she was left in Baltimore and this new treasure was entirely unexpected. The cakes, candies, books, etc., were overlooked in the caresses bestowed upon her, and she was scarcely out of her arms all day. Rooney got among his gifts a nice pair of boots, which he particularly wanted, and the girls, I hope, were equally pleased with their presents, books, and trinkets.

[59] Custis to F. Nelson, Jan. 15, 1852, Custis LMS, Wm. & Mary College.

> Your mother, Mary, Rooney, and I went into church, and Rooney...skated back along the canal (Rooney having taken his skates along for the purpose,) and we filled his place in the carriage with Miss Sarah Stuart, one of M's comrades, Minny Lloyd was detained at home to assist her mother at dinner, but your Aunt Maria /Fitzhugh/ brought her and Miss Lucretia Fitzhugh out the next day, and Wallace Stiles and his brother arriving at the same time, we had quite a tableful....
>
> I need not describe to you our amusements, you have witnessed them so often; nor the turkey, cold ham, plum pudding, mince-pies, etc. at dinner. I hope you will enjoy them again, or some equally as good....60

When the Lees returned to Baltimore, Annie and Agnes remained at Arlington in charge of a governess, Miss Susan Poor. Lee was jubilant when he learned, towards the end of January, that his son Custis had done well in his mid-year examinations at the Military Academy. He wrote to the lad to urge even greater efforts:

> This is not my day for writing to you. It is your Mothers turn & she claims the privilege. But being not yet ready to take up the pen, I am merely getting it ready for her. I shall leave her to tell you of domestic events, & will at once jump to what is first on my mind, viz. the June examination & your furlough. Have you thought of that? Has it ever occurred to your mind that such an event is hastening on, with irrepressible speed? Why man it will be upon us before you are aware.... You must press forward in your Studies. You must 'crowd that boy, Howard.' You must be No. 1. It is a fine number. Easily found & remembered. Simple & unique. Jump to it fellow. 61

Judging from his activities that winter, Custis was remarkably energetic for a man of seventy.

In January, he addressed a number of delegations which had come to Washington to petition the President to intervene on behalf of Irish "exiles" in Australia. On Washington's Birthday, at a ceremony in Washington, he presented a flag to the Continental Guards, a newly-

60Lee to G. W. C. Lee, Dec. 28, 1851, printed in N. Y. Times, Dec. 8, 1875; also in Jones, Life and Letters, 76f.

61Lee to G. W. C. Lee, Feb. 1, 1852, DeButts-Ely 133. The Howard mentioned is O. O. Howard, of Civil War fame.

organized militia company whose uniforms were patterned after those of the famous Revolutionary War regiments. In the evening, he spoke at a congressional banquet held at Willard's Hotel, urging that Congress raise the British prison ship Jersey, on which so many Americans had perished during the Revolution, and make part of it into a monument bearing the inscription: "This is what Liberty costs." As long as the heroes of the Revolution and their sacrifices were remembered, he reminded the legislators, political differences would never threaten the unity of the nation. They, "the masters of the Republic," should meet as "a band of brothers" each year on Washington's Birthday: "For one day in the whole year, lay aside the right of opinion. Let nobody here express but one opinion, and that for his country, his whole country, and nothing but his country."[62]

Such events must have been tiring at times, but his zest for them did not abate. As usual, he was one of the speakers at the Washington celebration of Saint Patrick's Day. A few weeks later, he attended the annual celebration of the first settlement of Maryland, at St. Mary's, where he may have become acquainted with another guest, Colonel Phil Kearny, U. S. A., whose empty coat sleeve attested his service in the Mexican War.[63] Ten years later the gallant colonel would be lying dead on the battlefield of Chantilly, Virginia; in time, his body would be buried not more than a hundred yards from Arlington House.

Of the numerous inquiries concerning events which he received about this time, the most interesting was from his own son-in-law. The letter contains the most explicit expression of Lee's admiration for General Washington to be found in any of his letters; it also shows that Lee, too,

[62] Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 18, 23, 24; and W. Hincks and F. H. Smith, Washington's Birthday: Congressional Banquet in Honor of George Washington (Washington, D. C.: Buell & Blanchard, 1852), 21.

[63] Nat. Intelligencer, Mar. 19, May 28, 1852.

considered his father-in-law an authority on everything that pertained to Washington.

Actually, the letter, which was written one day when Lee was confined to the house by a northeaster and a twinge of rhumatism, was addressed to Mrs. Custis. But most of it was concerned with the authorship of Washington's Farewell Address, a subject about which Lee had become deeply concerned. It read, in part:

> Will you, my dear Mother, send me 'The Life of John Jay?' You presented it to me many years ago, & I read it then with so much pleasure, that I wish to reperuse it....My desire to have it at this time is increased by the wish to read his letter to Judge Peters in March 1811 on the subject of the authorship of Washington's Valedictory. I think there can be no doubt as to who is the author, nor can any one read it without feeling, that but one man could have written it....Jay's testimony is conclusive. You have doubtless seen the injudicious claim (not to speak of it in harsh terms) set up by a son of Genl Hamilton. If he could prove what he desires, it would take from this matchless paper its greatest value. It would destroy the reverence in which it is now held by the Country. That Washington who omitted nothing to improve himself correctly in all he engaged in, should have submitted such a paper to Hamiltons scrutiny, was to have been expected. But that Hamilton was the author, is utterly impossible. I wish you would ask the Major [Mr. Custis] to read the letter of Jay on the Subject, which he is no doubt familiar with, & if he has any reminiscence touching the matter to write it to me. I wish to preserve it. Not that I think Washington's fame will ever need defense. But I fear the influence of his glorious acts & paternal advice, may be attempted to be weakened by the miserably selfish, who ignorant of virtue & patriotism are unable to appreciate unfailing wisdom & spotless integrity....In a letter M[ary] recd. yesterday from Aunt Lewis...she says, "I saw Genl W. write that very copy sent to Claypoole. I gave the Genl a needle & silk to sew the leaves together, & saw him sew it....Do ask the Major if he knows nothing of these things. I think it very important that the evidence should be as full & complete as possible-Not on account of Genl W. but on account of the Country. Ages to come will, I hope, read with admiration & benefit, the maxims of wisdom & rectitude he has bequeathed them. You will find the Life of Jay, 2 vols., either in the little book case that formerly stood in the dressing closet in our room or on the book shelves in the Parlour. I have forgotten which. 64

Unfortunately, his father-in-law's reply has been lost, making it impossible to know how well informed he was on the question. However,

64Lee to Mrs. Custis, Mar. 17, 1852, DeButts-Ely MSS.

a detailed study of the several drafts of the Farewell Address and other pertinent documents, made by Horace Binney a few years later, shows that Lee, like many others, had been misled by Jay's letter, which attributed the authorship of the document solely to Washington. It is now generally believed that Washington was the author of the substance of the Address and that Hamilton gave it its final form. According to Binney, the corrected draft that Mrs. Lawrence Lewis recalled seeing Washington prepare for the printer was one Hamilton had prepared for the General.[65]

Lee's letter, nevertheless, is a most significant revealation of his profound admiration and respect for Washington.

Work on Fort Carroll was going ahead steadily when late in May, 1852, Lee received orders to take command of the U. S. Military Academy at West Point on the 1st of September. With his usual modesty, he thought himself unqualified for the assignment, but his suggestion that someone with more ability and experience be given the post was turned down by the War Department. After that, he could do nothing but prepare for the move, happy that at last he would be able to see more of his son Custis.[66]

While Lee was trying to get his orders changed, his father-in-law was attending meetings of the newly-organized U. S. Agricultural Society whose main purpose was to seek the establishment of a department of agriculture in the government. Composed of the most distinguished men from all parts of the nation, the society promised to attain its object within a few years.

[65] Horace Binney, An Inquiry into the Formation of Washington's Farewell Address (Philadelphia: Perry & Macmillan, 1859), 10f., 119-122, 169. Also Allan Nevins, "Alexander Hamilton," in D. A. B., VIII, 177.

[66] Freeman, Lee, I, 316f.

Though the society's aims--the improvement of agriculture by state and local societies working together with the benevolent assistance of the national government--differed considerably from the more centralized national board of agriculture he had advocated more than forty years before, Custis gave it his wholehearted support. A charter member of the new society, he had the distinction of serving on the committee which drew up its constitution.[67]

At the society's first meeting, in the Smithsonian Institute at Washington, in June, Custis rose and cheered with the other delegates when Daniel Webster, ill and with little longer to live, entered the hall. Like most conservative Whigs, Custis believed that "the Farmer of Marshfield" (as Webster was introduced to the convocation) had saved the Union by the compromises he had supported two years before at the risk of his political career. Therefore, he felt doubly honored to be saluted by the old statesman as "The Farmer of Arlington." To his mind, the title was a proud one, reminiscent of a similar one, "Farmer of Mount Vernon," once borne by his distinguished guardian.[68]

Certainly the prosperous condition of his estates justified the appellation Webster had bestowed on him. In June, he learned from Nelson that both Romancock and the White House were in top notch shape, that a fine crop of wheat was being harvested and a bountiful corn crop was expected. The outlook for the Arlington crops was also good, for growing conditions in the neighborhood were for once almost ideal.[69]

Arlington Spring also had its biggest season to date that summer,

[67] U. S. Ag. Soc. Journal, I (Aug., 1852), 9f., 140. Also, B. P. Poore, "History of Agriculture of the United States," in U. S. D. of Ag. Ann. Report, 1866, 525.

[68] U. S. Ag. Soc. Journal, I (July, 1853), 11.

[69] Custis to Nelson, June 30, 1852, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College; and Alexandria Gazette, July 2, 1852.

when 20,000 persons are reported to have visited it.[70] A new dock had been built for "the Beautiful little steamer G. W. P. Custis" (as the National Intelligencer described it), so that visitors would not be dependent on the tide as formerly, when sometimes they would have to wait until after midnight. Now that this situation had been corrected, attendance soared. Typical was the outing in June, of three hundred childred from a city school. "Many prophesied that she [the Custis] was too 'crank' to carry such a restless cargo of boys and girls," said the Intelligencer, "but she made the trip in admirable style, keeping her position as steadily as a billiard table."[71]

The popularity of the Spring that year was also attested by a local guidebook:

> Very near the river, rising at the cool of a venerable umbrageous old oak, is the famous Arlington Spring, to which thousands resort in the summer months, and where preparations have been made by the hospitable proprietor for their welcome reception. Small buildings are here erected in which any articles of the company may be safely deposited; the best ice is always abundant; and all conveniences are provided on an ample sheltered platform, with commodious seats for a participation in such meals or refreshments as the party may have provided. Here are still, retired walks, inviting lawns, shaded by beautiful groves, and the finest view of the river and city imaginable. The fine manners and instructive conversation of the venerable proprietor often add to the life and social enjoyment of those who seek from the dust and crowds of the city a few hours relaxation and retirement amid the charm of this cool and quiet spot.[72]

Custis was the guest of honor at an outing of the officers of the city governments of Washington and Georgetown, in June. To him, the President of the Washington Board of Alderman addressed his remarks after the company had partaken of a hearty dinner.

[70] Lossing, "Arlington House," Harper's Mag., VII (Sept., 1853), 437.

[71] For the new dock and the Custis, both built by Capt. Page of Washington City, see Nat. Intelligencer, Mar. 10, June 25, July 2, 1852.

[72] Morrison, op. cit., 125f.

"Here we are assembled," he said, "on the platform of our venerable and esteemed friend, where we can all stand side by side, and feel we are brethern of the same household...May he long live to enjoy the affection and regard of those whom his liberality and kindness so often rendered happy!"

In reply, the master of Arlington delivered a short speech in which he described with great feeling the spectacular growth of the Union during his lifetime. America would soon rival England in wealth and power, he predicted. In sixty years it had reached a position which had taken England six hundred to attain. To him, it seemed almost like a romance, a truth of such magnitude that he could hardly grasp it.

Others then took over the speech-making and the time slipped by pleasantly until it grew late. Before leaving, another toast was drunk to "The Custis Platform."

Then, reported the National Intelligencer, "Mr. Callan very naively inquired of Mr. Custis, what time the moon rose!"

"Why, Lord bless you; the moon has been up for an hour or two," replied Custis, laughing.

"The gentleman will probably see two moons when he gets into the open air," chimed in another, a sally which brought roars of laughter.[73]

That summer, too, Mr. Custis' sister Nelly, died at Audley. Long in poor health, her passing, on July 15th, seemed to symbolize the death of an era in which the country had had its beginning and early development. It seemed most fitting that she should be brought back over the mountains

[73]Nat. Intelligencer, Aug. 2, 1852.

to her childhood home, Mount Vernon, and there buried. Since they were at Arlington, the Lees and Markie Williams probably attended the funeral with Mary's parents.[74]

Now only Washington Custis remained of the Mount Vernon family.

[74]For Mrs. Lewis' death, see the letter written by an unnamed relative to Mrs. Lee, July 29, 1852, in DeButts-Ely MSS. For her obituary, see Alexandria Gazette, July 22, 1852; also Older Records of St. Paul's Church, Alexandria, Va., entry for July 19, 1852. For Markie Williams and the Custises attending the funeral see Torrence, op. cit., 155; and for Lee being in Washington, Freeman, Lee, I, 318.

CHAPTER XV

CUSTIS "KEEPS THE KEYS"

Alone, Lee set out for West Point on August 23, 1852. Behind him, at Soller's point, he left more than three years of work on a stone fort of a type that within a decade would be made obsolete by new, more powerful weapons of war. It was to be the last engineering work he would ever do for the United States.[1]

A week later, on September 1, he assumed command of the Military Academy. As usual, he missed his family. "I am very solitary...," he complained to Markie Williams. "My good dame as is natural is lingering with her parents. Her departure is always a sorrowful event to them & sad to her..." Still, he went on, he did not wish Mary to leave her mother, who had been seriously ill, until she was fully recovered.[2]

Happily, Lee was able to have his family with him within a few weeks, except for Agnes and Annie, who remained in Virginia. The commandant's house was large and well-built, and before long Mrs. Lee had it comfortably furnished with pieces brought from Arlington or bought in New York. The family horses were there, too, so little Rob could go riding on "Santa Anna", his father on "Grace Darling."[3]

Back home, Mr. Custis was spending more time indoors, working on his battle paintings, as the weather grew colder. "I have an excellent

[1] Freeman, Lee, I, 318.
[2] Lee to Markie Williams, Oct. 8, 1852, in Craven, "To Markie," 28f.
[3] Same to Mrs. Lee, Aug. 20, 1855, in E. J. Lee, op. cit., 434; and R. E. Lee, Jr., op. cit., 11.

studio fitted up in the South wing of this House, with a first rate light, ...also a stove & everything comfortable," he wrote Lossing. By Christmas he had finished retouching four of his battlepieces--Monmouth, Princeton, Trenton, and Germantown--and was hard at work on a large painting of the surrender at Yorktown, "I have departed from the plan of dear old Trumbull's picture," he told Lossing, "which has always been considered a kind of stiff canvas parade." Evidently, he had forgotten his earlier unhappy experience or thought the political climate more favorable, for he continued: "I am working hard on this large picture to get done by the 22nd Feby & if successful may exhibit it in the Capitol."[4]

Lee was unable to bring his family home to Arlington for Christmas, but Annie and Agnes being there helped to make up for the absence of their parents. "I am flying about preparing presents and hanging stockings," Agnes wrote in a diary she had recently begun keeping. Christmas morning, she wrote, she was awakened before five o'clock. "I was up in an instant, examined my stockings, dressed & ran up stairs and caught them all [Annie and her cousin, Columbia Williams] there. I spent the whole morning giving and receiving gifts and being as happy as possible. It rained hard all day so we could not go to church."[5]

"Grandpa Custis" was a great favorite with the two girls, as with all the Lee children. They loved his stories of the old days, and liked to accompany him on the piano when he was in the mood to play or sing some old Revolutionary War song. They liked him, too, because he offered no objections when they played Indians in the unfinished drawing room, not even when they made houses and stables of his paintings and

[4]Custis to B. J. Lossing, Dec. 30, 1852, Custis Family Papers, Mt. Vernon, Va.

[5]Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entries for Dec. 24, 1852, and Jan. 1, 1853, DeButts-Ely MSS.

old furniture for their stick horses.[6]

When he did chide them for something, his words held no sting. "My dear old grandfather," Mildred would recall later, "used to tell me when I came in from play with a dirty frock, at Arlington, that his grandmamma, Mrs. Washington, wore always one white gown a week, and that when she took it off it was as spotless as the day she put it on."[7]

Their grandfather also disliked interruptions at mealtime, but occasionally had to give in to the girls even on this point. "Daniel [the coachman] was sent to town to-day," Agnes wrote in her diary, in February, 1853. "When he came in I felt there was a letter for me, but Grandpa put the bag down and went on with his dinner. Grandma insisted on having it opened and how great was my delight when I saw "Miss Agnes Lee" upon an envelope containing three letters, from Papa, from Mama and from Rob."[8]

Lee made it a practice to write often to the two girls, counseling them in his sometimes serious, sometimes bantering way, as when he wrote from West Point that month:

> My Precious Annie: I take advantage of your glorious permission to write to you, and there is no telling how far my feelings might carry me were I not limited by the conveyance furnished by the Mum's letter [his pet name for Mrs. Lee], which lies before me, and which must, the Mum says, go in this morning's mail. But my limited times does not diminish my affection for you, Annie, nor prevent my thinking of you and wishing for you....I am told you are growing very tall, and I hope very straight. I do not know what the cadets will say if the Superintendent's children do not practice what he demands of them. They will undoubtedly say he had better attend to his own before he corrects other peoples children.... [9]

The girls did not lack for company their own age, for often one or more of their cousins was at Arlington. The entry Agnes made in her diary

[6] Ibid., entry for July, 1853; and Lossing, "Arlington House," Harper's Magazine, VII (Sept., 1853), 437.

[7] Statement of Mildred Lee, quoted in Constance C. Harrison, "Washington at Mount Vernon After the Revolution," Century Magazine, XXXVII (April, 1889) 841f.

[8] Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for Feb. 2, 1853, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[9] Lee to Mildred Lee, Feb. 25, 1853, in R. E. Lee, Jr., op. cit., 14f.

later that month was typical: "Washy Stuart skated out here on the canal," she wrote one wintry day. "Laura was staying with us, /&/ we four took a long walk down to the Spring, rock, ice-house and all about. Grandpa's ice-house is quite full. So now we care not whether it freezes or does not freeze."

Naturally, most of their time was taken up by their studies, directed by Miss Poor, and on Sundays they not only attended services at home or in Alexandria, but also conducted a Sunday School for the children of the servants. "Last Sunday we heard a remarkably good sermon from Mr. Dana," wrote Agnes, "In the evening I had my little dark scholars, though they were loath to tare /sic/ themselves from their sleigh-riding."[10]

They also enjoyed meeting distinguished visitors, such as Washington Irving, who came to see their grandparents. With him, was another writer, Charles Lanman, who in his account of their visits mentions the strong impression of character that Mrs. Custis made upon them. Irving, he said, was struck by the remarkable resemblance between Mrs. Custis and his own long-dead mother. "I noticed...that he could hardly keep his eyes off of her, and he thought proper to apologize for his apparent rudeness by alluding to the emotions which her presence excited..."

Irving, who had come for information on the personal life of the First President for the biography of Washington he was writing, found his host most accomodating. "The pictures, the books, the furniture relics from Mount Vernon were all exhibited," wrote Lanham, "and it seemed to me that Mr. Custis was particularly happy in expressing his 'recollections of the chief...'" Because the famous author shared their admiration for Washington, he made a highly favorable impression on the Custises, who were amused, too by his exuberance, as when he took the stairs three

[10]Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for Feb. 2, 23, 1853, DeButts-Ely MSS.

steps at a time in his anxiety to see the relics on the second floor.[11]

Ben: Perley Poore, a Massachusetts writer just beginning to make his mark in Washington political circles, also visited Arlington that winter. He made the mistake of walking over and found the road up the hill to the house "shocking bad." Once there, he was impressed by the "noble mansion" and captivated by Mr. Custis' hospitable manner. Because he was a strong advocate of native art, which he considered more significant and vital, though less technically proficient than the more generally accepted imitations of European masters, he praised his host's artistic efforts in a magazine article he wrote about his visit. "Educated in Washington's family, Mr. Custis had unrivalled opportunities for becoming familiar with the uniforms, forms and features of the heroes of our Revolution, and has faithfully transferred them to canvas...," his account read. He was especially taken by the Yorktown surrender picture. "Although possessing some artistic defects, the picture interested me far more than many a 'classical work of art!'"[12]

It was this winter that Custis, as sole surviving executor of Washington's will, gave the clerk of Fairfax County permission to have an engraving of that invaluable document for exhibition to visitors, so that the original (much worn by constant handling), might be put away and safely restored.[13]

He also wrote another of his "Recollections," "The Last Days at Mount Vernon," for Washington's Birthday. This would be the last, he told William Seaton, the editor of the newspaper in which it appeared: "I am hard pressed by some of the finest men in our country...to bring

[11]Charles Lanman, "A Day With Washington Irving," Nat. Intelligencer, Mar. 25, 1857.

[12]Ben: Perley Poore, "Waifs in Washington," Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion, IV (Feb. 12, 19, Mar. 19, 1853), 103,123, 190, respectively.

[13]Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 15, 1853.

out the work entire in book form; and as a man at 72, if he has anything to do, should do it as a beefsteak should be broiled--quickly, I have no time to lose...." He was "untiring and untirable as a speaker," he explained, but "dreadfully annoyed by penmanship." Therefore, he planned to have an experienced writer put the work in final form.[14]

Probably he had Benson Lossing in mind for the task when he wrote, for he mentioned having discussed the matter with him in a letter he wrote to another writer, Rufus Griswold, who was preparing a book on Washington's presidential years.[15]

Most of his time, naturally, was taken up with the management of his estates. In March he arranged to have funds sent from the White House to pay for the repairs on the Arlington Mill, and a barrel of herring shipped to West Point, "for my daughter, Mrs. Lee, who is remarkably fond of them...," also one to Arlington--"when a year old, they are considered a treat by my friends who visit my house." He also informed Nelson that Edmund Ruffin had been elected an honorary member of the U. S. Agricultural Society, and that he proposed to nominate Nelson for membership because of the improvements he had made at the White House and Romancock.[16]

In praising Ruffin, he repeated what he had said earlier about him at the last meeting of the U. S. Agricultural Society, in February, at which he was elected Vice-President from Virginia. Ruffin, he said, was "the conqueror of ignorance, bigotry, and agricultural desolation," who

[14]Custis to W. Seaton and J. Gales, in Seaton, op. cit., 180; also, Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 22, 1853.
[15]Custis to R. W. Grisowld, Mar. 10, 1853, Griswold MSS, Boston Pub. Lib.
[16]Custis to F. Nelson, Mar. 22, 1853, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

by writings, experiments and, above all, his practical example had "showed his countrymen that in the very soil they were about to abandon in despair, Providence had provided abundance of material to restore their wasted lands." Take himself, for example. For years, he had been "the poorest man of large property in the world." Now instead of getting a few hundred bushels of "trash" from his Pamunkey farms, he was now getting over seven thousand bushels of the finest kind of wheat. "By the use of marl, the oyster-shell, clover, and plaister of Paris, together with improved tillage and the very able and energetic management of the gentleman who has charge of my estates in the South...my old patrimonial acres...now flouish and 'blossom as the rose.'"

His closing words, that society go ahead with its plans for a "Model Farm, where young men will be taught agriculture as a science...under the most skilled farmers the country affords," were ironically prophetic. He little realized that when it was finally established--by the government, not the agricultural society, which had long since passed out of existance--it would be situated on the Arlington Farm.[17]

From the response to this speech and the one he delivered in Liberty Hall at Alexandria on Washington's Birthday, it is evident that age had not lessened his ability to arouse the emotions of an audience. According to a newspaper, the latter speech was "full of the fire of '76." Agnes Lee heard it and afterwards wrote in her diary: "Then all called for 'Custis.' Grandpa came forward, made a polite bow. I was so tired or I should like to have listened as his [speech] was not long, but I could not. I counted almost a hundred times they 'clapped' and finding they

[17]U. S. Ag. Soc. Journal, I (July, 1853), 19, 148-153; and Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 4, 1853. The Arlington Experimental Farms was established by the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture about 1900.

would never stop applauding I stopped counting."[18]

Having witnessed the inauguration of every president of the United States up to that time, Custis was not to be kept away by a sleet storm from that of Franklin Pierce, March 4, 1853. Crossing the Potomac in an open boat, he took a carriage up to the Capitol, where he stood out in the storm for more than two hours during the inauguration ceremonies. Foolhardy though it was for a man of his years to be out in such weather, those who saw him there could not but admire his indomitable spirit.

Benson Lossing also saw the inauguration, but waited for better weather to journey over to Arlington, about which he was then preparing an article for Harper's Magazine. It was a fine morning when he arrived to find Mr. Custis in his "studio," putting the finishing touches on his "Surrender at Yorktown." The historian thought this the best of Custis' paintings, all of which he thought showed a commendable use of color, besides being "remarkable for their fidelity in the delineation of costume..." Later, after a great war had separated him from his old friends of Arlington, Lossing would term them "very poor specimens of art," valuable only as correct delineations of the costumes of the soldiers of that period."[19] But at this time he deemed the battle pieces worthy of reproduction in Harper's, along with sketches of family portraits, Washington relics, Arlington House and the famed Arlington Spring. He also got a certificate from his host attesting the fidelity with which they had been copied, to be used in advertising the article and his great work on the Revolution--such being the practice of publishers then, as now.[20]

[18] Alexandria Gaz., Feb. 24, 1853; also Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for Feb. 23, 1853, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[19] Lossing, "Arlington House," Harper's Mag., VII (Sept, 1853) 454.

[20] Lossing, "Arlington House," Harper's Mag., VII (Sept., 1853), 434f; and same, same title, Potter's Monthly Mag., VI (1876), 4; also Custis to Lossing, Mar. 24, 1853, Custis Family Papers, Mt. Vernon; and Alexandria Gaz., reprinted in Nat. Intelligencer, Apr. 9, 1853.

Because of her parent's poor health, Mrs. Lee wanted them to spend the summer at West Point. The change would do them good, she wrote. She was sure her mother would enjoy seeing her lovely flower garden, and knew Mr. Custis would be "delighted with the fine music & all the military show..." When they consented, Mary made arrangements to meet them in New York to do some sight-seeing before going on to the Military Academy.[21]

Everything was in readiness, towards the end of April, when Mrs. Lee received a telegram stating that her mother was seriously ill. Greatly alarmed, she packed a bag and took a train for New York, and another from there to Washington, where she arrived early on the morning of April 26, 1853. She reached Arlington shortly before breakfast, only to find her mother already dead and her father in a state of collapse.

From her daughters and cousin Britannia Peters, who had come over from "Tudor Place," she learned the sad details. Five nights before, on the eve of her sixty-fifth birthday, her mother had complained of a headache which persisted through the night. Next morning a doctor had been summoned, who diagnosed it as a relatively harmless stroke; but by the following morning it was apparent that she was sinking fast. Dimly realizing that her end was near, she was unafraid. When asked if she had any message for her absent daughter, she was concerned only at how the news would affect her. Towards the last she had clasped Annie, then Agnes in her arms, murmuring some endearment about her "little grandchildren." "How can you cry so, Annie?," she had asked the older girl. She had

[21] Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Custis, n. d., but evidently c. Mar. 15, 1853, DeButts-Ely MSS.

quietly expired a little later, whispering the Lord's Prayer. "Poor Grandpa," Agnes wrote in her journal later on. "I can hardly think of his agony. He knelt by her bedside, & implored God to spare her....[He] is almost heart broken & is quite sick."[22]

With the household so disrupted, Mrs. Lee could not give way to her sorrow. Instead, she impressed everyone by her self-control and the calm manner in which she set about getting things under control. The usual morning worship had been forgotten, so she had the bell rung, and after the household had assembled, conducted brief services. After breakfast she went out to select a place for her mother's grave, choosing one in the Park not far from the mansion where her mother had loved to walk under the towering trees.

Because of Mr. Custis' condition, the funeral next day was private. Rev. Dana conducted the service inside the house; then the coffin was borne to the grave by four servants--Austin, Lawrence, Daniel, and Ephraim--followed by Mrs. Lee and her daughters, a number of relatives, and a long train of weeping servants. Mrs. Lee provided her friends with bouquets of spring flowers, and as the coffin was lowered into the grave, these were cast in upon it in a last gesture of affection and respect.[23]

With Molly Custis gone, Arlington would never be the same again: of this, everyone was certain. "How changed is her recent home," read an obituary, from its warm tone written by one of the family. "The stately mansion is still there-the lofty halls, the hospitable board-the park, the lawn, the beautiful garden, the pleasant walks-the trees,

[22]Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for May 4, 1853, DeButts-Ely MSS; and Lee to Markie Williams, June 23, 1853, in Craven, "To Markie,", 31.

[23]Mrs. William Fitzhugh to Mrs. Abby Nelson, April n. d., 1853, printed in Va. Mag. of Hist. & Bio., XXV (Jan., 1927), 22.

the shrubs, and the flowers she loved so well are still there, decked in green, and blooming in all their wonted fragrance and beauty...The venerable bereaved husband is there, but he feels that he is alone. The affectionate and beloved daughter and grandchildren remain, but they feel an 'aching void'".[24]

Had it been possible, Mary's husband would have come home at once, but he could not because of his duties at the Military Academy. Therefore, he could only try to console and sustain his wife with advice and encouragement. For many years, he too had called Mrs. Custis "Mother", and his grief was almost as great as Mary's, to whom he wrote:

> But how sad to realize the change from other times, when that form and that house overflowed at your approach with devotion and tenderness. May God give you strength to bear it & enable us to say 'his will be done.' The more I think of our irreparable loss, the greater is my grief....I wish I could send you any comfort. But I trust you will be able to Calm your feelings & Compose yourself to your duties. We must not be turned from our Course through life, by all the rough knocks & death blows we receive by its way. You have your father, your husband, your children still clinging to you. They require & deserve all your energies.[25]

He also expressed his sense of loss to Markie Williams, writing: "Her illness was short. One day in the garden with her flowers, the next with her God...The blow was so sudden & crushing, that I yet shudder at the shock & feel as if I had been arrested in the course of life, & had no power to resume my onward march....May God give me the necessary strength, & above all the power to live, that when I die, my last end may be like hers." In another letter to Mary, he gratefully acknowledged that Mrs. Custis "was to me all that a Mother could be & I yield to none

[24]Undated newspaper clipping in DeButts-Ely MSS.
[25]Lee to Mrs. Lee, Apr. 27, 1853, DeButts-Ely MSS.

in admiration for her character, love for her virtues & veneration for her memory." He wanted, he said, to get a simple monument to mark her grave at Arlington, "where her tomb will give additional interest & attachment to a spot already possessing so strong a hold upon the affections of her family."[26]

Although the doctor advised otherwise, Lee thought that his father-in-law should at least spend the summer at West Point. "I was very glad to hear that...your dear Father was decidly better," he wrote Mary, not long after the funeral. "I hope he will go on mending rapidly & have many days of peace & happiness in the quiet evg. of his life." In another letter, he expressed the fear that some of them might come down with the "chills" if they waited much longer. Finally, it was decided that he would return home right after June commencement, and if Mr. Custis was well enough bring him,and all of them, back to West Point.[27]

Though feeble, Mary's father had begun to recover by the time Lee reached Arlington. Whenever the weather permitted, one of the family would take him out for a drive, and occasionally he felt well enough to receive a few visitors, such as President and Mrs. Pierce, who visited Arlington near the end of June. Financial worries slowed his recovery. Last year's corn crop had not brought in as much as expected; a contractor had cut a large quantity of pine on Smith's Island but as yet had not paid for it. "Weak and disspirited as I am, these disappointments annoy me very much," the old man explained to his White House overseer: "I have not to accuse myself of any extravagance--I have not owned a saddle horse to ride for 6 years--I have not drove a nail into my unfinished house." Too ill to look after his own affairs, he was anticipating

[26]Same to Markie Williams, June 23, 1853, in Craven, "To Markie," 31; and same to Mrs. Lee, May 2, May 10, 1853, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[27]Same to same, May 10, 18, 1853, DeButts-Ely MSS.

his son-in-law's help. "His arrival will be of great service to me, as he is a thorough man of business, a first rate accountant, and much better qualified to manage the affairs of this world, than I am," he told Nelson.[28]

Lee finished his work at West Point and left for Arlington on July 5, bringing Mildred and young Rob with him. Cadet Custis Lee was not entitled to a vacation, and so had to remain at the Military Academy.[29]

By this time, the religious convictions that had been originally instilled in Lee by his mother and subsequently deepened and matured by the example and teachings of Bishop Meade and Mrs. Custis, had brought Lee to the point of formally acknowledging the Christian faith. So on July 17, 1853, he and two of his daughters, Mary and Annie, knelt together in the chancel of Christ Church, Alexandria, and were confirmed by Bishop John Johns. From now on, the religious beliefs so noticeable in his letters from about the time of the Mexican War would become more and more the dominant factor in his character.[30]

Towards the middle of August, the family left for West Point. Mr. Custis went with them, leaving Arlington in charge of a neighbor, Robert Ball. As Lee had expected, the change benefitted the bereaved old man. "You are aware that your Uncle C.[ustis] is now with us," he wrote Markie. "You will be pleased to learn I know that his health is quite restored, & that he seems cheered & interested by the new scenes around him. I fear however that he will soon tire of the monotony of our life

[28] Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for June 22, 1853, DeButts-Ely MSS; and Custis to F. Nelson, June 9, 30, 1853, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

[29] Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for July 6, 1853, DeButts-Ely MSS; and Freeman, Lee, I, 330.

[30] Ibid., I, 330f.

& wish to return to his home. I cannot bear the idea of his living there alone & yet can do nothing to prevent it."[31]

To divert the old gentleman, Lee took him on a trip to Niagara Falls, but nothing could take his mind off his beloved Arlington. Wet weather had made hay scarce that year, and he was greatly concerned about winter food for his cattle. "Do give proper directions about the Fodder, as it will be very valuable this year," he implored Ball. He was also anxious to learn whether any of the tracts recently laid off in the Washington Forest tract-in expectation of a railroad soon to be built to Leesburg-had been sold.[32]

Lee sensed that when Mary and her father went into New York for a few days of sightseeing the old man would not come back. "He is very desirous now of returning," he wrote Markie. "Says his business requires his presence. I have proposed to him if he will wait till Novr--that M.[ary] will go on with him & make him comfortable for the winter. But he will not consent." Unbeknownst to Lee, his father-in-law had already arranged for his coachman to meet him in Washington, where he arrived, alone, a few days later.[33]

The trip must have done him good, for once back in his old surroundings he surprised everyone with his renewed energy. "Grandpa writes constantly..," Agnes wrote in her journal towards the end of the year. "Laura says he keeps the keys himself & gets out all the things himself."[34] Satisfied that the White House estate had been brought to a high degree

[31]Power of attorney given by Custis to R. Ball, Aug. 4, 1853, L.M.N.M., and Lee to Markie Williams, Sept. 9, 1853, in Craven, "To Markie,", 33f.

[32]Custis to R. Ball, Sept. 3,12, 1853, both at Lee Mansion Nat. Memorial.

[33]Lee to Markie Williams, Sept. 16, 1853, in Craven, "To Markie," 35ff. Also Custis to R. Ball, Sept. 12, 1853, L.M.N.M., and Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for Oct. 18, 1853, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[34]Ibid., entry for Dec. 1, 1853.

of fertility, he now planned to do the same for Romancock. To Nelson, who managed both estates, he wrote shortly after his return:

> I think it is a judicious plan to improve one of the Estates at a time....As soon as I can call myself an Independent man, I shall delight to appropriate a portion of my income to the Liming, etc. of Romancock, where the land is of such intrinsic good quality, that it will shew for itself the benefit of Improvement. 35

When they were unable to return home for Christmas, the Lees were grateful when Markie Williams said she would stay there all winter to look after Mr. Custis and keep him company. Lee, who had a deep affection for his father-in-law, had been much concerned about the old man living alone. When he sent New Year's greetings to Markie, he also expressed his gratitude for her kindness:

> I cannot let this day pass, devoted as it is to friendship, without offering to you...my sincere regard & true affection. Those feelings always strong are now much deepened by your kindness & consideration for your venerable Uncle, whose affections I experienced in boyhood, who since has been to me all a father could, & whom I shall never cease fondly to regard & love as such. 36

During the winter, Mr. Custis was well enough to make an occasional trip to the city, which seldom failed to lift his spirits. In February, 1854, he took his customary place next to the presiding officer at the annual meeting of the United States Agricultural Society, and when called upon to address the gathering, responded with something of his old eloquence. After contrasting the state of agriculture as he had known it fifty years before with its present condition, he told his audience that this might be the last time he would address them and therefore urged that the society be truly a national one, representative of all sections. "For the seventy-five years I have lived, I have also loved my country, and though a Southerner, have loved the true Yankee," he said.

[35]Custis to F. Nelson, Oct. 23, 1853, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.
[36]Lee to Markie Williams, Jan. 2, 1854, in Craven,"To Markie," 58f.

His affecting appeal inspired someone to write a poem in his honor, the last verse of which read:

> We would warm thee into life for love of him,
> And keep thee long time near us as his only son,
> Brightening thy pathway, letting no canker dim
> The last bright link of chain that binds us unto Washington. [37]

Much of his time was passed in his study. Lacking the energy to put his Recollections into book form, he contented himself with writing the last half of the final chapter, "The Last Days at Mount Vernon." This appeared in the National Intelligencer on Washington's Birthday, along with three letters written to his father by Washington during the Revolution. He had also promised to write a history of his section for the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, of which he was an honorary member, but could not get to it.[38]

There was talk that a new bridge would be built across the Potomac, and Custis hoped that it would abut somewhere near the northwest of Arlington. To publicize the advantages of this location, he dug out the letter Thomas Jefferson had written him on the subject fifty years before and got his friend Seaton to reprint it in the National Intelligencer. He also offered to donate the land needed for the Virginia end of the bridge.[39]

One visitor who lifted his spirits that winter was the popular authoress, Mrs. C. M. Kirkland, who was writing an article on Washington's boyhood for Putnam's Magazine. "I was charmed by the visit...," Custis

[37] N.Y. Intelligencer, Feb. 24, 25, Mar. 8, 1854.
[38] Ibid., Feb. 22, 1854; and Custis to Horatio G. Jones, Mar. 29, 1854, Society MSS, His. Soc. of Pa.
[39] N.Y. Intelligencer, Jan. 26, 1854; and Custis to W. W. Seaton, Feb. 21, 1854, printed in Seaton, op. cit., 181.

wrote his friend Seaton, who had introduced her. "What a fine, handsome woman!"[40]

In March, Lee had some official business to attend to in Washington. "My heart leaps within me at the thought of soon revisiting Dear A/rlington/ & all its inmates, scenes & associations," he wrote Markie Williams. Then, when he found he would arrive later than he had expected, he wrote again: "I shall therefore have the great pleasure of being at Arlington Saturday evg next at all events, & passing there I hope one more Sunday, where I have passed many many happy & improving ones, & where my affections & attachments are more strongly placed than at any other place in the World."[41]

Custis had planned to have Lee go over and straighten out the books for his Pamunkey farms during his brief stay. But when Nelson failed to send them, Lee could do nothing except recommend that they be examined by a professional accountant in Richmond, a suggestion which Custis passed on to the overseer. In his letter, he added that he had been planning to take a trip to Europe to raise his spirits, but that he did not wish to leave the country, perhaps never to see it again, without having his business affairs in perfect order: "This done, one part of the world will be pretty much the same to me as another."[42]

It is plain that the master of Arlington had little desire to leave his old surroundings, lonesome as they were without the one who had given meaning to his life. Probably it was concern about her father's health that brought Mary and her two youngest girls, back to Arlington early in May. Apparently she approved the European trip, which would include a visit to Lafayette's home at La Grange, France, for soon after her arrival

[40] Mrs. C. M. Kirkland, "Washington's Early Days," in Putnam's Monthly, III (Jan., 1854), 1-10; and Custis to W. W. Seaton, Feb. 21, 1854, in Seaton, op. cit., 181.

[41] Lee to Markie Williams, Mar. 11, 15, 1854, in Craven, "To Markie," 41f.

[42] Custis to F. Nelson, Apr. 24, 1854, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

her father informed Nelson that he planned to leave in August, and therefore wanted him to send his accounts to Arlington, not Richmond, so that his son-in-law could examine them and render "a full & fair statement of our Long Standing accounts..."[43]

Having Mary and the girls home lifted Custis' spirits considerably, as did the great interest shown in his gifts to the American people, of the British and Hessian colors captured at Trenton and Yorktown, which a grateful Congress had presented to Washington. Both flags were in good condition considering their age, when Custis turned them over to President Pierce, suggesting that they be exhibited in a "Hall of Triumph" in the Patent Office along with similar trophies.[44]

A New England visitor, who visited Arlington in June of 1854, got this impression of Mr. Custis:

> He is a venerable gentleman in his deportment, and his conversation is replete with interest and instruction. With his ruffled wrist-bands and rich old-fashioned vest and polished address, he carries us back to the very life of the time which he so eloquently describes. [45]

After June commencement, Lee returned to spend a few weeks at Arlington, highly gratified that his son Custis had stood first in the graduating class and hence was qualified for the engineer's corps. Custis, too, was proud of his grandson's achievement. When he wrote to Jared Sparks that summer, introducing Rooney Lee, who was to enter Harvard in the fall, he did not fail to mention the "distinguished honors" which

[43] Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for May 28, 1854, DeButts-Ely MSS; and Custis to F. Nelson, May 7, 1854, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

[44] Nat. Intelligencer, May 23, 1854; and Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for May 28, 1854, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[45] Salem (Mass.) Register, June 26, 1854, reprinted in Nat. Intelligencer, Sept. 7, 1854.

Rooney's brother had won at West Point.[46]

Nothing had as yet been done about the White House accounts when Lee returned to the Military Academy early in August with four of the children. By now Mary's father had given up the idea of going to Europe, so he was to come on later with her and the rest of the children. He had lost considerable weight, Custis explained to Nelson, and he did not feel up to an ocean trip. His son-in-law, he went on, was still of the opinion that their accounts should be straightened out by having a Richmond accountant. "My advanced age and impaired health," he wrote, "render it proper that all accounts of long standing should be settled." Tangled financial accounts apparently did not affect the normal operations of the White House farm, for in closing he congratulated Nelson on the "wonderful" crop of wheat recently reaped.[47]

Robert Ball again took charge of Arlington when Mrs. Lee took her father to West Point late in the summer. Ball was a capable manager, but his employer could not help fretting about the estate. In one letter after another, he sent detailed instructions as to what should be done at Arlington in his absence: the "Beef Pasture" plowed up; the sassafras grubbed out of another field; the corn and rye gotten in while the good weather lasted; how the winter rye was to be seeded, with at least two tons of guano harrowed in with it. Ball was to see that the railroad to Leesburg--due to be started sometime in October--passed far enough south of the Arlington Mill so that the mill dam and race would not be injured. "Keep a bright look out and be at your post," he warned.

Finally, too restless to linger any longer at West Point, he wrote that he was coming home. The housekeeper was to see that everything was

[46] Freeman, Lee, I, 348; and Custis to J. Sparks, Aug. 19, 1854, Sparks MSS, Harvard U.

[47] Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for Aug. 1, 1854, DeButts-Ely MSS; and Custis to F. Nelson, Aug. 27, 1854, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

in readiness for his arrival; Charles, his valet, was to put down the carpets and set up a stove in his "painting room," and Young Daniel, the coachman's son, was to cut a supply of stove wood from standing dead trees and store it in the cellar. Lastly, Mary Ann, a mulatto girl hired out to a lady in the city, was to return home to wait on Markie Williams, who was coming to stay with him.[48]

Custis Lee, now awaiting assignment as a lieutenant in the corps of engineers, escorted his grandfather home to Arlington towards the end of October. Unfortunately, the old man's homecoming was marred by an attachment he found awaiting him for an overdue debt of almost a thousand dollars owed to a man in New Kent County. Never had he heard of either the debt or the man, Custis irrately wrote Nelson. He had come home early in order to attend the agricultural exhibition in Richmond, where he had hoped to make the acquaintance of Edmund Ruffin; now he could not risk being publicly humiliated by being served a writ for debts of which he had never heard. Worse yet, he would not be able to go ahead with his plans to reclaim another eighty acres of "pocosin" at Arlington or finish his mill on Four Mile Run.[49]

His indignation and concern grew when Nelson took no notice of his complaints. Six letters went unanswered in the next three months, and in December Custis, provoked, wrote again to ask why he was being treated so contemptuously. The least they could do after all these years, he said, was to part in peace.[50]

[48]Custis to R. Ball, Sept. 28, Oct. 2, 6, 12, 1854, all at L. M. N. L.

[49]Agnes Lee, NP Journal, entry for Mar. 11, 1854, DeButts-Ely MSS; Lee to Markie Williams, Nov. 10, 1854, in Craven, "To Markie," 50; and Custis to F. Nelson, Nov. 7, 1854, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

[50]Same to same, Dec. 5, 1854, Custis MSS, W. & Mary College.

It may have been to help his father-in-law with his affairs at this critical juncture that Lee came to Washington a few days before Christmas. "I had forgotten that he was such a handsome man," wrote a cadet's mother whom he met at a friend's home during his brief stay. She thought he appeared "very human, kind, calm, and definite."[51]

How much Lee was able to accomplish with the White House accounts before he returned to West Point can only be surmised, though some kind of a statement seems to have been forthcoming from the overseer and no more was said of his leaving for the moment. Apparently, the debt which had so annoyed Custis had been incurred by purchasing a slave for the White House farm, and Custis forbade his overseer to buy any more in the future. "Negro property is of great and increasing value," he wrote Nelson, "but altho I hold much more than an hundred thousand Dollars worth..., I have no desire to add one more." Nor was Nelson to sell any White House land to the speculators then buying up property along the projected railway. Whatever increased value resulted from the railroad was to go to his grandchildren to whom he intended to leave the farms.[52]

He was happy that Custis Lee had been assigned to the Washington office of the Chief of Engineer's, and so would spend the winter with him. Markie's presence also kept him from feeling lonely, and Rooney was home for a time in February. As usual, he spoke in Alexandria on Washington's Birthday, 1855. "The old man eloquent," said a Washington paper, "is really one of the few Americans of his age whose hearts, souls and minds keep pace with the ideas of the times in which he now

[51]Lindsay Lomax Wood, ed., Leaves from an Old Washington Diary (New York: Books, Inc., 1943), 28.

[52]Custis to F. Nelson, Jan. 17, 26, 1855, both in Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

lives."[53]

His speech at the annual meeting of the United States Agricultural Society a few days later, on Washington's farming practices at Mount Vernon was also warmly applauded. Again, at another session, he told of his experience in growing wheat and aroused much curiosity with a sample of "Monument Wheat"--so called, because it had been grown from a few grains found in the straw packing of Crawford's statue of Washington.[54]

A traveller, who saw the White House plantation in the spring of 1855 was much impressed by its historical associations, even though the house in which Colonel George Washington had courted the widow Custis had long since been demolished and replaced by a less pretentious one on the same site. He also mentioned the productivity of the estate. "A stranger is slow to realize," he wrote, "that...this is also a mansion of 8,000 acres, busy with 130 negroes, and an annual yield of wheat alone, of 11,000 bushels..."[55]

But anyone who might envy the owner of such a fine property would have been quickly disillusioned by glancing at some of the letters then passing between Custis, his overseer, and his son-in-law.

Nelson, it seems, had at last submitted a statement of his accounts for the eleven years of his stewardship. According to his figures, Custis owed him a large sum. Lee was surprised, almost shocked by the amount of the claim, but his reaction to business reverses was as direct

[53] Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for Mar. 11, 1855, DeButts-Ely MSS; Lee to Markie Williams, Feb. 12, 1855, in Craven, "To Markie," 51f.; and Evening Star (Washington, D. C.), Feb. 23, 1855.

[54] Nat. Intelligencer, Mar. 1, 2, 1855; and U. S. Ag. Soc. Journal, III (Mar., 1855), 21f.

[55] Richmond (Va.) Dispatch, reprinted in Evening Star (Washington, D. C.) Mar. 23, 1855.

as if he were in command of an army which had suddenly encountered superior enemy forces. He advised his father-in-law to prepare to meet the obligation in case it should prove valid, and since he would not be able to examine the accounts until summer, if then, again suggested that they be turned over to a professional accountant. Under no circumstances, he added, was the overseer to be allowed any delay in submitting future reports. He expected that Nelson's expenditures would be properly supported by receipts, but if his books were not in order, it would be difficult to determine what he had received. Above all, Custis was not to worry about the balance against him: "By economy, & good management, you can soon pay it off, & then all will be right again."[56]

Lee's premonition that something might prevent him from being of assistance was borne out a few days later when he received orders appointing him lieutenant-colonel of a regiment of cavalry to be raised for service on the frontier. Up to now, Lee had been a staff officer and he did not welcome the change to the line, even though chances of promotion would be better in the cavalry and the active, outdoor life appealed to him. He disliked the thought of leaving the engineer corps, and, above all, being separated from his family for an indefinite period. But as a good soldier, he felt obligated to serve where the Army deemed him most useful. As he told Markie:

> Personal considerations or convenience, would not induce me to sever my connexion with my Corps, or to separate myself from my family. And the thought that my presence may be important to the latter or necessary to my children is bitter in the extreme. Still, in a military point of view I have no other course, and when I am obliged to act differently, it will be time for me to quit the service. My trust is in the mercy and wisdom of a kind Providence, who ordereth all things for our good... [57]

[56] Lee to Custis, Mar. 2, 1855, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[57] Same to Markie Williams, Mar. 14, 1855, in Craven, "To Markie," 52f.

Still, Lee must have felt pleased that he had been selected to be second in command of the new 2nd Cavalry, for the assignment showed that his superiors had approved his performance as superintendent of the Military Academy. Thinking it over, he must have concluded that he had learned much about handling young men in such a way as to bring out their best qualities and minimize their weaknesses. Considered in that light, it had been a worthwhile experience for both himself and the cadets in his charge.[58]

During the next two weeks, Lee was occupied in getting everything in order for his successor and making arrangements for returning their household furniture to Arlington. Almost before his family realized it, the time came for them to watch their last parade, attend their last service in the chapel, and say farewell to their friends. Though they had enjoyed their stay at the Academy, the girls were anxious to return home to Arlington. "I was in a perfect 'gale' as Grandpa would say & laughed & talked the whole time," Agnes wrote in her journal, when they were packing.[59]

Early in April, they left for home. At Baltimore, they visited Lee's sister, Mrs. William Marshall, and there met cousin Charlotte Wickham, "very pretty & sweet," according to Agnes. A carriage was waiting for them in the station at Washington, and after dropping Lee off at the War Department, the rest of the family went on to Arlington.

Charlotte Wickham

"I felt so excited I could hardly keep still," Agnes wrote in her

[58]For an excellent summary of Lee's experiences at West Point, see Freeman, Lee, I, 351-358.

[59]Some of the furniture was left to be sold, but that in the parlor and library was shipped to Arlington. Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for Apr. 16, 1855, DeButts-Ely MSS.

diary. "It seemed an age before we dashed around the garden fence. I sprang out on the steps, kissed Grandpa, & Cousin Markie, ran out to tell the servants how d'ye do & then wandered all over the house."

A few days later, she wrote with an effort at critical detachment: "West Point is probably more striking & picturesque, but Arlington with its commanding view, fine old trees & the soft wild luxuriance of its woods can favorably compare with any home I've seen."[60]

[60] Ibid., also entry for Apr. 20, 1855.

CHAPTER XVI

"WITH KINDNESS & AFFECTION"

Lee had about three weeks to get his affairs in order before leaving to join his regiment at Louisville, Ky. Almost daily he rode over to Washington where he was settling up his accounts as superintendent of the Military Academy; and since he expected to be away indefinitely, arranged his personal affairs so Mary could manage them in his absence. He also seems to have lent his father-in-law a hand, for about this time Custis informed overseer Nelson that two Alexandria men, a banker and an attorney, had been selected to examine their accounts and arrange a settlement.[1]

Except for the Mexican War and his trip to Florida shortly after it, Lee had not been away from his family for more than three months at a time since 1840. Now there was no prospect whatever that his family might be able to join him, since the regiment might be sent anywhere from Texas to California. Mary and the children would have to remain at Arlington, and to have them as comfortable as possible, Lee made arrangements to have the big drawing-room finished off, a hot air furnace installed, and the house redecorated.

He also ordered a monument for Mrs. Custis' grave from New York. Robert Launitz, recently commissioned by the state of Georgia to make a sixty-foot column commemorating the heroism of Pulaski at the Battle of

[1] Freeman, Lee, I, 351, 360; and Custis to F. Nelson, Apr. 9, 1855, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

Savannah, in 1778, was to make it. With his usual thoroughness, Lee sent a sketch of the monument, a plinth a few feet tall on a square base, and specified that the marble be "perfect in every respect." Besides a conventional inscription, he wanted a wreath of heartsease and lillies of the valley, Mrs. Custis' favorite flowers, carved on the front. He also wanted to know the exact dimensions of the base it would need, so that a foundation might be prepared.[2]

In April, Lee got orders to proceed to Louisville and take command of the 2nd Cavalry in the temporary absence of its commanding officer, Col. Albert Sidney Johnston. Before he made his departure, his father-in-law presented him with a sword once owned by George Washington. Custis had intended to bequeath the relic to Colonel Lee, but now thought it best that he should have it for his first command, to take with him into the Indian country. Little is known about the blade, including its present whereabouts, but it appears to have been a service sword, for it was described as being "plain and dull in appearance" by a lady to whom Lee showed it some years later.[3]

"We are very busy all the time now cleaning, fixing, working hard to renovate our dear old home," Agnes wrote in her diary a few days after her father's departure. Custis Lee, now stationed in Florida, received glowing accounts of the work in progress. "I am glad to hear you are renovating old Arlington," he wrote his mother. "By the time I see it again it will be so grand I shall hardly know it."[4]

The arrival of Smith Lee, just back from Commodore Perry's expedition to Japan, added to the excitement. "Uncle Smith," as the girls called

[2] Lee to R. E. Launitz, Apr. 17, 1855, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[3] B: P. Poore, "Waifs in Washington," Gleanson's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion, IV (Mar. 19, 1855), 190; also Long, op. cit., 469.

[4] Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for May 20, 1855, DeButts-Ely MSS; and G. W. C. Lee to Mrs. Lee, May 27, 1855, DeButts-Ely MSS.

him, had presents for everyone: a waiter for Mrs. Lee, a Japanese kimono and a "lacca" workbox for each of the girls, a Chinese kite for Rob. Under the circumstances, Mrs. Lee found it difficult to keep the household to its usual routine, though she made the children study regularly, and as usual had the older girls conduct classes for the servant's children each morning just before and after breakfast.[5]

With so much confusion in the house, old Mr. Custis must have been glad to get away whenever he had the opportunity. In May, he accompanied the local Jamestown Society to Mount Vernon, and a few days later took the steamboat over to St. Mary's, Maryland, to attend the annual celebration of the settlement of that state. Both occasions were such as he loved best--a trip in good company to a scene replete with historic associations, patriotic speeches (some by himself), and a good dinner afterwards,[6]

In the meantime, Lee was becoming acquainted with his regiment which had been ordered to Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, Mo. Luckily, he was able to get home for a week before leaving for his new post, and was able to see for himself how the "renovation," as the family termed it, was coming along. During his short stay, he probably helped select a team of carriage horses to replace "Tiger" and "Lion," now grown too old to be of service. "Pa' wrote me that Grandpa' had bought a fine pair of horses," Custis Lee wrote his mother from Florida. "They must be a great comfort."[7]

[5] Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for May 20, 1855, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[6] Nat. Intelligencer, May 16, 18, 21, 1855.

[7] Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for June 11, 1855, DeButts-Ely MSS; and G. W. C. Lee to Mrs. Lee, July 26, 1855, DeButts-Ely MSS.

At Jefferson Barracks, Lee set about making recruits into soldiers, and in the process demonstrated that he could bring out the best qualities in enlisted men as well as he had previously done with fledgling officers at West Point. Uniforms were lacking for many of the recruits, and telling Mrs. Lee about an experience he had because of this deficiency, he wrote:

> Yesterday at Muster I found one of the late arrivals in a dirty, tattered shirt & pants, with a white slouched hat, & shoes, his only garments to match. I asked him if he could not wash & mend those; He said he hadnnothing else to put on. I then told him immediately after muster, to go down to the river, wash himself & clothes thoroughly, & sit on the bank & watch the passing Steamboats till they dried, & then mend them. This morg. at Inspection he looked as proud as possible. Stood in the position of a soldier, with his little fingers in the seams of his pants, his beaver cocked back, & his toes sticking through his shoes; but his skin & solitary two garments clean. He grinned very happily at my Compliments. [8]

His family was often in Lee's thoughts, and the religious note evident in his earlier letters became even stronger. "I am content to read my bible & prayers alone, & draw much comfort from their holy precepts & merciful promises; though feel unable to follow the one, & utterly unworthy of the other," he wrote Mary. "I must still pray to that glorious God, without whom there is no help, & with whom there is no danger. That he may guard & protect you all, and more than supply you in my absence is my daily & constant prayer." [9]

From his letters, it is obvious that Lee would have liked to have had a hand in the "renovation." As it was, he took care of ordering the furnace and two marble mantels for the drawing-room, as well as the brickwork and plastering that was to be done. [10] Mrs. Lee kept him

[8] Lee to Mrs. Lee, July 1, 1855, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Same to same, July 1, 1855; and Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entries for July 23, Aug. 20, 1855; both in DeButts-Ely MSS.

posted as to the progress of the work, while he advised as to how it might be done most economically.

He was especially interested in the decoration and furnishing of the newly-plastered drawing-room. Its walls and ceiling should be painted white, he told Mary, that being the simplest and cheapest color, besides which the room needed light. He wanted the doors stained oak or walnut, and artificially grained; he preferred the walnut finish because of its richer appearance. The lamp which had hung in the hall at West Point would do for the new room, but he thought the old harpsichord--probably the one from Mount Vernon which Mrs. Lawrence Lewis had left at Arlington--would be out of place in the new room; therefore, it should be placed elsewhere. The organ, too, would have to make way for the hall table they had brought back from the academy. Mary could have a pair of chairs made similar to their other ones, and these with a lounge and table would be sufficient. "I wish indeed I could be there to help you, but it is impossible," he wrote. "You must have everything nice and comfortable for your father and friends, and I will enjoy it through you."[11]

His reasons for wanting Arlington House kept up, as expressed to Mrs. Lee, are especially apt now that it is maintained by the government as a national memorial in his honor:

> You must not think I desire the house to be repaired [he wrote Mary] from any expectation of enjoying it. It is not with that view I do anything farther than incidentally. But I think it right to improve every thing for which we are responsible, as far as necessary for its object, & within our means, & leave the enjoyment to the great disposer of events. In this particular instance, it is for the sake of her who is gone, & of those who remain, that I wish the place dear to their affections to be properly preserved, & not either to suffer from, or exhibit neglect. And I wish it out of respect for their memory & feelings.

[11] Same to same, July 9, 1855, DeButts-Ely MSS; also same to same, July 20, 1855, in E. J. Lee, op. cit., 434. An examination of the paint on the walls and woodwork of the drawing room, made in January 1953, showed that Lee's wishes were carried out.

> Life as you say hangs by an uncertain tenure; but that ought rather to stimulate us to execution, then to relaxation, that we may fulfill our duties, & the work set before us before we go hence. It matters not who is nebefitted by our labours, so our part is done. May God grant it be well done, & that we may earn the title of faithful Servants. [12]

For once, there was no talk of the family going away from Arlington during the hot months; too much was yet to be done. Also, Rooney had contracted a bilious fever at Harvard, and had to stay home while he recuperated. Anne and Agnes were now old enough to go away to school that fall, so they were enrolled at the Virginia Female Institute, at Staunton. Rob was to attend a nearby boarding school conducted by a Mr. Lippitt, so only Mildred and little Mary would remain at home.[13]

Anne + Agnes to Va Female Institute
Rob to boarding school

Though he knew it was impractical, Lee could not help hoping that his wife and the two younger children might join him at Jefferson Barracks or wherever else he might be stationed. "Ask your father to come out with you & take a look at the Country & Indians," he urged Mary. "Bring out George and Perry [cook and valet, respectively], & we could give him plenty of venison, wild turkies, bear, black hens, & partridges, &c."[14] But Mr. Custis was too old and Lee's stay at any one place too uncertain for his suggestion to be taken seriously.

By fall, when the children went away to school, the "renovation" was largely completed and already paid for, for Lee disliked being in debt. Some of the things left at West Point were still unsold and Mrs. Lee was tempted to give them away, but her husband thought some use could be made of them at Arlington. There was also some discussion as to where

[12] Same to same, July 9, 1855, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[13] Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for Sept. 2, 1855; Lee to Mrs. Lee, July 9, 1855; G.W.C. Lee to same, July 26, 1855; all in DeButts-Ely MSS. See also, MacDonald, op. cit., 116.

[14] Lee to Mrs. Lee, July 9, 1855, DeButts-Ely MSS.

their pictures would look best, particularly a view of West Point a friend had painted for them.' "It will serve to recall more vividly a view we have often admired," Lee wrote, "& a place that afforded us for a Season a pleasant residence, & where we recd. much kindness."[15] All this interest in pictures may have prompted Mary's father to publish an article on the Washington portraits at Arlington in which he compared them with others elsewhere and gave his recollections of the circumstances under which they were made.[16]

Apparently the old gentleman was able to get out a good deal in the fine fall weather, for Lee, in November, wrote from Fort Riley, where he was serving on a court martial: "I am glad your father is so well, & that he is enjoying his visits to the agricultural Fairs in the vicinity. They will bring to his notice many things that he may apply to his own advantage on his own estates, besides adding to his agricultural knowledge and pleasure." He added: "You must assist him as far as you can in all his matters, & lighten his labours..."[17]

By now Lee's regiment was in Texas, but instead of joining it there when he finished at Fort Riley, he received orders to sit on another court-martial scheduled to convene at Carlisle Barracks, Pa., early in January. Consequently, he lost no time in leaving for home and reached Washington on November 27. Taking a carriage over to Arlington, he was happy to find everyone well.[18]

One can be sure that as soon as the greetings were over, he was taken on a tour of the house by his wife and daughters--and Mr. Custis.

[15] Lee to Mrs. Lee, Sept. 3, 9, and Nov. 5, 1855; all in DeButts-Ely Mss.

[16] Nat. Intelligencer, Nov. 24, 1855.

[17] Lee to Mrs. Lee, Nov. 5, 1855, DeButts-Ely Mss; and Freeman, Lee, I, 382f.

[18] Ibid.; and Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entry for Nov. 27, 1855, DeButts-Ely Mss.

He could only have admired the transformation wrought in the "big room," as the family called it. When he had last seen it, the floor was of rough boards, the walls bare brick, and the woodwork (such as there was) unpainted. Then its only furnishings had consisted of a few old clothes-presses from Mount Vernon crammed with mouldy books, a broken table, some old chairs and an ancient harpsichord, plus a number of his father-in-law's old paintings hanging either from the walls around the room or stacked in corners.[19] Covering everything was a layer of dust and a tangle of cobwebs.

Now he saw a handsome drawing-room, as elegant as any in Washington. The floors were of pine, polished to a soft glow; walls and ceilings were white, as was the woodwork, except for the doors which had been finished in a dark walnut stain and rubbed to a soft, lustrous finish. The simple Early Victorian mantels carved with oak leaves, that he had gotten from New York went well with the parlor furniture of the same period which they had brought from West Point. On one mantel stood a fragile Parisian clock; on the other a cup and saucer of the famed "States China" once owned by Martha Washington. A table or two, probably marbletopped, crimson velvet drapes at the windows, some well-filled bookcases, a piano for the girls, and the West Point hall-lamp, hanging from the center of a raised gold ring in the middle of the ceiling completed the furnishings. Above one mantel Mrs. Lee had hung a portrait of her husband--either the one made by William West in 1838, or the larger one showing him in the undress uniform of a colonel of engineers which Professor Robert W. Weir had painted at West Point two years before. The

[19] An examination of the paint and plaster in the drawing-room, made in January, 1953, revealed picture hook holes over each of the mantles and at approximately four foot intervals around the room, just beneath the molding; also that the raised circle in the middle of the room was gilded. Also, Mrs. Anna H. Dorsey, "Annals of Georgetown," in Sunday Morning Chronicle (Washington, D. C.), July 7, 1872; and Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for Sept. 2, 1855, DeButts-Ely MSS.

West portrait of Mrs. Lee hung over the other mantel. Elsewhere in the room were portraits of the children, and the view of (or from) West Point that Lee liked so well. The total effect was one of rich beauty and dignified elegance in keeping with the best taste of the times. "A beautiful & noble drawing room, very handsomely furnished...," commented a young lady who saw it a few months later.[20]

There was less to see out in the hall, which had been painted a warm grey, except where the ducts from the hot air furnace had been let into the north wall to convey heat up to the second floor. The Peale portrait of Washington had been moved to a new place over the mantel in the family parlor, but the other Custis portraits were back in their old places, together with some of Custis' battlepieces for which the girls had made leather-ornamented frames.[21] The hall floor may also have been new.

Mr. Custis' "studio," or study, remained as before, but Mrs. Lee was now using the larger room between it and the drawing room as a "morning room," after the English fashion. Upstairs, one of the front rooms overlooking the river, shared by Markie Williams and young Mary Lee, may also have been redecorated. Sparsely furnished like the other bedrooms, it contained a few pieces of furniture and several pictures of Markie's, notably a portrait of her father in the uniform of an infantry officer

[20] Ibid.; also Torrence, op. cit., 152f. Lee liked the Weit portrait and thought it a good likeness, but Mrs. Lee was not entirely satisfied, perhaps because of the rather stern expression which resulted from the artist having to work at night under a light so strong Lee had to keep his eyes closed. See Lee to Mrs. Lee, Apr. 12, 1856, DeButts-Ely MSS; and R. E. Lee, Jr., op. cit., 19. Architect Gilbert Rodier notes the Early Victorian details in his "Arlington House," Architectural Forum, XL (Mar., 1924), 89.

[21] The ducts were found in the wall at the time the house was restored by the War Dept., c. 1929, according to L. M. Leisenring, statement to the author, June 17, 1949, L.M.N.M. The fire pot of the furnace is still in the basement. See also, Lee to Mrs. Lee, n.d., but evidently written late in 1855, DeButts-Ely MSS; Torrence, op. cit., 151; and statement of Mrs. Polly Sickles in D. E. Lee, op. cit., 99.

and one he had painted of her mother.[22]

Lee's verdict on the work accomplished can only be conjectured, but it is safe to say that he probably was well pleased with what had been done. Mrs. Lee would be most comfortably situated in his absence and able to entertain guests in a manner befitting her position as mistress of Arlington. A close acquaintance would later recall the "elegance and comfort" in which the family lived at this time.[23]

Only one thing marred their Christmas holiday that year--old "Nurse" was gone. "How I missed her Christmas when we paid the servants our usual visits," Agnes wrote in her diary; "there was one pair of steep steps up which I had no cause to go." Ever since they could remember, the children had loved Nurse's tales of "those good old times at Mount Vernon," where she had been one of the "out-door girls" whose duty it was to run and open the gate for "the General." Now there would be no more "nice talks" in Nurse's room in the north quarters.[24]

They would have been happier, too, if their father had not had to spend so much of his vacation going over the tangled accounts of the White House. According to Mr. Custis' lawyer and banker in Alexandria, whom he consulted about them, Nelson's accounts were at fault; therefore Lee went on to the White House estate where he spent several days going over the overseer's books and inspecting the two Pamunkey estates.

[22]Its use as a "morning room" is inferred from several letters written later by Mrs. Lee, July 25, 1862, DeButts-Ely MSS; Osborne, op. cit., 14, states that the room was made into a "parlour" about this time. For Markie's room, see Torrence, op. cit., 152f.; Markie Williams to Agnes Lee, May 8, 1861; and same to Annie Lee, July 13, 1861; DeButts-Ely MSS.

[23]Mrs. Burton Harrison, Recollections Grave and Gay (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), 53.

[24]Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for Mar. 23, 1856, DeButts-Ely MSS.

Everything was in good order at the White House: 10,000 bushels of wheat had been harvested; there would probably be about 1,000 barrels of corn; and 400 acres of winter wheat had been planted. The old Romancock house, from which the other estate took its name, was in ruins; the rebuilt mill was in operation; some 800 barrels of corn were expected to be harvested; and the right of way of the new railroad would not injure the farm in any way.[25] The slaves at both places were well. In short, the two properties were in good order.

It was otherwise with their books, which were in such bad shape he would have to take them back to Arlington in order to straighten them out. On his way home, he stopped off at Richmond to arrange for statements to be sent him by the firms which had done business with the Pamunkey farms. After his return, he made a short trip to Baltimore for the same purpose, then he set about the tedious task of going over Nelson's accounts for the eleven years of his stewardship.[26]

He had made good progress by the time he had to leave for Carlisle, Pa., early in January. With his usual thoroughness, he had checked each entry against its supporting voucher, noting each error, ambiguity and discrepancy. According to his figures the overseer was definitely in error to the sum of about $6,000 in addition to which there were $6400 of vouchers requiring further examination. On the basis of this evidence, Lee felt that a settlement advantageous to his father-in-law could be reached with Mr. Nelson, but since he might have to leave for Texas as soon as the court martial was over suggested that it be negotiated by some qualified person, for instance, William O. Winston, who lived not far from the White House estate.[27]

[25] Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entries for Dec. 5, 7, 8, 1855, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[26] Ibid., entries for Dec. 12, 15, 17, 19, 1855.
[27] Ibid., entries for Jan. 1, 4, 5, 1856; also Lee to W. F. Wickham, Jan. 2, 1855, in Lee Letter Bk. No. 1, DeButts-Ely MSS

Thus matters stood when Lee set out for Texas in the middle of February, leaving Arlington several days earlier than necessary in order to again visit the White House. There he spent two days going over old vouchers and the accounts for the previous year, and much to his satisfaction found that last year's wheat crop would bring in about $8400--more than enough to meet Nelson's balance against the estate. The overseer having agreed to turn over the accounts to Winston, Lee took them with him to "Hickory Hill," the home of a relative, William F. Wickham, where he met Winston and authorized him to make a legal settlement. Then he went to Richmond, where he arranged for some more statements to be sent Winston. That night February 20, 1856, he wrote in the little diary he was then keeping: "At 3 P. M. continued my journey to Texas, having made all the arrnagements in my power for the management of Mr. Custis' affairs & the Comfort of my dear family."[28]

As always, his homesickness became the more acute the farther he got from home. It took almost a month to reach San Antonio, Texas, from where he wrote:

> I have thought of you all very much dearest Mary, & have prayed for the health & happiness of each & all of you. In the hands of the great & Good God I leave you; trusting in his power & mercy to guard & protect you from all harm, & hoping he may be pleased to unite us once again....
>
> Write to me regularly, without waiting for answers, & tell me all about yourself, the children, & of every thing in which I can aid or relieve you. Urge the children to apply themselves to their several tasks & to endeavour to promote the prosperity & happiness of each & all. Give much love to your father, Markie ...& all the children & tell the latter to write to me when they can.
>
> For yourself accept my love & blessing & believe me always yours
>
> R. E. Lee [29]

That Lee felt himself beginning to grow old made him more understanding

[28]Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entries for Jan. 14, 22 and Feb. 4, 13-20, 1856; Lee to F. Nelson, Feb. 15, 1856; and same to W. C. Winston, Feb. 18, 1856; all in DeButts-Ely MSS.

[29]Lee to Mrs. Lee, Mar. 20, 1856, DeButts-Ely MSS.

about his aged father-in-law's difficulties. "As regards your house hold arrangements & what concerns your father's Comfort & Welfare, as well as your own, you must yourself act, & not rely on him or wait for me...," he wrote Mary a week later. "At his age & present state of life, persons prefer their matters to be accomplished by others, if Well & Satisfactorily performed. I feel that coming on me myself. We do not attach the same importance to objects we did when younger, & I hope our children will come to our relief in the same way at the proper time."[30]

Now almost seventy-six, Mr. Custis was grateful for his son-in-law's assistance, and as soon as Lee took his finances in hand, his spirits began to rise, giving him renewed vigor and interest in life.

In December, not long after Lee's arrival at Arlington, he accompanied a company of New Hampshire militia to Mount Vernon and showed them about the mansion and grounds. A month later, he delivered a stirring address to a convention of veterans of the War of 1812, and the following day addressed the annual meeting of the U. S. Agricultural Society. Occasionally, he went over to the city with Markie or the Lee girls, or into Alexandria to the bookstore. Rainy days, or when he did not feel like going out, he worked on his battle pictures in his "studio." Evenings, he liked to read or drowse in his favorite armchair before the fireplace in the family parlor, his favorite cat, "Tom Tita," in his lap.[31]

Though he had several times announced that he would write no more, a perennial swan-song, he had another of his Recollections ready for

[30] Same to same, Mar. 28, 1856, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[31] Nat. Intelligencer, Dec. 19, 20, 1855; Jan. 10, 14, 1856; Poore, Reminiscences, I, 444f.; and Terrence, op. cit., 160f. Also Custis to F. Nelson, Apr. 8, 1856, Custis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

publication on Washington's Birthday, 1857. Under the title, "Mysteries of the Revolution," he related what "Light-Horse" Harry Lee had told him about one of Washington's best spies, Rivington, the King's Printer in New York during the Revolution.[32]

From his camp on the Brazos River in Texas, where he was to be stationed for the next nineteen months, Lee wrote home frequently, trying to be as helpful as he could be at such a distance. Informed that the new furnace was not working well because too many persons tinkered with it, he suggested to Mary that she have it repaired by the manufacturer and then allow only one servant, Perry, to operate it. Likewise, when he learned that Mr. Custis intended to get a new manager for his Pamunkey farms, he suggested that Winston be given the job, even though he would not be able to live at the White House as Mr. Custis wished. "Tell your father he must do as he thinks best," he wrote Mary. "I am too far, my movements so uncertain, & our mail so irregular that he cannot depend on hearing from me....I wish I was where I could relieve him of the trouble."[33]

In reply, Mary wrote that her father had assured her he would not make any decision regarding Nelson's successor without consulting him, but Lee was much put out to learn that Mary's father had insisted on paying for the recent improvements on the house. "It was not right he should pay for matters which he neither desired or required," he told Mary--the money should have been used to reduce the sum her father owed Nelson.[34]

He was greatly concerned that Mary's rhumatism seemed to be getting worse. One bad attack had confined her to her bed during the early part

[32] Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 22, 1856; also Custis to Col. Canopy Janifer, Aug. 15, 1857, Misc. MSS, N. Y. H. S.; and Apr. 12, 1856, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[33] Lee to Mrs. Lee, Apr. 12, July 28, Aug. 18, Sept. 13, Oct. 13, 1856; all in DeButts-Ely MSS.

[34] Mrs. Lee to Lee, Aug. 19, Sept. 2, 6, 1856; and Lee to Mrs. Lee, Oct. 31, 1856, Jan. 9, 1857; all in DeButts-Ely MSS.

of the summer, and a trip to the Warm Springs had benefitted her only to the extent of allowing her to get downstairs and about the house a little. He was saddened, too, by the news that his sister Mildred, Mrs. Edward Vernon Childe, had died in Paris at the age of forty-five. "The news came to me very unexpectedly, and in the course of nature I might never have anticipated it," he told Mary, "as indeed I had never realized that she might precede me on the unexplored journey upon which we are hastening."[35]

In his letters home, he made light of the hardships of living in the Indian country. Living in a tent at Camp Cooper and sleeping under the stars when out on a patrol was good fun the way he described it to the children. Like all good campaigners he was resourceful in keeping himself well supplied with food. Telling Mildred of his chickens, he wrote:

> I have only seven hens & some days I get seven eggs. Having no plank, I have been obliged to make them a house of twigs. I planted four posts in the ground & bored holes in each three feet from the ground, in which I inserted poles for the floor, & around which were woven the branches that formed it. There are so many reptiles in this Country that you cannot keep fowls on the ground. The sides and top were formed in the same way & the whole is covered with branches with their leaves on, which makes a shady house, but affords little protection against rain. Soldier hens, however, must learn not to mind the rain. I converted the coop they came in into nests. They pick up so much corn among the horses that I do not have to feed them & they seem quite domesticated. I have no cat, nor have I heard of one in this country. You will have to send me one kitten in your next letter....My rattlesnake, my only pet, is dead. He grew sick and would not eat his frogs, etc., and died one night. [36]

On the 4th of July, he made a thirty mile march across the plains, and afterwards lay down to rest, he told Mary, "under my blanket, elevated on four sticks driven in the ground as a sunshade." Lying there,

[35] Same to same, Aug. 19, Sept. 1, 6, 13, 1856; Lee to Mrs. Lee, Aug. 4, Sept. 13, 1856; also Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for Aug. 30, 1856; all in DeButts-Ely MSS. Also Lee to Mrs. Lee, Aug. 25, 1856, in Jones, Life and Letters, 80.

[36] Same to Mildred Lee, Apr. 28, 1856, DeButts-Ely MSS.

he thought of Arlington and the celebration Mr. Custis customarily attended hat day. "The sun was fiery hot, the atmosphere like a blast from a hot air furnace, the water salt; still my feelings for my country were as ardent, my faith in her future as true, and my hopes for her advancement as unabated as they would have been under better circumstances."[37]

But as time went on, life on the Brazos became increasingly dull and monotonous. No Indian war parties put in an appearance and slowly Lee came to the conclusion that there was little to show for his long separation from his family.[38]

At the time Lee found his old sense of futility and frustration creeping over him, back home his father-in-law was taking advantage of the fine fall weather to visit local agricultural fairs. In October, he even ventured as far as Philadelphia to attend the national exhibition held by the U. S. Agricultural Society. There he looked in on many of the exhibits and attended the grand dinner, attended by more than two thousand persons, which climaxed the event. He was deeply touched by the storm of applause that greeted him when he was introduced to the gathering, and addressed himself mainly to the members from Pennsylvania under whose auspices the fair was being held, reminding them of the pride Washington had taken in being a farmer and urging them never to forget that the liberty they now enjoyed had been won at such memorable places in their state as Independence Hall and Valley Forge. "I pray God to bless your noble State, rich in its revolutionary recollections..." he said in closing: "I pray him to bless the nation!" Reported a newspaper:

[37] Same to Mrs. Lee, Aug. 4, 1856, in Fitz Lee, op. cit., 59f.
[38] Freeman, Lee, I, 365.

"The immense pavilion trembled with the deafening plaudits of genuine heart-felt approbation."[39]

Cheered by his reception at the Philadelphia fair, one of the great moments of his life, the old gentleman decided to return home, then go on to the state fair to be held in Richmond a few days later. But apparently he was more tired than he realized, for Mrs. Lee urged him not to go, though she was only able to dissuade him after he had gotten into his carriage and was about to depart.[40]

For some time rumors had been afloat that a new brigadier general was to be commissioned, and a number of prominent Virginians had petitioned the President to promote Lee to that grade. Lee himself was pessimistic. "Do not give yourself any anxiety about the appointment of the brigadier," he wrote Mary, in September. "If it is on my account that you feel an interest in it, I beg you will discard it from your thoughts. You will be sure to be disappointed..." The election of Buchanan in November made him slightly more hopeful: "If anything should turn up in the way of promotion, ask your father, if suitable & proper, to apply in my behalf," he wrote home. He hoped, he continued--in the first comment he is known to have made on the subject--that the new President would "extinguish the fanatacism North & South, & cultivate love for the Country & Union, & restore harmony between the different sections."[41]

With Christmas approaching, his thoughts turned to the holiday seasons he and his family had previously enjoyed at Arlington. Early in December, he wrote Mary:

[39]Nat. Intelligencer, Oct. 13, 1856; and U. S. Ag. Soc. Journal, IV (1856), 119f.

[40]Curtis to F. Nelson, Nov. 2, 1856, Curtis MSS, Wm. & Mary College.

[41]Lee to Mrs. Lee, Sept. 1, Dec. 13, 1856, Jones, Life and Letters, 81, and DeButts-Ely MSS, respectively.

> The time is approaching when I trust many of you will be assembled around the family hearth at dear Arlington, to celebrate another Xmas. Though absent, my heart will be in the midst of you, & I shall enjoy in imagination & memory, all that is going on. May nothing occur to mar or cloud the family fireside, & may each be able to look back with pride & pleasure at their deeds of the past year & with confidence & hope to that in prospect. I can do nothing but hope & pray for you. [42]

Again, only a few days before Christmas, he wrote:

> I have been recalling dearest Mary the many happy Xmas' we have had together, & the pleasure I have enjoyed with you, your dear parents & the children around me. I ought not therefore to repine at an occasional separation from you, but be grateful for what I have had, & be prepared to keep this solitary & alone.... My prayers & thoughts will be with you & all will receive my fervent salutations. I hope nothing will be omitted that I could have done, to make each one happy... [43]

Deprived of the company of his own children, he got some enjoyment from buying presents for those of the garrison at Fort Brown. "I hope you had a joyous Christmas at Arlington," he wrote Mary a day or two later, "and that it may be long & often repeated," "I thought of you all and wished to be with you. Mine was gratefully but silently passed." [44]

In this letter, Lee set forth for the first time, as far as is known, his views on the slavery question. Though he had been in contact with slavery all his life, he had seen little of it other than in Virginia and the border states where it was at its best. He himself had never owned more than half a dozen slaves, all inherited, and these he had given the opportunity of going to Liberia. [45]

1856

Like his father-in-law and many others in his section, Lee believed that slavery was bad for both races, that it held back the economic development of the South, and that the abolitionists were needlessly inflaming public opinion North and South, whereas emancipation could

[42] Same to same, Dec. 5, 1856, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[43] Same to same, Dec. 20, 1856, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[44] Same to same, Dec. 27, E. J. Lee, op. cit., 436.
[45] Statement of G. W. C. Lee, given in Page, op. cit., 37 and n.

46

only be brought about gradually.

Writing to Mary seven weeks after the first national election in which the Republican party had entered a candidate, Lee referred with approval to President Pierce's recent admonition to those who sought to interfere with Southern institutions. He then went on:

> In this enlightened age, there are few I believe, but what will acknowledge, that slavery as an institution, is a moral & political evil in any Country. It is useless to expatiate on its disadvantages. I think it however a greater evil to the white than to the black race, & while my feelings are strongly enlisted in behalf of the latter, my sympathies are more strong for the former. The blacks are immeasurably better off here than in Africa, morally, socially & physically. The painful discipline they are undergoing is necessary for their instruction as a race, & I hope will prepare & lead them to better things. How long their subjugation may be necessary is known & ordered by a wise Merciful Providence. Their emancipation will sooner result from the mild & melting influence of Christianity, than the storms and tempests of fiery Controversy. This influence though slow, is sure....While we see the Course of the final abolition of human Slavery is onward, & we give it the aid of our prayers & all justifiable means in our power, we must leave the progress as well as the result in his hands who sees the end; who Chooses to work by slow influences; & with whom two thousand years are but as a Single day. Although the Abolitionist must know this, & must see that he has neither the right or power of operating except by moral means & suasion, & if he means well to the slave, he must not Create angry feelings in the Master; that although he may not approve the mode by which it pleases Providence to accomplish its purposes, the result will nevertheless be the same; that the reasons he gives for interference in what he has no Concern, holds good for every kind of interference with our neighbours when we disapprove their conduct; Still I fear he will persevere in his evil Course. Is it not strange that the descendents of those pilgrim fathers who Crossed the Atlantic to preserve their own freedom of opinion, have always proved themselves intolerant of the Spiritual liberty of others? [47]

In general, these were the prevailing beliefs of Lee's class in the border states, and after expressing them to his wife he seems to have lost interest in the subject, for there was no mention of slavery in a letter he wrote Mary a few days later. Instead, he described some sheep of an

[46] Lee, interview with Roy John Leyburn, Century Mag., XCX, 167; also interview with Herbert C. Saunders, given in R. E. Lee, Jr., op. cit., 231.

[47] Lee to Mrs. Lee, Dec. 27, 1856, DeButts-Ely MSS.

unusual breed he had recently seen which might interest her father. He also sent New Year greetings:

> To all & each I wish a useful, happy New Year, & that every & many returns of the day may add to their joy & content. To you dear Mary, I wish every good, every happiness: & pray to the good & great God, to guard & preserve you from every ill & danger. May it please him to keep us & all from every Sin, every folly; & when it is best for our present & future weal, to unite us in this world & forever in the world to come! [48]

By now, Lee had been in Texas ten months. He had long since become hardened to the hardships of a soldier's life in the field and camp and resigned to the courts-martial that took up a large part of his time. But always he felt torn between his profession and his family: as a soldier, he belonged where the Army could best use him; as a husband and father he was needed at home. Learning that Mrs. Lee had been ill again and would have to make another trip to the Warm Springs that summer increased his concern. "I wish it was in my power to accompany you," he wrote to her in March, 1857. "But I unfortunately belong to a profession that debars all hope of domestic enjoyment, the duties of which cannot be performed without a sacrifice of personal & private relations, & one or the other must be abandoned. I cannot in honour abandon the former, while holding the office, I am therefore forced to relinquish the latter." [49]

Having made up his mind as to where the greater duty lay, he tried to discharge the lesser as best he could. He tried to help Mrs. Lee with household problems like the proper maintainance of the furnace and sought to encourage the girls to apply themselves to their studies. "You did

[48] Same to same, Jan. 3, 1857, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[49] Same to same, Jan. 7, 1857, Jones, Life and Letters, 84; also same to same, Mar. 7, 1857, DeButts-Ely MSS.

not tell me why Mr.---ceased giving you musick lessons," he wrote Mildred. "I hope you will like Mr. Palmer better...But you will like neither the teacher nor the subject unless you practice diligently & learn to play well. That is the secret. We are always fond of what we do well. Try it & you will find it so."[50]

He also sought to be of assistance to Winston, who, as he had suggested, had been given the management of the Pamunkey estates, and was considerably put out when he learned that Winston's predecessor had departed without leaving an inventory or rendering any accounts for the last two years.[51]

His father-in-law was especially angry that his former manager had not built the new slave quarters that Lee had ordered built; as a result, he was now being annoyed with anonymous letters complaining of the poor living conditions on the two farms. "I am not to blame," he protested to Winston, directing him to correct the situation. "I have been kept so perfectly in ignorance of my affairs, that I had as well lived in the Sandwich Islands." Winston was also to make the railroad company pay for labor and materials supplied it by the former manager at the time it was being constructed across the estate.[52]

Concern over his business affairs or even a feeling that his time was growing short may account for his noticeable restlessness at this time. In January, he again addressed the annual convention of the Veterans of the War of 1812, also the U. S. Agricultural Society, and a few weeks later wrote an article for the National Intelligencer in which he described the inaugurations he had witnessed in his lifetime. Gone now, he

[50] Same to same, Jan. 9, 1857, and same to Mildred Lee, Jan.9, 1857, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[51] Same to Mrs. Lee, Jan. 9, 1857, DeButts-Ely MSS; and same to G. W. C. Lee, Feb. 15, 1858, Lee MSS, Duke U.

[52] Ibid.; and Custis to W. C. Winston, Jan.28, 1857, Custis Family Papers, Mt. Vernon, Va.

he said, was the "pilgrim's stone" where he had been accustomed to sit in previous years. "But the pilgrim will be somewhere near the ancient spot, and while the sounds of artillery still linger about the echoes of the Capitol, the old man will say, 'James Buchanan, fifteenth President of the United States! What next?'"[53]

Events were to make the query more pertinent than he could have realized. His opinion of the new president is not known, but that of his daughter was not flattering. "Everybody is agog for the inauguration," she wrote a friend. "I never felt so little interest in a new President, for I never admired Mr. Buchanan." After this event, there was little for the old man to anticipate, except perhaps the coming season at Arlington Spring. "Father is well as usual but just now much ennuied for lack of excitement," Mrs. Lee confided to her husband.[54]

Developments at his distant estates did not add to his peace of mind, though the new manager was proving most capable. One of the White House servants had tried to kill a steward and had been sentenced to be transported out of the country, and an embarrassing number of bills, about which he knew nothing, were coming in from all directions.

By now, it appeared that instead of Custis owing Nelson, the latter actually owed his former employer a considerable sum, which could not be collected because Nelson had lost almost everything of his own in some bad speculation. Lee termed Nelson's conduct "most extraordinary," but was inclined to be charitable. "It is perhaps unreasonable to expect others will do for us as they will do for themselves...," he told Mary, expressing the hope that the new manager would "bring all things straight"

[53] Nat. Intelligencer, Jan. 9, 17, Feb. 23, 1856; and U. S. Ag. Soc. Journal, V (1857), 68-73.

[54] Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Hackley, Feb. 19, Mar. 17, 1857, Lee MSS, U. of Va., and DeButts-Ely MSS, respectively.

in a year or two. "You must give much love to your father," he wrote later on. "Tell him I hope his affairs will yet be settled to his satisfaction & benefit, & that I shall return as soon as I can to attend to them."[55]

Despite his growing concern over the way things were going, Lee managed to be cheerful in his letters to his daughters. "To "Precious Life" (his pet name for Mildred), he wrote in March:

> You must be a very great personage now. Sixty pounds! Enormous. I wish I had you here in all your ponderosity. I want to see you so much. Can not you & dear Mary Childe [his sister Mildred's little daughter, then at Arlington] pack yourselves up in a Carpet bag & come up to the Comanche Country? I wish you would. I would get you such a fine Cat, you would never look at Tom Tita again. Did I tell you Jim Nooks, Mrs. Wait's cat was dead? Died of apoplexy. I foretold his end. Buttered toast for Tea, & Mexican rats, taken raw, for Supper. Cat nature could not stand so much luxury. He grew enormous & ended in a spasm. His beauty could not save him.[56]

He would have been more worried had he known actually how ill his wife was. The arthritis she had long had in her right hand and arm often pained her so much she could not sleep; worse yet, it seemed to be slowly spreading. "I almost dread him seeing my crippled state," she confided to a friend.[57]

Not wishing to add to her husband's worries, Mrs. Lee confined her letters to domestic happenings, such as Rooney's recent appointment as a second lieutenant in the infantry. She had given her consent without first consulting him, she told Lee, because she knew her son was dissatisfied at Harvard and the decision had to be made at once. Army discipline ought to benefit Rooney, because he had a "warm & affectionate heart," but had "too careless & reckless a disposition."[58]

Rooney 2nd Lt. Inf.

[55] Lee to Mrs. Lee, Mar. 7, Apr. 7, May 18, 25, 1857, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[56] Mar. 22, 1857, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[57] Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Hackley, Feb. 19, 1857, Lee MSS, V. H. S.
[58] Same to Lee, n. d., quoted in part in MacDonald, op. cit., 119f.

Unaware of the seriousness of Mary's illness, Lee went about his usual duties in Texas. Easter Sunday, he wrote Mary from Fort Mason:

> I hope you have been able to attend the services at Church. My own have been performed alone in my tent, I hope with a humble, grateful, and penitent heart, and will be acceptable to our Heavenly Father. May he continue his mercies to us both and all our children, relatives and friends, and in his own good time unite us in his worship, if not on earth, forever in heaven. 59

That he was asked to read the burial service for two little boys who died in camp in the early summer indicates the mutual respect and understanding between Lee and his men. Telling Mary about the first, Lee wrote:

> The great heat has produced much sickness among the men. The little children, too, have suffered. A bright little boy died a few days since from it. He was the only child, and his parents were much affected by his loss. They expressed a great desire to have him buried with Christian rites, and asked me to perform the ceremony; so for the first time in my life I read the beautiful funeral service of our church over the grave to a large and attentive audience. 60

Lee was happy to learn that Mary planned to spend several weeks at the Warm Springs, and that her father had had a pleasant outing to Jamestown for the celebration of the first settlement of Virginia. "Tell him I at last have a prospect of getting a puss," he wrote, in June. "I have heard of a batch of kittens at a Settlers down on the river & have the promise of one." 61

As the weather grew warmer, old Mr. Custis was able to get outdoors more and his boredom vanished. "Father is...so engrossed now with the Spring, nothing seems to trouble him much," Mary wrote her husband. Sometimes he brought his friends up to the house to see the Washington relics.

[59]Lee to Mrs. Lee, Apr. 12, 1857, quoted in Fitz Lee, op. cit., 68.
[60]Same to same, June 9, 1857, quoted in ibid., 69.
[61]Same to same, June 15, 1857, DeButts-Ely MSS.

"Nor ought we omit to mention the courtesy with which we were received at the Arlington mansion, and the felicitous manner in which Mr. Custis pointed out objects of interest in the 'battle scenes' and other paintings, which adorn the walls of that house," a member of a Sunday School, which he had taken through the mansion, wrote that summer. "You might see him on the grounds in an old straw hat and in common dress, and you would with difficulty be convinced he was the adopted son of Washington," another visitor would later recall.[62]

His correspondence regarding Washington was as heavy as ever. That summer he was called upon to settle a dispute which had arisen among some citizens of Frederick, Md., as to whether Washington had held the rank of Marshal of France in the Revolutionary War. Again, a New York merchant asked his opinion as to which was the best likeness of Washington. His answer was interesting--that none was completely satisfactory. "I assured Lord Napier, who made me an especial visit to inspect the /Washington/ Treasury, that the Sharpless...was the best likeness of the Man extant," he wrote in reply. "Trumbull for the figure; Stuart the head; & Sharpless the expression and you have all you can have of the portraiture of Washington." With only "a few grey heads like my own" left to tell how Washington had really appeared, it was high time that such a portrait be made.[63]

He was feeling the weight of his years, though he made light of them. "I am myself no chicken, having entered my 77th year," he told Rembrandt Peale, who himself was almost eighty. But age had not diminished his affection for little children, and more than once he delved into the old black leather trunk bearing Washington's initials in brass nails on

[62] Mrs. Lee to /Lee?/, June 24, n. d., but evidently 1857, typescript copy in L. M. M. M.; National Intelligencer, July 20, 1857; and Packard, op. cit., 157.

[63] Nat. Intelligencer, Aug. 28, 1857; and Custis to T. W. O. Moore, June 6, July 21, 1857, both in Soc. MSS, His. Soc. of Pa.

its top to send a scrap of his handwriting to a little boy who wanted a memento of the First President.[64]

Old as he was, he could still speak out strongly in favor of the principles he held dear. He deplored the wave of religious intolerance which was then sweeping the country under the auspices of the "Native Americans," or "Know-Nothings," as they were popularly called. Because of his age, he was forced to decline an invitation to address the "Friends of Civil and Religious Liberty" in New York, but stated his beliefs in a letter to the committee in charge of the affair.

> Civil & Religious liberty & the principles of the Revolution, were instilled in my mind in my infancy in the sacred shades of Mount Vernon; they have grown with my growth, & strengthened with my strength, up to the close of my 'Seventy-sixth year, [&] will continue to be cherished as the proudest feelings of an American heart, during my few remaining years....
>
> The American People have forgotten the great principles of the Revolution, for which their fathers fought & bled,...& introduced in modern times bigotry & intolerance, where all should be kindness & brotherly love....From the times of America's old Battle Days down to the present hour, more gallant sons of the Emerald Isle have mustered around the 'Star Spangled Banner', than from all the other nations of the Earth...I pray God that the Americans, seeing the error of their ways, may return to First Principles, the spirit of the Revolution and Civil and Religious Liberty... 65

A photograph Mathew Brady made of him about this time gives an impression of stronger character than is noticeable in earlier portraits. It shows him cane in hand, dressed in a dark coat with shiny buttons over a vest of elaborate design. Half-bald, he has sideburns and a small neatly-trimmed mustache; the nose is thin and prominent, the face deeply-lined. But the eyes are only slightly dimmed by age and gaze steadily into those of the viewer--clearly those of a man still vigorous and daunted neither by his years nor the times.[66]

[64] Same to Rembrandt Peale, Aug., 1857, printed in The Crayon, V (May, 1858), 144; and Nat. Intelligencer, July 4, 1857.

[65] Custis to Issac Bell, et. al., Feb. 23, 1857, photostat copy in Georgetown U. archives.

[66] The photograph is now in the collection of Frederick H. Meserve, New York City.

1857

Va Hot Springs

Mrs. Lee passed most of the summer of 1857 at the Virginia Hot Springs with her eldest son, who was waiting for a ship to take him to California. It was there that she learned that Rooney had become engaged to his cousin Charlotte Wickham, and though she thought the couple too young and closely related, nevertheless gave her approval. "A virtuous attachment is often a great safeguard to a young man," she told her husband.[67]

Rooney engaged to Charlotte

She cut her visit short in order to take her father to Louisville, Ky., for the annual exhibition of the U. S. Agricultural Society, in September. Lee, to whom she confided her plans, thought the excursion would do his father-in-law good. "I know it will be very agreeable to him, & he will meet with much kindness and hospitality," he wrote. "He has never crossed the Alleghanies, or looked into the Mississippi Valley. He will pass over Braddock's burial ground, & see the Queen City, & it is a short run from Louisville to Lexington by R. R. which will give him a sight of the finest portion of Kentucky....He would return renovated & strengthened for his business in the Fall."[68]

Another event to which the old man was looking forward with even greater anticipation was to take place on February 22, 1858, when the Mount Vernon Ladies Association would formally assume the ownership of Washington's old estate. Unproductive for years, the historic estate had declined badly under its successive private owners, and the question of what should be done with it had long been agitated. Among other proposals, it had been suggested that the government acquire it for a

[67] Mrs. Lee to Lee, n. d., but evidently c. Aug., 1857, quoted in part in MacDonald, op. cit., 122.

[68] Lee to Mrs. Lee, Aug. 22, 1857, DeButts-Ely MSS.

national cemetery; again that the U. S. Agricultural Society buy it for an experimental farm--both of which were to come about in time, not at Mount Vernon, but Arlington. Now, under the inspired leadership of Miss Ann Pamela Cunningham, of South Carolina, the ladies of America were about to buy and maintain it as an historic shrine, and Custis, as the last survivor of Washington's family, was invited by Miss Cunningham to attend the ceremony in the national Capitol.[69]

But he was not to witness this event. Upon her return home, Mrs. Lee found her father too ill to make the trip to Louisville because of a minor bilious complaint. Though mild, his illness persisted, and finally in October, he came down with influenza. Even then there seemed no cause for alarm, and he appeared to be doing better when Mrs. Lee wrote to tell her husband that a new roof was being put on the stable and the two front dressing rooms upstairs had been made into an extra bedroom. "Father sends his love as do the girls," she said.[70]

On Saturday, October 10, 1857, Lee wrote from San Antonio to Charlotte Wickham, the young lady Rooney was to marry:

> I never thought my dear Charlotte when I held you a girl in my arms, & felt revive for you the love I bore your mother, that you would ever be nearer or dearer to me than then. But you are now united in my heart with one, who from infancy has been dearer to me than myself, & whose welfare in manhood I value beyond my own. You can conceive then the grateful affection I feel for her who is to promote his happiness & smooth for him the rough path of life. I hope his love & devotion to you will make your part easy, & that in return he will lighten your cares & bear your troubles. To me he has always been an affectionate son: To you I hope he may ever prove a tender & faithful husband. I feel very

[69] Nat. Intelligencer, Dec. 12, 1829, Oct. 26, 1850, Jan. 15, 1857; and "Southern Matron" (apparently Miss Cunningham), to Custis, Apr. 10, 1857, in Mary Lee Scrapbook, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[70] Mrs. Lee to Lee, Oct. 7, 1851, DeButts-Ely MSS.

sensibly your kindness in consenting to enter our family. I fear you will find us rough Soldiers. But I trust you will be as dear as my own daughter, & if you will allow me I will guard & watch over you with the care of a father. And that makes me grieve at the hard life you have chosen, & I fear you may not know the privations to which you may be exposed. A Soldiers life is one of toil & selfdenial. A Soldiers wife must practice hope & patience. But you may always rely on a home with me & as long as you are within my reach, no harm shall come near you. Yet in our broad Country, we may be widely separated. Then we mustvtrust to our father in heaven, who I know will order all things for our good. 71

That same day, Mr. Custis died. For some time he had been failing steadily, and at last had been persuaded to go to bed--something he had hardly ever done in previous illnesses. When he realized that he would not rally from the congestion of the lungs that was dragging him down, he had gone over his will and various business matters with Mrs. Lee, then had slowly sunk into unconsciousness. About midnight, October 9, he had rallied enough to ask her to summon everyone to take leave of him while he knew them, and after talking a little to each one, had asked to be remembered to his son-in-law, and to Custis Lee, who by this time was in California. Then he had asked for Mr. Dana, their minister, with whom he took communion.

"God have mercy on me in my last moments," they heard him murmur about sunrise. "Lay me beside my blessed wife," he whispered a little later. Feebly, he shook his head when the doctor tried to give him some brandy. "You know I never liked spirits," he said. About noon his harsh breathing had suddenly ceased, as quietly and peacefully he passed away.[72]

"We miss him more & more every moment," Agnes wrote to her father

[71] Lee to Charlotte Wickham, Oct. 10, 1857, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[72] Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for Oct. 11, 1857; and Mrs. Lee to Lee, Oct. 11, 1857; both in DeButts-Ely MSS.

next day. "Everything around us reminds us so forcibly of him who has left it forever. Even his cat wanders around the hearth as if it misses the familiar figure in the arm chair."[73]

At that moment, the body of her beloved grandfather lay in a mahogany coffin decorated with flowers and autumn leaves in the drawing room. There the Reverend Mr. Dana conducted funeral services on Tuesday morning, after which six of the servants bore the coffin out of the house to the grave prepared for it next to that of Mrs. Custis.

In every respect it was just the kind of funeral the old man would have wished. Warm sunshine filtered through the dark old trees, glistening on the instruments of a brass band he had often heard play at Arlington Spring. The Washington Light Infantry, dressed in colorful uniforms, was there, and following them in the procession, a number of veterans of the War of 1812, wearing their faded, ill-fitting uniforms of a by-gone era. With the black-robed priests of his own faith, were those from Georgetown College who came with the Washington Society of that school. More than a thousand persons gathered close about the grave to hear the burial service and watch the pall bearers fill the grave with earth. Then, after the mound was banked with flowers, the crowd dispersed quietly and the family went back to the mansion, now strangely silent with its old master gone.[74]

No doubt those who mourned him were gratified that almost every paper in the country carried his obituary. Most of these agreed that he had truly linked the present with the past by his relationship with Washington, his genuine reverence for his guardian, and his efforts to

[73] Agnes Lee to Lee, postscript to ibid.

[74] Nat. Intelligencer; and Evening Star (Washington, D. C.), Oct. 14, 1857.

perpetuate his memory. All had some word of praise for the hospitality and generosity he had always displayed to all who came to Arlington, and Northern papers mentioned the admiration he had frequently expressed for their section and expressed the belief that he had done much to foster a fraternal spirit throughout the nation. "Thousands from this country and from foreign lands who have visited Arlington to commune with our departed friend, and look upon the touching memorials there treasured up with care of him who was first in the hearts of his countrymen, will not forget the charm thrown over all by the ease, grace, interest, and vivacity of the manners and conversation of him whose voice, alas! is silent now," said the National Intelligencer.[75]

Those who had known him best thought the secret of his character lay in his having been born in the closing days of the Revolution and raised in the presence of the First President. "Your Father was distinguished by talents which would have made him envied in any profession," the Reverand Mr. Gurley wrote to Mrs. Lee, "but his ample Fortune, extensive & generous hospitality, and the care of his large estates, led him rather to Agricultural pursuits, general literature, and the indulgence of his tastes for the fine Arts..." "I knew Mr. Custis well, and regarded him always as an amiable, upright, and accomplished gentleman," Henry S. Foote recalled. "Had he been poor, he would probably have attained great distinction in some one of the learned professions."[76]

Perhaps the most sincere tribute, because it was intended for no one else's eyes, was paid him by his son-in-law, who wrote in his private "memorandum book" on October 21:

> Recd. telegraphic notice of the death of my kind & dear father in law, G. W. P. Custis. The shock was as unexpected as afflicting.

[75] Oct. 12, 1857.

[76] R. R. Gurley to Mrs. Lee, Oct. 6, 1858, Custis MSS, V. H. S.; and Foote, op. cit., 167.

Determined to go immediately to my wife to give her all the comfort & aid in my power.

The entry made after Lee reached Arlington two and a half weeks later tells its own story of a household mourning its late master:

> Arrived at Washington at 11 1/2 A. M. Reached Arlington about 1 P. M. Found all sad, suffering & sick, & the chair of him who had always recd. me with kindness & affection-- vacant. 77

77 Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entries for Oct. 21, Nov. 11, 1857, Dearborn-Ely Mss.

CHAPTER XVII

"TO BUILD UP OLD ARLINGTON"

For a time, it seemed as if some vital force had gone out of the old house, leaving it spiritless. "I miss every moment, him that always reed. me with the kindness & affection of a father," Colonel Lee wrote to Aunt Maria Fitzhugh at Ravensworth soon after his return. He seemed surprised at how fast everything had changed; "The grass is already green over his grave." He was also distressed to find Mrs. Lee barely able to get around the house because of her arthritis. Though only forty-nine, she had aged greatly during his long absence.[1]

Mrs. Lee knew what was in her father's will, bit had deferred opening it until her husband was home. From it, Lee learned that he was one of four executors--Bishop William Meade, Robert Lee Randolph of Eastern View, and George Washington Peters were the others. But it was soon apparent for legal reasons only he would be able to qualigy before the Alexandria County Court; hence, the settlement of the estate would devolve entirely on him. Accordingly, he got his leave extended for another year, until December 1, 1858.[2]

He realized that settling the large, involved estate according to the will his father-in-law had made two years before would not be easy. Mrs. Lee was to have a life interest in the Arlington estate, Arlington

[1]Lee to Mrs. A. M. Fitzhugh, Nov. 22, 1857, Lee MSS, Duke U.; and Freeman, Lee, I, 379.

[2]Ibid., I, 381; and Mrs. Lee to Lee, Oct. 11, 1857, DeButts-Ely MSS. Lee qualified as executor, Dec. 7, 1857; for which see Lee Exec. Bk. No. 7, DeButts-Ely MSS.

House and its contents, and the Washington Forest Tract on Four Mile Run; all of which after her death would go to Custis Lee on condition that he take his grandfather's "name and arms." Rooney was to get the White House estate; his brother Robert, Romancock. Each of the four girls was to receive $10,000 from the sale of Smith's Island and miscelleanous tracts in Stafford, Richmond and Northumberland Counties, and if that was not enough, the balance was to come from the White House and Romancock plantations. After the legacies had been paid, all the slaves were to be freed--"the said emancipation to be accomplished in not exceeding five years from the time of my decease."[3]

As Lee saw it, some of the provisions were contradictory and would require judicial interpretation, particularly the extent of the liens on the White House and Romancock estates. When that had been decided, he could then sell the miscelleaneous properties and apply the proceeds to his daughter's legacies, making up the balance from the profits from the Pamunkey farms. Had not the panic that year caused a decline in agricultural prices, he could have anticipated settling the estate in a reasonable time. But with money scarce, merchants wanted everything that was owed them. "Debts are pouring in on me," Lee confided to his son Custis, early in 1858, "not in large amounts, but sufficient to absorb my available funds." "So far I have paid all that have been presented by tradesmen & merchants."[4] He estimated that these amounted to about $10,000.

His first thought was that Rooney and young Robert should take over the management of their estates on the Pamunkey as soon as possible. These had always been self-supporting and would present no serious problem. Arlington, which his eldest son would ultimately inherit, was a

[3] Will of G. W. P. Custis, probated Dec. 7, 1857, MS Records of Alexandria County, Va. The will is printed in Frussing, op. cit., 476f.

[4] Lee to G. W. C. Lee, Jan. 17, Mar. 17, 1858, Lee MSS, Duke U.

different matter; to make it self-sustaining would take time and considerable effort. Confronted with his old dilemma as to which had the greater claim on him, the Army or his family, Lee sought the advice of Mrs. Fitzhugh. "Dear Cousin Anna, what am I to do?," he wrote, shortly after his return. "I fear Mary will never be well enough to accompany me in my wandering life, and it seems to be cruel to leave her....Every thing is in ruins & will have to be rebuilt. I feel more familiar with the military operations of a campaign than the details of a farm."[5]

Finally, he decided to put off his decision until his sons had made theirs. He knew that Custis disliked the post where he was stationed and would welcome coming home. Rooney wanted to resign from the Army, marry Charlotte Wickham, and move into the White House, but would not while he was under orders to join an expedition against the Mormons in Utah. "There would be no necessity for my leaving the Army," he explained to Custis, if he took over Arlington and Rooney the Pamunkey farms.[6]

While he waited to hear from his sons, Lee set to work with his customary vigor to make Arlington self-sufficient. To relieve him of the detailed supervision of the estate, he looked about for an overseer, preferably a "single, respectable man," who could live in the north wing of the mansion and assist Mrs. Lee whenever Lee himself was away. In order to get the Arlington Mill in operation as quickly as possible, he was satisfied to lease it for $400 per year, though at that rate, it would take four years to pay the repairs and wages owed the old miller.[7]

[5]Same to Mrs. A. M. Fitzhugh, Nov. 22, 1857, Lee MSS, Duke U.
[6]Same to G. W. C. Lee, Feb. 15, 1858, Lee MSS, Duke U.
[7]Same to same, Jan. 17, 1858, Lee MSS, Duke U.

Though all but Rooney and Custis Lee were home for Christmas, the holiday was a sad and quiet one for the Lees. "Nothing has occurred to cheer the sadness that reigns over the house since your departure," Lee wrote Markie.[8]

To add to his difficulties, some of the servants had been led to believe that Mr. Custis had intended that they be freed immediately after his death. According to them, reported the Washington correspondent of a Boston newspaper, their old master had told them so as he lay dying, and now the will was being kept secret so that the slaves on the Pamunkey River estates could be sold.[9]

This was Lee's second direct contact with the extravagant attacks made on Southern slaveowners by militant abolitionists, for the scurrilous "obituary" of his father-in-law printed by the Chicago Tribune and other abolitionist newspapers had no doubt been called to his attention. This was a "translation," they said, of the one which had appeared in "the quaint old National Intelligencer," and it read, in part:

> Mr. Custis died at Arlington...after a brief illness, on the morning of the 10th instant. For several years he had stood alone in his relations to the immortal Washington, seizing upon the occasion of every public dinner to make a tipsy speech commencing: 'Dandled upon the lap of the Father of his Country, I--;' whence he came to be known in gastronomical circles as the Inevitable Custis. His departure will awaken the sentiments of surprise that the event had not transpired some years earlier.
>
> He was early united in marriage to Miss Mary Lee Fitzhugh, of Virginia, a lady of unsurpassed excellence in all the relations of life, vindicating her woman's nobility by avoiding the society of her husband for many years previous to her death, on account of his notorious licentiousness-a licentiousness which was strictly Virginian in its impartiality for color...
>
> Mr. Custis was distinguished by an original genius for the eloquence of the dinner-table, and still more zeal for displaying it. His forte, however, was in the department of the fine arts.... People jeered at his daubs, but he preserved with the undaunted

[8] Agnes Lee, MS Journal, entry for Jan. 3, 1858, DeButts-Ely MSS; and Lee to Markie Williams, Dec. 5, 1857, in Craven, "To Markie," 55.

[9] Boston (Mass.) Traveller, reprinted in N. Y. Times, Dec. 30, 1857.

spirit of an Angelo....

'Thousands who have visited Arlington to look upon the memorials there treasured up...will not forget the mortification excited by the thought that George Washington Parke Custis was the keeper of these memorials, and that he could even have passed a moment in the society of George Washington. [10]

Such spitefulness could only have strengthened Lee's dislike for abolitionists. Yet the letter he wrote to the New York Times, which had reprinted the article on the Custis slaves, was dispassionate. Init, he explained that the will had not been kept a secret; on the contrary, it had been submitted for probate to the Alexandria County Court on the first day of its session, December 7, 1857, where it could be inspected by any interested person. No one had any intention of subverting the provisions regarding the freeing of the slaves, none of whom had been, or were to be sold. And as far as anyone knew, Mr. Custis had made no deathbed statement to any of his servants, for there had been no assembly of the servants to say farewell to their dying master, as stated by the article. He had taken leave of only one, present when he bade farewell to the family. [11]

As far as is known, this is the only time Lee ever replied publicly to abolitionist attacks, though this was not his last experience with them. It is regrettable that while the calumnies about him have long since been consigned to the rubbish heaps of history, along with those about George Washington, those about Custis have persisted to some extent. [12]

[10] Chicago (Ill.) Tribune, Oct. 19, 1857, reprinted in The Ottawa Register (Holland, Mich.), Nov. 23, 1857, clipping in Henry Schoolcroft Papers, L. C.

[11] Lee to the editor, Jan. 4, 1858, N. Y. Times, Jan. 8, 1858.

[12] Thus Helen Nicolay, Our Capital on the Potomac (New York: Century Co., 1924), 513, states that Custis made life "delightful" for chance visitors at Arlington, but "insupportable" for his family.

How best to employ the Arlington slaves was a vexing problem. Altogether, there were sixty-three, ranging in age from babies to old men and women who had not worked for years. There were too many of working age for them all to be profitably employed at Arlington, so Lee decided to hire out some, as his father-in-law had done, but of the six he sent to work in Alexandria, early in January, three returned home within a few hours, complaining that the work was too hard. With only one state, Maryland, between them and freedom, runaways were also a perennial problem; three such attempts were made in the spring and summer of 1858, though all the fugitives were arrested and sent down to the Pamunkey farms where there would be less chance to get away.[13]

After he had decided what needed to be done at Arlington, Lee went down to the White House and Romancock, to survey the situation there. He was pleased to find the White House land in excellent condition, the wheat crop doing well, and the slaves in good health. On the other hand, its buildings were dilapedated, there was no corn to sell, and another $1200 in unpaid bills had turned up. At Romancock, he found the mill, upon which both plantations depended for bread, shut down. The barn and corn houses were also badly in need of repair, and the overseer's house in such bad condition, he had been forced to move out of it.

Lee spent a week looking over the two farms, deciding what needed to be done. Before leaving, he gave instructions for a new barn and two corn houses to be built at the White House, the Romancock mill repaired and put in operation, and the slave quarters, fences, and barn at the same place repaired. He also ordered a shipload of lime from Baltimore for the corn fields.

[13] The Arlington slaves are listed by name in an inventory taken Jan. 1, 1858, in Records of Alexandria County, Va., Will Book VII, 370; and Lee to Custis Lee, Jan. 17, 1858, Lee MSS, Duke U.

Hampered by debts and lack of funds, it was discouraging to see so much that needed improvement. At the moment, there appeared little prospect of fulfilling the terms of Mr. Custis' will within the next five years.[14]

With her husband away, Mrs. Lee set about editing and rearranging her father's Recollections for publication in a more permanent form. "How it carries me back to the past-the happy past!," she wrote a friend. The task would occupy much of her time for the next two years, but she thought the labor worthwhile as a tribute to her father's memory and a diversion from her arthritis. Not one for self-pity, Mrs. Lee regretted only that the business affairs often deprived her of her husband's company. "Mr. Lee is with me," she wrote a friend, after Lee had returned home from the White House, "but is so harassed with the cares and trouble he had in settling this large estate with very inadequate means, that I do not have the comfort that his presence might otherwise have afforded me."[15]

Contrary to tradition, there is little in Lee's letters to show that he longer to be a farmer. An appreciation of the beauties of nature, affection for domestic animals, and a taste for the peace and quiet of country life do not necessarily qualify a man to be a farmer; on the contrary, a man wresting his living from the soil seldom has the time or the interest to thus indulge himself. Actually, Lee considered himself a soldier by profession, a farmer by necessity. As he explained to his cousin, Edward Turner, to whom he wrote concerning a new overseer the latter had recommended: "I am no farmer myself, & do not expect to be

[14]Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entries for Feb. 4, 8, 10, 1858, DeButts-Ely MSS. Also, Lee to G. W. C. Lee, Feb. 15, 1858, Lee MSS, Duke U.

[15]Mrs. Lee to (?), Feb. 10, 1858, printed in Brock, op. cit., 324.

always here." He would try out the new man, he said, and if he proved competent, would have the overseer's house put in good repair or, if he had only a wife and one or two children, he could live in the north wing of the mansion. "I wish to get an energetic, honest farmer, who while he will be considerate & kind to the negroes, will be firm & make them do their duty," Lee said.[16]

Having to forego his own personal desires and ambitions in the interest of his family made Lee more appreciative of the generous gesture his son Custis made that winter, in having a deed made transferring his interest in Arlington to his father. "I have been convined that it was not only right and proper, but in accordance with the best interests of all of us, that Pa' should have unlimited control over the whole property, in order that the will might be carried into effect," Custis explained to his mother. "I trust Pa' will not refuse to receive my interest in Arlington, for may sake, if not for his own-I can never have any interest separate from my dear Father and Mother."[17]

In a letter to his father, in which he enclosed the deed, the young man explained that it was only fair that Lee should have the property on which he was having to spend his own money. His father disagreed. His savings, he said, were ample for his own needs and everything he put into the estate would eventually be repaid. Deeply touched, he wrote:

> It is not from any unwillingness to receive from you a gift you may think proper to bestow, or to be indebted to you for any benefit, great or Small, but simply because it would not be right for me to do so. It will not prevent me from improving it to the best of my ability, or of making it as Comfortable a home for your Mother, Sisters & yourself as I can....I wish you to save <u>all</u> your money & invest it in some Safe & lucrative way, that you may have the means to build up old Arlington & make it all we would wish to see it.[18]

[16]For instance R. E. Lee, Jr., <u>op. cit.</u>, 20, says his father "was always fond of farming," and that Lee "longed for the time when he could have a farm of his own" on which to retire. See also, Lee to E. C. Turner, Feb. 12, 1856, McGregor MSS, U. of Va.

[17]G. W. C. Lee to Mrs. Lee, Feb. 16, 1858, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[18]Lee to G. W. C. Lee, Mar. 17, 1858, Lee MSS, Duke U.

Managing Arlington was considerably easier after the new overseer, William F. Moore, arrived in March. Still remaining was the more difficult problem of finding money for the improvements which in time would make the estate self-sufficient. To accomplish this, he would have to expend more on the estate that year than he could hope to get back even with bumper crops. Already he had spent $1700 for fertilizer, implements, teams and a yoke of oxen to clear new acreage and strengthen the old fields.[19]

In April, he revisited the Pamunkey farms to see the spring planting. As he had expected, the wheat on the improved lands of the White House farm was doing much better than at Romancock, where he saw the spring oats planted and lime spread on the corn fields. The spring fishing was in progress at the White House, but the catch was disappointing. On his return home, he had to attend a court martial at Newport Barracks, Ky., but it turned out that he had to be away only a fortnight. Consequently, he was able to supervise the planting of the Arlington corn crop, his first big venture as a farmer.[20]

The talent he had demonstrated as an engineer in getting the most out of every dollar alloted for a military project was proving equally useful at Arlington. Instead of buying lime, he had oyster shells burned in a kiln built in the poorest part of the oatfield, spread it as far as it would go, then applied plaster and guano to the remainder of the field. By the end of May, when the oat crop was well along, he was gratified to see that the oats on the limed section of the field were doing better than those where the more expensive fertilizer had been used. He therefore ordered 3,600 bushels of the cheaper fertilizer spread on the cornfields.

[19] Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entry for Mar. 2, 1858, DeButts-Ely MSS; and Lee to E. C. Turner, Mar. 10, 1858, McGregor MSS, U. of Va.

[20] Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entries for Apr. 7-14, 26, May 1, 4, 1858, DeButts-Ely MSS; and Lee to G. W. C. Lee, May 27, 1858, Lee MSS, Duke U.

A dressing of salt, bought cheaply in Alexandria because the bags had rotted away, was used to improve the old meadows. In the belief that neighbors were encroaching upon the estate, he searched the mansion and the county courthouse for a record of its boundaries, but without success. He also made another trip down to the Pamunkey farms.[21]

Apparently there had been some doubt as to whether Arlington Spring would be open to the public now that old Mr. Custis was gone, but Lee let it be known that picnic parties were as welcome as ever, and not long after he got back from New Kent, a large Sunday School picnic was held there. The National Intelligencer, in reporting the event, complimented Lee not only for his generosity, but for the good order maintained at the spring:

> ARLINGTON IS ARLINGTON STILL.
>
> Now that the patriarchal proprietor of that renowned place of convenient resort is gone.../ the article read in part/, to mingle no more with the groups of Sabbath schools and other gatherings, around the excellent watering place, we feared that the attractiveness and the propriety even of such assembling there had also passed away. But we are gratified with having the opportunity to bear our testimony that such is not the fact. While we never saw more people on the grounds than were assembled there last Friday, we never saw better order, heard less noise, or enjoyed more quietude. The present proprietor appeared to feel and act as if it was a part of his duty to see nothing should occur to prevent a feeling of security against any interference with the highest degree of social and even religious enjoyment. [22]

From this, it is apparent that Lee was determined that the rowdies who often broke up such gatherings elsewhere would not do so at Arlington. More than 2,000 persons celebrated the 4th of July there without any disorder to mar the day, and a "mammoth festival," held later in the month by the German population of Washington, was also remarked for the good order maintained. "Music by the band and songs by the regular singers were given, alternately, and dancing and gymnastics occupied the happy

[21] Ibid.; Lee to R. E. Lee, Jr., July 28, 1866, DeButts-Ely MSS.; same to G. W. C. Lee, May 17, 1868, Lee MSS, Duke U.; and Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entries for June 15, 21, 1868, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[22] Nat. Intelligencer, June 29, 1868.

hours, which seemed too fleeting for the occasion, and all passed off pleasantly," said the Intelligencer. "There was an abundance of good cheer in the shape of well-brewed "lager," nothing stronger being allowed..."[23]

By summer, Lee had made a good start on his Arlington improvements, though lack of money sometimes made him impatient or depressed. "I am getting along as usual, trying to get a little work done and to mend up some things," he wrote Rooney. "I succeed badly." Actually he was making better progress than his words indicated. By now, many of the buildings, roads and fences had been repaired, in fact the appearance of everything on the estate had been greatly improved, and by winter, he would have a new slate roof on the house, a new gravel one on the stable, the overseer's house and the mill back in good repair, and stone foundations laid for a new barn.[24]

Family matters took up much of his time. Rooney, now campaigning in the West, near the Platte River, liked Army life but wanted to return home and marry. Lee sought tactfully to dissuade him from leaving the army until he had first established a name for himself. At the same time, he was trying to get Custis assigned to Washington so he might try his hand at farming.[25]

He was still worried about Mrs. Lee, though the "cold bath" treatments she had been taking for several months had improved her condition to where she was able to get about more easily and the painful swelling

[23] Ibid., July 7, 26, 1858.

[24] Lee to W. H. F. Lee, Aug. 7, 1858, in Jones, Reminiscences, 377f.; same to Mrs. A. M. Fitzhugh, Nov. 20, 1858, Lee MSS, Duke U.; R. E. Lee, Jr., op. cit., 20; and application by Lee, for fire insurance with Hartford Fire Insurance Co., Oct. 17, 1859, photostat copy, L. M. H. M.

[25] Lee to W. H. F. Lee, Aug. 7, 1858, Jones, Reminiscences, 377f.; and Same to C. W. C. Lee, May 17, 1858, Jones, Life and Letters, 91ff.

in her feet and ankles had gone down. Mary and Annie were not feeling well, nd Lee wanted them and their mother to spend the summer with at Berkeley or the Hot Springs, but it was the middle of August before he could take them there because of the illness of his overseer.[26]

Aside from occasional bouts of depression, he usually managed to be cheerful. Coming out of the house one day that autumn, he found Annie bidding a tearful goodbye to a friend who had been visiting them. "No tears at Arlington," he told the weeping girls, "no tears!"[27] A few more years, and events would give his words a new poignancy.

His leave was due to expire December 1, 1858, and Lee had considerable misgivings about having it extended, but he could not as yet see his way clear to leave Arlington. Therefore, when the court which was to rule on the provisions of Mr. Custis' will dealing with the emancipation of the slaves adjourned without deciding the question, Lee had to ask that his leave be extended to May 1, 1859.[28]

That he was called upon to perform some minor military duties about this time may have reassured him that his superiors had not forgotten him. In December, he sat on a court martial at West Point, and happily was back home in time to celebrate the New Year with his family. "A happy New Year! and many happy returns of the same to you, my precious Roon!," he wrote from Arlington, congratulating his son on a commendable report he had received from the colonel of Rooney's regiment. As usual, he offered some fatherly advice. "I was sorry to see from your letter to your

[26]Same to same, May 17, 1858, Lee MSS, Duke U.; and same to W. H. F. Lee, Aug. 7, 1858, Jones, Reminiscences, 378.

[27]Katherine C. Stiles, "His Associations with Savannah," Times-Dispatch (Richmond, Va.), Jan. 20, 1907.

[28]Freeman, Lee, I, 387f.

mother, that you smoke occasionally," he wrote. "You have in store so much better employment for your mouth. Reserve it, Roon, for its legitimate pleasure. Do not paint and corrupt it with stale vapors, or tarnish your beard with their stench."[29]

Except for some service on a board convened in Washington to consider equipment for the cavalry, Lee was at Arlington for the remainder of the winter, working hard to get all the buildings and equipment in good condition by spring. By April, when the White House and Romancock corn and wheat had been sold, the financial situation had eased considerably. Some money was coming in from the sale of timber, and a fair amount was being received for the Negroes hired out in the neighborhood. Every dollar that could be spared went into tools, fertilizer and seed. The only exception was the monument he vought in Washington to mark his father-in-law's grave.[30]

Still he was far from satisfied with the results of his work. He had "ameliorated some things," he wrote Custis Lee, but the improvements were "very meagre," especially on the grounds about the house where he had done little but clean up the hill. Strangers, however, thought the mansion looked fine--at least from a distance. According to one, who observed it from the Capitol that year, it was "a baronial mansion in the midst of the forest."[31]

[29] Ibid.; Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entry for Dec. 13, 1858, DeButts-Ely MSS; and Lee to G. W. C. Lee, Jan. 2, 1859, Jones, Life and Letters, 97; and same to W. H. F. Lee, Jan. 1, 1859, Jones, Reminiscences, 378f.

[30] Records of Alexandria Co., Va., Will Bk. VII, entries for Dec. 6, 1858, Mar. 25, and Apr. 15, 1859. Also Lee to Crabb & Bros., Jan. 31, 1859, Misc. MSS, N. Y. H. S. Lee paid Henry Parry, of Washington City, $235 for making the monument.

[31] Lee to G. W. C. Lee, Jan. 2, May 30, July 2, 1859, in Jones, Life and Letters, 97f, 99, and 102, respectively; and Journal of Commerce (N. Y.), Sept. 12, 1859.

1859

Rooney marries Charlotte at Shirley

In the spring of 1859, Rooney returned home to marry Charlotte Wickham at Shirley, the beloved old home of Lee's mother. To Lee, who went down to Shirley to witness it, the wedding was a welcome relief from the cares of managing Arlington. "The marriage took place at night in the old Hall," Lee wrote in his diary, March 23, 1859, "and I became the exulting father of a Sweet daughter."[32]

After several pleasurable days at Shirley, he went on to the White House and Romancock to inspect them and examine their accounts before returning home. Once home, his cares seemed heavier than before. He had hoped to rejoin his regiment on May 1st, but instead had to have his leave extended another four months. "God knows whether I have done right, whether my stay will be an advantage," he wrote Custis Lee. "I am very doubtful on the subject and feel that I ought to be with my regiment, and this feeling deprives me of half the pleasure I should derive from being here under other circumstances." It would take at least another year, he thought, to accomplish all he wished. Mrs. Lee's arthritis was worse, too, and he doubted whether she would ever get over it. Discouraged, he told his eldest son, "I have no enjoyment in life now, but what I derive from my children."[33]

He was not always so depressed, for most of the time he enjoyed being at Arlington. He loved the old place and especially enjoyed walking in its flower garden in the center of which was a frame summer-house, or arbour, covered by pink and red honeysuckle and yellow jasmine, where

[32] Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entries for Mar. 22, 23, 1859, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[33] Ibid., entries for Mar. 26 to Apr. 2, 1859; and Lee to G. W. C. Lee, y 30, July 2, 1859, Jones, Life and Letters, 99-102.

his daughters liked to sit and read on warm summer days. Often the girls would gather the fragrant jasmine blossoms and make them into necklaces or long strings to be put in the linen. Each of them had their individual preference as to roses: Mrs. Lee was fond of the moss rose; Annie liked the dark red ones that grew along the sides of the garden because they looked well in her glossy black hair; Mildred, whose hair was curly and brown, liked the single red roses that grew under an apricot tree. Lee preferred the delicate Safronia roses, and made it a practice, when they were blooming, to gather a few buds before breakfast, placing one beside the plate of each of his daughters, Mildred, the youngest, getting the smallest bud, and so on up to the eldest, Mary. In spite of her crippled condition, Mrs. Lee also spent much times in the garden, and years later Mildred would recall her mother sitting there, a white sun-bonnet hanging down her back, directing the activity of "Old George," the gardener, and his helpers.[34]

George gardener

Mrs. Lee was also working on a short biography of her father for a new edition of his Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington. Benson Lossing, who was making sketches of the Washington relics to illustrate a book on Mount Vernon, was assisting her to correct discrepancies or errors in her father's work and eliminate duplications in the text.[35] He was also writing a number of explanatory notes for it.

During the summer, Lee had another encounter with the abolitionists. Unable to hire out some of the Arlington slaves, he had sent them to work

[34] Statement of Mildred Lee, Feb. 5, 1884, appended to Agnes Lee, MS Journal, DeButts-Ely MSS. Also statements made by Mrs. Anna Baker and Mrs. Ada Thompson, daughters of Mrs. Lee's housekeeper, Selina Gray, Mar. 3, 1930, L. M. N. M. Records.

[35] Mrs. Lee to B. J. Lossing, Jan. 18, 1859, excerpt printed in The Collector, LXIV (Mar., 1951), 86. Also, same to Mrs. A. M. Fitzhugh, n. d., but evidently written in the latter part of 1858, Custis Lee MSS, V. H. S. For an early notice regarding Lossing's collaboration, see Historical Magazine, III (Jan., 1859), 32.

in eastern Virginia, and apparently his action was resented by some of those at Arlington for two of them ran away, only to be apprehended in Maryland. Lee sent these, as he had previous runaways, to the Pamunkey River farms; but there is not the slightest evidence for any of the charges contained in two anonymous letters printed a few weeks later in the New York Tribune: that he was keeping his father-in-law's will secret in order to keep the Custis slaves in bondage, was not giving the slaves enough to eat, was making the old ones work out in the fields, and had himself whipped one of the runaways, a woman, when the "slave-whipper" had refused to do it.[36]

Lee resented the libel, but did not reply to it, convinced of the futility of trying to do so from his earlier experience. "The N. Y. Tribune has attacked me for my treatment of your grandfather's slaves, but I shall not reply," he wrote Custis Lee. "He has left me an unpleasant legacy." He is known to have referred to the incident only once, in 1866, when the charge was revived. Though again he made no public statement, he did write a friend: "There is no truth in it, or any ground for its origin. No servant, soldier, or citizen, that was ever employed by me, can with truth charge me with bad treatment." At the time, he must have been heartened by the support of one of his friends who termed the story a "malicious fabrication" of a "concealed assassin of character," in a letter to the Tribune editor. "I am no advocate of slavery in any form," this man wrote indignantly, "and have no other interest in noticing this matter than...defending the reputation of an accomplished gentleman and estimable man like Col. Lee." The attacks, if they had any affect on Lee, must have deepened his distaste for abolitionists and

[36]Lee to G. W. C. Lee, July 2, 1859, Jones, Life and Letters, 101f.; Records of Alexandria Co., Va., Will Bk. VII, 490; and N. Y. Tribune, June 24, 1859, quoted in Freeman, Lee, I, 390ff.

strengthened his sense of identity with his class and section.[37]

A few brief trips, made during the summer of 1859, did little to divert Lee from his cares. In June, he and Rooney were at the White House, mainly to see what had to be done on the house to make it ready for Rooney and Charlotte to move into it in January.[38] In July, Lee went over to Baltimore to visit his sister, Mrs. Marshall, who was in danger of losing her eyesight, and the following month took Mrs. Lee and Agnes to Capron Springs. From there, he was called away by a letter from his neice, Mary Childe, telling him that her father was seriously ill at Saratoga Springs, N. Y. where she wanted Lee to meet her. Alarmed, Lee set out at once, but fortunately had gotten no further than Alexandria when word came that Mr. Childe was better and he need not come. Therefore, he went on to Arlington, where he learned that one of Custis Lee's friends, Lieutenant "Jeb" Stuart, of the cavalry, had been over to Arlington several times while he was away.[39]

A fortnight later, he journeyed down to the White House, where he found that five slaves had already died of typhoid fever and two more were still sick, though the epedemic seemed to be abating. He was disappointed that the wheat crop, just thrashed, amounted to only 5200 bushels, but was pleased to see that the corn looked good. A great deal of work had been accomplished at Romancock, which looked prosperous, and

[37] Lee to G. W. C. Lee, July 2, 1859, Jones, Life and Letters, 102; and same to E. J. Quirk, Mar. 1, 1860, Lee Letter Bk. No. 3, DeButts-Ely MSS; and N. Y. Tribune, June 28, 1859.

[38] Same to G. W. C. Lee, May 30, 1859, Jones, Life and Letters, 98f; also Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entry for June 1, 1859, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[39] Stuart stayed overnight on one occasion, for which see Lee to G. W. C. Lee, Aug. 17, 1859, Lee MSS, Duke U. See also, same to same, Aug. 19, 1859, Jones, Life and Letters, 104; and Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entries for Aug. 3, 12, 1859, DeButts-Ely MSS

its crops were thriving. He then had the unpleasant task of informing the overseer at each place that their services would not be needed after the end of the year, because Rooney would manage both farms. That done, he saw a cargo of wheat off to Richmond (where it brought $3300), and returned to Arlington.[40]

By now the neighborhood had grown accustomed to seeing Lee, in civilian clothes, riding into Alexandria or Washington on business or calling on some friends. By now, too, he had gained the reputation of being a careful businessman, punctillious in the payment of his obligations.[41]

Lee was inclined to discount the glowing account Rooney had given his brother Custis regarding what his father had accomplished at Arlington; nevertheless, the outlook was distinctly brighter. The additional land he had put under cultivation, about one hundred acres, promised to soon pay for the labor and fertilizer expended upon it, and his decision to raise grain and market vegetables on the old beef pasture had also proved sound. All of last year's crops had been sold, money was coming in from those just harvested, and, in addition, he had sold a quantity of Smith's Island timber and a fair amount of beef, mutton and dairy products. As a result, when he submitted his accounts to the Circuit Court, in October, he was repaid some of the money he had put into the estate.[42]

He also seems to have made some improvements on the buildings and grounds at Arlington Spring, and leased it to a concessionaire. "Everyone

[40] Ibid., entries for Aug. 30, Sept. 1-4, 1859; and Records of Alexandria Co., Va., Will Bk. VIII, p. 92.

[41] As when he sent two gold dollars through the lines in the fall of 1861, to pay a Washington blacksmith for some work done a year or two before; Jones, Reminiscences, 286f.

[42] Lee to G. W. C. Lee, July 2, 1859, in Jones, Life and Letters, 102. Records of Alexandria, Va., Will Bk. VII, p. 8; VIII, p. 92. Joseph C. Roberts, "Lee the Farmer," Jour. of S. His., III (1937), compares the census returns for 1850 and 1860 to arrive at the conclusion that Lee was chiefly responsible for the increased acreage under cultivation at Arlington and the shift from cattle-grazing to grain and garden produce.

speaks in praise of the good order in which the beautiful spring and surroundings are now kept," observed a Washington newspaper. A new steamboat, the George W. Riggs, was also put in service that season to accomodate the crowds. Thousands enjoyed the orchestras, glee clubs and gymnastic teams that came from places as far distant as Richmond and New York to compete for prizes in the German Musical Festival, in June, and an even larger crowd attended a picnic for the benefit of an orphan asylum, later in the summer. There was even a joisting tournament, put on by the Knights of Malta, at which the only casualty, who fell from his horse and had to be taken to a hospital, bore the appropriate title, "Knight of the Bleeding Heart."[43]

In the fall of 1859, when he again submitted his accounts to the Circuit Court, Lee informed the judges that he planned to rejoin his regiment as soon as the accounts were approved. Smith's Island was as yet unsold, and he had failed to locate any of the lands described in his father-in-law's will as being in the counties of Stafford, Richmond, and Westmoreland, which meant that the girls' legacies would have to come out of the profits from the White House, Romancock, and Smith's Island. To date there had been none, for any surplus had been used to pay off debts, but another year or two would see the estates free of debt, after which their profits could be applied to the legacies. If Smith's Island were sold in the meantime, less of course would be needed. Though it would probably take several years to settle the estate, things were in such order that it was simply a matter of time before the whole thing would

[43]Bohn, op. cit., 115, mentions improvements made at the Arlington Spring after Custis' death. The "lessees" are mentioned in Nat. Intelligencer, June 17, 1859. For the Riggs and the various events, see ibid., May 24, June 8, 17, 24, and Sept. 15, 1859.

work itself out. As soon as Rooney took charge of the Pamunkey River farms and Custis was transferred to Washington, where he could keep an eye on Arlington, there would be no further need for him to remain home.[44]

Not long after he turned in his accounts to the court, Lee went to Governor's Island, N. Y., to attend a court-martial which lasted only a few days. He was back at Arlington, and had just filled out an application for some additional fire insurance on the mansion and stables, with a Hartford company, on the morning of October 17, 1859, when Lieutenant "Jeb" Stuart galloped up, breathless, with a message directing him to report at once to the Secretary of War.[45]

Still in his civilian clothes, Lee, with Stuart, set out immediately for the War Department. There he was told that Secretary Floyd was at the White House, conferring with President Buchanan and other members of his cabinet. Reporting there, Lee learned that a mysterious "invasion," or insurrection of some kind, was taking place at Harper's Ferry, Va., where a United States arsenal and armory were situated. Apparently some strangers were inciting a slave revolt, and to further their plans had already blocked traffic on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, preparatory to seizing the town and the weapons stored there. Lee was to take command of the forces--three companies of artillery from Fort Monroe and the Marine detachment at the Washington Navy Yard--which had been assigned to put down the uprising. Stuart would be his aide.[46]

[44]Records of Alexandria Co., Va., Will Book VII, 491f.; and Lee to J. A. Simkins, Jan. 10, 1867, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[45]Freeman, Lee, I, 393f.; and H. B. McClellan, Life and Campaigns of Major-General J. E. B. Stuart (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1885), 29f. There is a tradition, at variance with this account, which says Lee received the message in Leadbeater's Apothecary Shop at Alexandria, for which see Leadbeater, op. cit., p. 1139. The insurance application, dated and signed by Lee, was with the Hartford Fire Insurance Co.

[46]Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entry for Oct. 17, 1859, DeButts-Ely MSS. Also Oswald Garrison Willard, John Brown, A Biography After Fifty Years (New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1911), 435, 449; McClellan, op. cit., 28; and Freeman, Lee, I, 394f.

Taking a special train, by midnight Lee and the Marines were in Harper's Ferry, where he posted them in the armory, which the militia had already recaptured from the insurgents. Instead of the five hundred insurgents he had been led to expect, there appeared to be a much smaller number, and these the militia had driven into the engine house of the armory. According to rumor the insurrectionists were being led by a John Brown, an anti-slavery fanatic from Kansas, and were holding a number of hostages. Had it not been for the latter, Lee would have attacked the engine house at once, but he feared that any hasty action might endanger them and therefore decided to wait for daylight.

Preparations for the assault were complete when, about 7 A. M. Lee took up his position on a slight elevation near the doors of the engine house. Nearby, out of the line of fire, was a storming detachment of twelve Marines, led by a lieutenant. Stuart was to present a message to the insurgents, demanding their surrender; if it was rejected, he was to step inside and signal the Marines to break down the doors and rush inside, using only their bayonets in order not to harm the hostages.

The action came off exactly as planned. Stuart advanced under a flag of truce to the door of the engine house where he held a long parley with Brown, and when Brown refused to surrender unconditionally, signalled for the assault. Within three minutes the Marines had battered down the door, fought their way inside, and killed or captured the eight insurgents they found inside; none of the hostages, thirteen in number, were hurt. When the brief action was over, two of the insurgents were dead, one was dying, and Brown himself was seriously wounded. Lee seems to have considered the whole affair of little importance, and soon as he had turned the prisoners over to the authorities, left for Washington, where

he made out his report at the War Office and then went home to Arlington.[47]

By now, Custis Lee was prepared to take over the responsibility for Arlington, and his father had orders to proceed to Texas; but the Harper's Ferry incident delayed his departure. To prevent any attempt to rescue John Brown, who had been sentenced to hang, troops were again sent to Harper's Ferry towards the end of November, with Lee in command. There he met Mrs. Brown, who asked his permission to say farewell to her husband; but since he had no authority in the matter, he could only refer her to the commanding officer of the militia at Charleston, where Brown was to be executed. No attempt was made to prevent the execution which took place on December 2, and a fortnight later Lee returned home. There he found that he would have to put off his departure for Texas until after he had testified before a Senate committee which was to investigate the Harper's Ferry affair.[48] Thus he was able to spend Christmas with his family at Arlington--the last he was ever to celebrate there.

As it turned out, Lee was only asked a few unimportant questions when he appeared before the committee in January. That done, he spent a few days with Rooney and Charlotte at the White House, going over both the Pamunkey farms with his son and giving advice as to their management. He then returned to Arlington, and two weeks later received orders to proceed to San Antonio and take temporary command of the Department of Texas. On February 10, 1860, he said goodbye to his family and set out. That night, he wrote in his "memorandum book": "At 6 A. M. left Arlington

[47] Ibid., I, 396-402; Villard, op. cit., 451-455; and Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entry for Oct. 17, 1859, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[48] Freeman, Lee, I, 403; and Jones, Life and Letters, 109; Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entry for Nov. 23, 1859; Lee to Mrs. Lee, Dec. 1, 1859; and Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entries for Nov. 28, Dec. 14, 15, 22, 1859, DeButts-Ely MSS.

& its dear inhabitants for Texas."

Of the ten years Lee had yet to live, less than three months would be spent at his beloved Arlington. He seems to have sensed that forces were in motion which were too strong for him to influence or even struggle against. Gloomily, he wrote Mrs. Lee on his arrival at San Antonio:

> It was very sad to leave you, & my departure grows harder to bear with years. Still as there is a necessity for it, they must be borne, & ought not to be made worse by useless repining ....What I most desire is that you should do all in your power to recover your health....As to your domestic affairs-you must not worry yourself about them. If you can keep them progressing it is as much as you can do. It is almost useless to attempt improvement, or to resist the Current that has been so long setting against industry & advancement. 50

Unlike many Southern-born Army officers, Lee had never been long away from his native state. For years he had considered Arlington his home, and his close associations with his father-in-law and his own experiences with the estate had given him a sympathetic understanding of the problems faced by his kinsmen and fellow-planters. He understood how Virginians felt about slavery; like them, he saw no immediate solution to the situation, only a long gradual process of social education leading toward eventual emancipation. The abolitionists, in slandering him and the memory of his father-in-law had only deepened his sense of identity with the people of his state.

Had they not had so many ties with people living in the North, he

[49]Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entries for Jan. 20-25, Feb. 9, 10, 1860; DeButts-Ely MSS. Lee spells the name of the estate "Romancoke," for the first time, in these entries. Apparently Rooney and Charlotte decided upon the changed spelling, for it was soon adopted by all the Lees; probably they simply changed the spelling to conform to the established pronunciation, after the Scottish fashion according to which, for example, "Cockburn" is pronounced "Coburn."

[50]Lee to Mrs. Lee, Mar. 3, 1860, DeButts-Ely MSS.

and Mary might have viewed the mounting dissension over slavery with greater equanimity. But they had many friends, made during their stay in New York, and many of the prominent Northerners who had been drawn to Arlington, as by a magnet, had become close friends--Edward Everett, Benson Lossing, the Reverand Mr. Gurley, and Mrs. Sigourney, to name a few. These, like the Lees, disapproved of slavery, and all thought the Union far too important to be sundered on such an issue. As a gesture of friendship, Mrs. Sigourney sent Mrs. Lee a volume of her inspirational poems in January, 1860, and a letter which read:

> I often think of you & my visits to Arlington House in past years when your sainted Mother presided with her serene angelic spirit, or your Father, whose gifted mind is entwined with memories of the Pater Patria, nobly displayed the true Virginia hospitality....I send this morning thro' the Office a Book of which I request your acceptance as a token of affectionate remembrance & will also ask that instead of perusing it in course, you will read daily one of its little poems....The Ancient Dominion which I have always loved has been in my mind of late with an intenser interest-God preserve our Union & grant that those 'who in times of danger stood side by side'...fall not out when peace & prosperity have blessed them. It seems to me that the duty of our sex is, without leaving their own sphere, to do all in their power to allay animosities & strengthen every link of sweet, social intercourse... Will not the mutual ownership of Mt. Vernon prove a bond of unity' concord? 51

In return, Mrs. Lee had an author's pleasure in sending the Hartford poetess a copy of her father's Recollections, which had recently appeared in two editions--one printed in Washington, the other in Philadelphia. In thanking her, Mrs. Sigourney promised to review the book, which she had found "delightful," in periodicals to which she contributed. She thought Mrs. Lee had written an excellent memoir of her father, but wished she had said more of her "accomplished and saintly" mother: "I should love to have seen the portrait of her benignant face in its serene beauty...for I greatly admired and loved her." 52

51 Mrs. L. Sigourney to Mrs. Lee, Jan. 17, 1860, D.Butts-Ely MSS.

52 Same to same, Feb. 10, 1860, D.Butts-Ely MSS. One edition of the Recollections was published by the Edgewood Publishing Co., Philadelphia, Pa., the other by W. H. Moore, Washington, D. C.

Their old friend William Seaton, editor of the National Intelligencer, also praised the book, most of which had appeared at one time or another in his newspaper. His review termed it a "splendid memorial to Washington," Mrs. Lee's memoir of her father "a worthy tribute of a distinguished lady to her eloquent and honored father....clear, concise and interesting."[53]

Lee, who had taken a copy with him to Texas, was interested in the success of the book and clipped all the newspaper and periodical notices that he came across. These, he suggested to his wife, might be pasted in a scrapbook and used to improve subsequent editions. "I am much pleased that your publication of your fathers Memoirs has been so well recd...by the press," he told her. "I hope the Sale will be extensive, & encourage the publisher to issue another edition." Regarding her biography of her father, he said, in another letter: "It would have been very easy to have said more...but it is difficult to draw the line between what would be pleasing & interesting to friends and that to the general public. A Man engaged in public affairs, the events in which he participated, lends interest to his history. But one who has passed his days in retirement, & chone in domestic scenes, is without the means of eliciting general interest."[54]

From this it would seem that he, like Mrs. Lee, thought the public would be interested only in Custis' early life, when he was closely associated with the Washingtons. This was unfortunate, for by devoting most of her biography to her father's early years, Mrs. Lee led later writers, who based their accounts largely on hers, to assume that he did little of importance during the many years he was master of Arlington, which of

[53] Nat. Intelligencer, Dec. 22, 30, 1859.

[54] Lee to Mrs. Lee, Apr. 4, 1860; same to same, n. d., but evidently written about this time; and same to same, June 3, 1860; all in DeButts-Ely MSS, L. C.

course is not at all true.

Mrs. Lee might well be pleased of the popularity of the book, for another edition came out that spring. In telling a kinsman in Louisiana about it, Mrs. Lee showed that she could be a tactful saleswoman:

> I hope ere this, you have seen my book & that it has made a favorable impression upon you. I had a letter from the Printer, Derby & Jackson, when it was first issued, saying that they would thankfully receive any aid from me that might assist in its circulation, as they knew I had many personal friends who would be interested in it....It certainly ought to be most valuable as a reliable production, for you know my Father had a most retentive and unerring memory & no one living could have had such opportunities of knowing all about Washington. 55

In March, Mrs. Lee felt well enough to travel down to the White House, where Charlotte was awaiting the arrival of her baby. Thirty-five years had passed since she had last seen the estate, and now she was impressed by the rich land and general prosperity, though she found the scenery uninteresting and disliked the isolated location. "The servants were all delighted to see me," she wrote home to Agnes. "They called me Mistress & always ask after your papa as Old Master which I told them they must not do as he considered himself quite a young man yet." A few days later she wrote to announce the birth of her first grandchild:

> He is large and strong, has a fine large nose & mouth & weighed 8 1/2 lbs. Charlotte is doing well....The baby develops new beauties every hour; he is a fine little fellow...I cannot find out who he is like except that his head is shaped like your Grandpa's. 56

For Rooney, who was making some repairs on his house, Mrs. Lee asked Agnes to find out how the shutters at Arlington had been treated:

> Rooney wants you to see Uncle Charles & get sent particulars directions from him about staining the doors, if the walnut bark can be got now & how it is prepared & what sort of brush it is put on with & whether he uses any hickory with the walnut & whether the oil that was put on your papa's shutters was boiled or not. Be particular & write as soon as possible.

55 Mrs. Lee to E. G. W. Butler, n. d., but c. Mar. 1, 1860, quoted in part in MacDonald, op. cit., 130.

56 Same to Agnes Lee, Mar. 15, 1860; and same to "Ladies at Arlington," Mar. 10, 1860, DeButts-Ely MSS.

Meanwhile, in Texas, Lee was attempting to end Indian depredations and catch a notorious Mexican bandit. By summer, enough troops had been stationed along the border to discourage further forays by either and life became the old routine of camp and patrol. It was a monotonous life, lightened only by the letters from his family. When he learned that he was now a grandfather, he wrote enthusiastically to Rooney:

> I was delighted, my dear son, at the reception of your letter of the 10th inst., announcing the birth of that anxiously expected little boy! I sincerely congratulate you and my darling daughter at his prosperous advent, and pray that his future career may give more happiness to his parents than even his present existance. You must kiss his dear mother for me, and offer her my warmest thanks for this promising scion of my scattered house, who will, I hope, resuscitate its name and fame. Tell her I have thought much of her, and long to see you both, and your little treasure, who must, I think, greatly resemble his father. 57

He was deeply touched when Rooney and Charlotte named the baby after him:

> I wish I could offer him a more worthy name and a better example [he wrote]. He must elevate the first, and make use of the latter to avoid the errors I have committed. I...thought that under the circumstances you might like to name him after his great-grandfather, and wish you both 'upon mature consideration', to follow your inclinations and judgment. I should love him all the same, and nothing could make me love you two more than I do. 58

His letters home ranged in tone and subject from the humorous to the philosophical, though always he tried to be helpful. "I told you I never found my pants," he wrote Mrs. Lee concerning some clothing missing from his baggage. "They are gone. Do not trouble yourself about them. They are only one more item to the number that have disappeared. Perhaps taken

57Lee to W. H. F. Lee, Apr. 2, 1860, in Jones, Reminiscences, 380.
58Same to same, June 2, 1860, in ibid., 381.

off by Spirits, I know not where." Again, he wrote: "You must endeavour to make yourselves comfortable & happy & continue the little improvements we have been able to set in motion. I feel so much relief at Custis' being with you, that I do not apprehend anything will require my attention." Happy that Rooney was keeping his expenditures to a minimum, Lee wrote to congratulate him, and incidentally express his own views on happiness:

> As you have commenced, I hope you will continue, never to exceed your means [he wrote]. It will save you much anxiety and mortification, and enable you to maintain your independence of character and feeling. It is easier to make our wishes conform to our means than to make our means conform to our wishes. In fact, we want but little. Our happiness depends upon our independence, the success of our operations, prosperity of our plans, health, contentment and the esteem of our friends. 59

Invariably, he had numerous questions as to what was happening at home. He wanted to know how the crops were coming along, and whether they had been set back by the weather or locusts. Were the flowers in the conservatory and gardens flourishing? How many oaks on the estate had been destroyed by the severe storm Mary had told him about? Occasionally, he had some message to be relayed to one of the servants, as when he asked Mary to congratulate his valet, Perry, on getting over his recent illness, Ephraim, for his flourishing vegetable garden. When he wrote of Arlington itself, it was always with deep affection:

> I was very glad...my Sweet Annie...to hear that the garden & trees & hill at A[rlington] looked beautifully. I hope it will always continue to appear so in your eyes, & in the eyes of those with whom it is associated with many pleasing recollections. 60

Naturally, he worried a great deal about his wife's health, and also about the children, for they occasionally had rhumatism or a touch of "chills and fever." He was highly amused when Mary expressed the opinion

[59]Same to Mrs. Lee, Mar. 24, Apr. 25, 1860, DeButts-Ely MSS; and same to W. H. F. Lee, Aug. 22, 1860, Jones, Reminiscences, 381.

[60]Same to Mrs. Lee, June 3, 25, July 1, 1860; same to Agnes Lee, June 8, 1860; and same to Annie Lee, June 16, 1860; all in DeButts-Ely MSS.

that the older children should be giving some thought to getting married:

> As to your impression about its being time for a wedding in our family, [he wrote in reply], I must refer you to...the young people themselves. Whenever they think it time, it is time, & they need not wait for my return, which is uncertain, & may be protracted beyond the limit of my patience. 61

At times, he felt depressed because he could not do more for his family, or frustrated because he seemed to be standing still in his career. Usually he kept his worries from his family, but occasionally he confided in Mrs. Fitzhugh, as when he wrote that summer:

> At this distance from those you love and care for, with the knowledge of the vicissitudes and necessities of life, one is rent by a thousand anxieties, and the mind as well as the body is worn and racked to pieces. But I will not, dear Cousin Anna, impose my sad thoughts upon you, for a man may manifest and communicate his joy, but he should conceal and smother his grief as much as possible. Touching your kind wishes for my speedy return, you know the embarrassments that attend it. A divided heart I have too long had, and a divided life too long led. That may be one cause of the small progress I have made on either hand, my professional and civil career. Success is not always attained by a single undivided effort, [but] it rarely follows a halting vacillating course. My military duties require me here, whereas my affections and urgent domestic claims call me away. And thus I live and am unable to advance either. But while I live I must toil and trust. 62

Sometimes, he was troubled by the thought that Mary and the children had long since grown accustomed to getting along without him and that his presence only disturbed their usual way of life. This was on his mind, when he wrote to Annie, in August:

> I am much gratified, dear Annie, that you think of me often & earnestly. God knows how often I think of you & long to see you. If you wish to see me you will have to come out here, for I do not know when I will be able to go on there. It is better too, I hope, for all that I am here. You know I was much in the way of everybody, & my tastes and pursuits did not coincide with the rest of the household. Now I hope everybody is happier. If you will come out here, I will endeavour to make you as comfortable as possible. 63

[61] Same to Mrs. Lee, June 3, July 1, 1860; same to Agnes Lee, June 8, 1860; all in DeButts-Ely MSS, L. C.

[62] Same to Mrs. A. M. Fitzhugh, June 6, 1860, quoted in Freeman, Lee, I, 410f.

[63] Same to Annie Lee, Aug. 27, 1860, DeButts-Ely MSS.

As men will when they are out of touch with what is going on elsewhere, ee tended to exaggerate the effect of his prolonged absence on his relations with his family, for there seems to have been little, other than Mrs. Lee's health, to warrant his anxiety. His sons were proving themselves competent managers of the estates entrusted to them and often sought his advice and assistance, and his daughters were generally in good health and doing well with their studies. Mrs. Lee, too, was cheerful and resolute as ever, despite her physical condition. As always, she ran her busy household with a firm hand, enjoyed the company of her children and friends, and diverted herself with her painting and gardening.

Indeed, she was well enough to make a long trip that summer to Niagara Falls and the springs at St. Catharine's, in Canada. Her first view of Niagara Falls, when she, Custis, Agnes and Markie Williams arrived there in July, proved disappointing. "Man has done all in his power to mar its sublimity by building workshops & mills down to its very edge," she wrote Annie. "I...lament that it had not been left in its wild state with trees & rocks overhanging the shore....How grand it must have been when the Indians first wandered on its shore!" Young Robert had been left in charge of the estate, Annie the household; and their mother wanted to be sure that they overlooked nothing:

> Tell Rob I depend upon him & Uncle Charles to attend to out door concerns, the garden & the park & to keep the children at work [she wrote]. Do see that they water my flowers. The latter part of next week I want Billy & Ephraim to wash a bag of wool & nurse must see to the dying & putting it away & when Sally & Patsy have done knitting they can pull it. Daniel must haul some manure for Ephraim's strawberry bed. When you get tomatoes enough; have some cans filled & sealed up. Old George picks them & Nurse must do them with some one to help her seal them up. I shall not put up so many as I did last year as there is some left. You had better lock up the key to my cellar as the wine there is a tempting article. 64

64Mrs. Lee to Annie Lee, July, n.d., 1860, DeButts-Ely MSS.

Their stay at St. Catharine's, in a cottage, proved interesting. Mrs. Lee had never before been in a foreign country, and hearing the congregation of the church they attended pray for Queen Victoria was to her a novel experience. She also remarked the large number of fugitive slaves in the town. "Tell Nurse there are a great many runaways here," she wrote Annie, "but I have not met with any acquaintance." Of those she encountered, few appeared to be doing well. "I am told they suffer a great deal here in the long cold winters," she told her daughter. "After enticing them over here, the White people will not let their children go to the same schools or treat them as equals in any way..." She continued to bombard Rob and Annie with instructions: Ephraim was to tie up and prune her grape vines; Rob must keep an eye on the apple orchard if all the fruit was not to be "borne away as usual"; Annie could have a "little brush fire" made up each night and morning, if the weather turned cool. She must be especially careful of their wine, she warned her daughter; "Do not throw the keys of the cellar about or I fear that scuppernong wine will be absent." Finally, convinced that the waters of the Canadian spa were doing her little good, she returned home in order to see Mildred off to school.[65]

With young Robert also away at school, she had more leisure for her own interests. By then, she had received the list of errors found by Lee in his copy of her father's Recollections; also a suggestion that she delete a letter her grandfather had written to Washington about a privateer in which they had shares. "There is nothing objectionable in the letter," he explained, "but I felt on reading it, that I would prefer it had been omitted. It may suit the mercantile taste of the East more than

[65]Same to same, n. d., but evidently c. July 10, 1860, DeButts-Ely MSS; and MacDonald, op. cit., 135.

it does mine."[66]

But Mrs. Lee was unable to incorporate his suggestions in either the New York or London editions of the work, both of which had come out by the time his letter arrived and were selling well, despite unflattering reviews in two leading English literary periodicals, the Atheneum and the Saturday Review. "A pile of biography," the Athenæum termed it; "bulky and uninteresting," because Washington himself was "as uninteresting a character as one can easily conceive." The details of his domestic life and habits, it said, would interest only valets, not "those of gentle nature." The Review was less biased. It criticized the book for not being arranged in chronological order and for omitting such important battles as Saratoga. It also termed Custis' style "turgid and bombastic," typically American in that it was a blend of English "commercial shrewdness and energy and French extravagance of sentiment."[67]

Later on, many American historians would criticize the work as being too filial, and so partly responsible for the popular conception of Washington being a stately, reserved, marble-like figure, inhumanly virtuous--though most of them did not hesitate to draw on Custis for interesting material, with or without acknowledgement. Certainly, the Recollections must have suited contemporary tastes, for another edition was published by a Philadelphia firm in 1861.[68]

[66]Lee to Mrs. Lee, July 15, 1860, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[67]The Athenaeum, No. 1697 (May 5, 1860), 615; and The Saturday Review, reprinted in The Outlook, LXV (June 16, 1860), 771ff.

[68]For examples of this type of criticism, see Grace Greenwood, Stories and Sketches (N. Y.: Tait, Sons & Co., 1892), 8; and Stanley T. Williams, The Life of Washington Irving (2 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), II, 229. The Philadelphia edition was published by J. W. Bradley; the London edition by Low & Co.

As the year 1860 neared its end, Arlington seemed much the same as when Lee had left it. True, there had been small changes. "Santa Anna," for instance, was dead, having been left out overnight in an open field during a violent storm. But Tom Tita, Lee's favorite cat, was fatter than ever. "He comes in my room every morning, fondles me & gets in my bed, & sleeps all day by the stove," Mrs. Lee wrote Mildred.[69]

Things were just the same--but somehow strangely different, too, now that the Republicans had won the Presidential election in November and the sectional crisis, long dreaded, had at last been precipitated. South Carolina was momentarily expected to leave the Union, and other states were bound to follow. As yet their own state, Virginia, had taken no action, but as the weather grew colder and the process of disunion continued unchecked, uncertainty as to the future of their beloved country cast a shadow over the lives of those at Arlington. A heavy snow that fell the day before Christmas was followed by a severe cold spell, and the chill outdoors seemed to penetrate inside, into the hearts of those gathered at Arlington to quietly celebrate the holiday.

The new year came, and with it even more tragic happenings. Mrs. Lee was appalled when she read that the steamer, Star of the West, carrying reinforcements for beseiged Fort Sumter, had been fired upon as it tried to enter Charleston harbor. She grew sick at heart as state after state seceded from the Union:

> I do not feel much in heart to go anywhere, viewing constantly the sad state of my country, [she wrote Mildred] We must be more earnest in supplication to that Almighty Power who alone can save us. That is all we poor women can do....I miss you very much. My room looks so lonely when I go up to bed. [70]

Meanwhile, in Texas, Lee was watching the progress of events with

[69] Mrs. Lee to Annie Lee, Oct. 21, 1860, and same to Mildred Lee, Dec. 4, 1860, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[70] Same to same, Jan. 17, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS.

distress and helpless anger which he masked with a guarded tongue and a new reserve, confiding his opinion only to his family. For a time, he had hoped that a crisis might be avoided. "It is difficult to see what will be the result," he wrote Custis a few days after the election, "but I hope all will end well."[71] Three weeks later, when he wrote again, he denounced the "Cotton State" extremists who blandly presumed to speak for the entire South; in his opinion, there could be no such thing as allegiance to a section, only to the nation and the state. General Twiggs, commanding officer of the Department of Texas, had predicted that the Union would be dissolved within six weeks, he told his son; then continued:

> I hope, however, the wisdom and patriotism of the country, will devise some way of saving it, and that a kind Providence has not yet turned the current of His blessings from us....Feeling the aggressions of the North, resenting their denial of the equal rights of our citizens to the common territory of the commonwealth, etc., I am not pleased with the course of the 'Cotton States,' as they term themselves. In addition to their selfish, dictatorial bearing, the threats they throw out against the 'Border States,' as they call them, if they will not join them, argues little for the benefit. While I wish to do what is right, I am unwilling to do what is wrong, either at the bidding of the South or the North. One of their plans seems to be the renewal of the slave trade. That I am opposed to on every ground...[72]

With everything so unsettled, they might not be able to sell Smith's Island and apply the proceeds to the girls' legacies, Lee told his eldest son. But if the crisis should be safely passed, he wanted the island sold as soon as possible, and in the meantime Custis had better pay off all his debts and hold on to all the specie he could get.[73]

He was as dismayed as Mary by the events in January. Reading Edward Everett's recently-published Life of George Washington, which Mary had sent him, he probably was struck by the parallel between his own situation

[71] Lee to G. W. C. Lee, Nov. 24, 1860, Jones, Life and Letters, 115.
[72] Same to same, Dec. 14, 1860, in ibid., 118f.
[73] Ibid. The part of the letter mentioning the specie is not seen in Jones' version, but is in the original at Duke U., for which see Freeman, Lee, I, 417n.

and that in which Washington had found himself on the eve of the Revolution, when he had had to choose between the mother country and the insurgent colonies. If he did, it must have helped him to define his own position in the present crisis. "As far as I can judge from the papers we are between anarchy & Civil War. May God avert us from both," he wrote Mary. It has been evident for years that the Country was doomed to run the full length of democracy. To what a fearful pass it has brought us." Fearful that the border states, too, would be dragged into "the gulf of revolution," arraying half the country against the other, he could "only be patient and await the end, for I can do nothing to hasten or retard it."[74]

He was more explicit regarding his position in the crisis in another letter, to his eldest son, written the same day:

> The South in my opinion, has been aggrieved by the acts of the North, as you say. I feel the aggression and am willing to take every proper step for redress. It is the principle I contend for, not individual or private benefit. As an American citizen I take great pride in my country, her property and institutions, and would defend any State, if her rights were invaded. But I can anticipate no greater calamity for the country than a dissolution of the Union. It would be an accumulation of all the evils we complain of, and I am willing to sacrifice every thing but honor for its preservation. I hope, therefore, that all constitutional means will be exhausted before there is a resort to force. Secession is nothing but revolution. The framers of our Constitution never exhausted so much labor, wisdom, and forbearance in its formation, and surrounded it with so many guards and securities, if it was intended to be broken by every member of the Confederacy at will. It was intended for 'perpetual union,' so expressed in the preamble, and for the establishment of a government, not a compact, which can only be dissolved by revolution, or the consent of all the people in convention assembled. It is idle to talk of secession. Anarchy would have been established and not a government, by Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson, Madison, and the other patriots of the Revolution....Still, a Union that can only be maintained by swords and bayonets, and in which strife and civil war are to take the place of brotherly love and kindness, has no charm for me. I shall mourn for my country and for the welfare and progress of mankind. If the Union is dissolved, and the Government disrupted, I shall return to my native State and share the miseries of my people, and save in defense will draw my sword on none.[75]

[74]Same to Mrs. Lee, Jan. 23, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS. The version printed in Jones, Reminiscences, 136, is very inaccurate.

[75]Same to G.W.C. Lee, Jan. 23, 1861, Jones, Life and Letters, 130f.

When he learned that Custis and Orton Williams hoped to get commissions in the army of the "Southern Republic," he wrote to Markie Williams:

> The subject recalls my grief at the condition of our Country. God alone can save us from our folly, selfishness & short sightedness. The last accounts seem to shew that we have barely escaped anarchy to be plunged into civil war. What will be the result I cannot conjecture. I only see what a fearful calamity is upon us & fear that the country will have to pass through for its sins a fiery ordeal. I am unable to realize that our people will destroy a government inaugurated by the blood & wisdom of our patriotic fathers, that has given us peace & prosperity at home, power & security abroad, & under which we have acquired a colossal strength unequalled in the history of mankind. I wish to live under no other government, & there is no sacrifice I am not ready to make for the preservation of the Union save that of honour. If a disruption takes place, I shall go back in sorrow to my people & share the misery of my native state, & save in her defense there will be one soldier less in the world than now. I wish for no other flag than the 'Star Spangled Banner,' & no other air than 'Hail Columbia.' I still hope that the wisdom & patriotism of the nation will yet save it.....
>
> My own troubles, anxieties & sorrows sink into insignificance when I contemplate the sufferings present & prospective of the nation. Yet I am very desirous to be near those who claim my protection, & who may need my assistance. Nothing prevents my endeavouring to do so, but the necessity of my presence with the Regiment. There is no other field officer with it, & the presence of the officers may do much to quiet the apprehensions of the men, who are impatient under the present prospect of affairs; & absence of pay. We must all endeavour to do our whole duty however far we know we fall short of it. 76

As the crisis deepened and efforts to reach a compromise failed one by one, Lee grew more certain that war was inevitable. "I had hoped that Mr. Crittendon's propositions would have found favor with the Country...," he wrote Agnes, towards the end of January. The action of the southern states in taking over the United States property within their boundaries, "or as it is pompously termed capturing the U. S. Forts, Arsenals, &c, &c," would not calm agitated feelings on either side; separation, he thought was now an accomplished fact, and he doubted whether the two sections would long remain at peace. "I can

[76] Same to Markie Williams, Jan. 22, 1861, in Craven, "To Markie," 58f.

however do nothing, but trust in the wisdom & patriotism of the Nation & to the overruling providence of a merciful God. I am particularly anxious that Virginia should keep right, & as she was chiefly instrumental in the formation & inauguration of the Constitution, so I would wish that she might be able to maintain it & save the Union." If Texas seceded, he told his daughter, he hoped that his regiment would be ordered out of the state. "We can go up into the Indian, Cherokee country. They cannot secede, nor has their folly yet reached that point."[77]

From his letters, it is clear that Lee had certain definite convictions and had decided that his actions would be governed by the course of events. Secession he deemed unconstitutional and revolutionary, and bound to bring about a war. He hoped that his own state would remain in the Union, but in the event that it did not, he would resign and defend it, representing as it did his kinsmen, neighbors, and friends. In later years, Mrs. Lee would state his position correctly when she said: "From the first commencement of our troubles, he had decided that in the event of Virginia's secession, duty...would compel him to follow."[78]

It has been inferred that Lee intended to resign whether or not his state seceded, and fight for neither side unless Virginia was drawn into the conflict. This seems improbable, if only because his state could not possibly remain neutral if war came. More likely, he hoped that Virginia would remain in the Union, in which case he would retain his commission in the United States Army regardless of events. This is borne out by a letter he wrote Mildred on April 1, 1861:

> Tell Cousin Rebecca that I think a great deal on the state of the Country-too much to give my thoughts in a letter. She, however, ought to know that the business of an American soldier is to defend his Country. [79]

[77]Lee to Agnes Lee, Jan. 29, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS.
[78]Long, Lee, 91.
[79]Lee to Mildred Lee, Apr. 1, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS.

Back home, Mrs. Lee was thinking much the same thoughts. Early in the year, she wrote to one of her daughters: "With a sad heavy heart, my dear child, I write, for the prospects before us are sad indeed & as I think both parties are in the wrong in this fratricidal war there is nothing comforting even in the hope that God may prosper the right, for I see no right in the matter. We can only pray that in his Mercy he will spare us."[80] Like her husband, she hoped that the "peace convention" called by her state early in February would be able to compromise the differences between the slave-holding and non-slave-holding states:

> The papers are filled with Mr. Lincoln's arrival in Washington, & this week will I presume decide our fate as a nation..... [she wrote, near the end of the month.] I pray that the Almighty may listen to the prayers of the faithful in the land & direct their counsels for good, & that the designs of ambitious & selfish politicians may be frustrated, especially that our own State may act right & obtain the merit promised in the Bible to the peace Makers.[81]

But the peace convention on which she had pinned her hopes turned out only a long list of resolutions which few people bothered to read. While it was meeting, Texas seceded, and Lee was ordered to Washington to report to General Scott. "Paid my debts & distributed my little valuables among the officers," he wrote in his diary the day he set out for home, February 13, 1861.[82]

On his way, he stopped over at San Antonio, where he found the secessionists in full control. Some of these informed him that his journey would be facilitated if he resigned his commission and declared for the Confederacy;

[80] Mrs. Lee to one of her children, Jan. [Feb.?], 19, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[81] Same to ?, n. d., but c. Feb. 25, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[82] Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entry for Feb. 13, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS.

if he did not, he would be allowed no transportation for his baggage. The proposal angered Lee who felt that he owed allegiance only to Virginia and the Union, not the state of Texas or a section of the country. Therefore, he ignored the proposal. To a friend who promised to send his baggage on later, he stated his position plainly:

> I think it but due to myself to say that I cannot be moved by the conduct of those people from my sense of duty. I still think...that my loyalty to Virginia ought to take precedence over that which is due the Federal governement. And I shall so report myself at Washington. If Virginia stands by the old Union, so will I. But if she secedes (though I do not believe in secession as a Constitutional right, nor that there is sufficient cause for revolution), then I will still follow my native state with my sword, and if need be with my life. I know you think and feel very differently, but I cant help it. These are my principles, and I must follow them. 83

When he found that no hindrance was to be placed in his way, he continued on to New Orleans, and thence home to Arlington, where he arrived on March 1, 1861.

The entry he made that night in his diary gives no hint of his feelings. "Arrived in Alexa. at 2 P. M. & took a carriage & reached Arlington to dinner," it read. "Found all well."[84]

[83]Charles Anderson, Texas Before and on the Eve of the Rebellion (Cincinnati: P. G. Thomson, 1884), 29ff.

[84]Lee Memo. Bk. No. 5, entry for Mar. 1, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS.

CHAPTER XVIII

"THE QUESTION...SETTLED"

Shortly before Lee reached home, his family had tried to celebrate Washington's Birthday with something of the old spirit. Charlotte and Rooney were at Arlington, and may have accompanied Markie to the city to see the customary parade, only to learn that President Buchanan, with characteristic timidity had called it off for fear some untoward incident might occur.[1]

Later that day, they celebrated the day privately with some of their friends, including two of Rooney's from Massachusetts--Henry and Charles Francis Adams. "I remember it well," the latter recalled later on. "A daughter, Miss Agnes, I thought extremely attractive. We had some young officers of artillery there. A few months later we were all arrayed against each other; and I fancy there must have been fully half-a-dozen future generals and colonels about the Arlington table that day." He also recollected seeing Rooney's father ride up Pennsylvania Avenue in a carriage a week or two later--"a military, handsome man, with a short, grey beard."[2]

Major S. P. Heintzelman, who had served with Lee in Texas, encountered him in Washington the day after Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated. "I met Col. Robert E. Lee at General Scott's office," Heintzelman wrote in his diary. "He feels badly at the prospect."[3] Lee conferred several times

[1] Mrs. Lee to Mildred Lee, Feb. 24, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[2] Charles Francis Adams, Autobiography (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1916), 90f.

[3] MS Diary of S. P. Heintzelman, entry for Mar. 5, 1861, Heintzelman Papers, L. C.

with the old general during the next few weeks, but neither ever revealed what was said at these meetings. It has been surmised that Scott told Lee he was soon to be promoted, and hinted that he would recommend Lee to be his second in command. Presumably Lee told him that, as he saw it, his first obligation was to his state, and that if Virginia seceded, he must go with it.[4]

While awaiting developments, Lee stayed close to home and tried to keep his worries from his family as best he could. "The Pup is well but melancholy," he wrote Mildred, with something of his old humor. "He is very belligerent & carries on perpetual combats with the Wild Cats. His face is much scarred & he begins to look like a veteran. I am his only companion....I have only been once to Alexa...." Even the weather was depressing, so cold and cloudy that only a few jonquils had come up in the garden by the first of April. "Your Papa says that both He & Tom [their cat] are melancholy & grieving in your absence," Mrs. Lee wrote to one of her daughters.[5]

Virginia's course in the crisis was to be decided by a convention then in session; and since most of the delegates were conservatives, anxious to preserve the Union, there was some chance that secession might be avoided. It was generally agreed, however, that Virginia would not countenance the use of "coercion" to maintain the Union. Meanwhile, General Scott, who was endeavoring to keep Lee with the Union, succeeding to the extent of getting Lee to accept a new commission, signed by the new President, as colonel of the 1st U. S. Cavalry, about the same time, Lee ignored an offer of a brigadier general's commission in the

[4]Freeman, Lee, I, 432f.; and Erasmus D. Keyes, Fifty Years Observation of Men and Events (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884), 206.

[5]Lee to Mildred Lee, Mar. 15, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS; and Mrs. Lee to [same?], Apr. 10, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS.

Confederate Army made by the Confederate Secretary of War, L. P. Walker.[6]

While the Virginia convention deliberated, Lee waited patiently, hoping for the best. Apparently most of the delegates felt as he did--that there was no issue at stake to warrant secession, for, on April 4th, secession was voted down by a two-to-one majority. If he owned all the slaves in the south, Lee told a friend about this time, he would free them all to avert war. His great fear was that war might be precipitated by some rash, overt action. "I fear the mischief that is brewing there," he told a visitor one day, pointing to the Capitol across the Potomac.[7]

Hope of peace vanished on April 12, 1861, when South Carolina forces opened fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor and President Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers "to suppress combinations" and "to cause the laws to be duly executed." Now the issue was joined; there could be no peace until the Union was restored by force or the states which had seceded had won their independence. To most Virginians, there now seemed no choice except to take the part of their southern neighbors or assist in their coercion.

Thus matters stood, when on April 17th, Lee received a letter from General Scott, asking him to call at his office next day, also a note asking him to call on Francis P. Blair, who was the former editor of the Congressional Globe and a man of considerable influence in the new administration.[8]

Accordingly, Lee rode over to the city next morning. He stopped first at the Blair residence, opposite the White House, where Blair informed him that he had been authorized by President Lincoln to "ascertain

[6]Freeman, Lee, I, 433f.

[7]Statement of Bishop Joseph P. B. Wilmer of Louisiana, quoted in Long, Reminiscences, 142; and Thomas B. Bryan, Military Essays and Recollections (5 vols. Chicago: Dial Press, 1899), III, 14.

[8]John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Abraham Lincoln (10 vols. New York: The Century Co., 1890), IV, 98; also Jones, Life and Letters, 130.

Lee's intentions and feelings," and by Secretary of War Cameron to offer Lee the command of a large army the government planned to raise as quickly as possible. When the old gentleman had finished, Lee had his answer ready. "I declined the offer he made me,.." he recalled several years later, "stating, as candidly and courteously as I could, that, though opposed to secession and deprecating war, I could take no part in an invasion of the Southern States."[9]

Lee then went on to General Scott's office, where he told the general of Blair's offer and why he had refused to accept it. When he had done so, there was nothing left to do but bid his old friend an affectionate farewell. "Lee, you have made the greatest mistake of your life, but I feared it would be so," Scott is reported to have said as they parted sadly. "I cannot consult my own feelings in the matter," Lee is said to have replied, by a Washington newspaper three months later.[10]

Smith Lee

Before returning home, Lee stopped to see his brother Smith, then on duty in Washington. Foremost in his mind was the question of whether it was right for him to retain his commission as colonel in the Army now that he had declined the command tendered him by Blair and Scott. Up to now, it had been a fixed principle with him to serve, regardless of his own inclinations, whereever his superiors thought he might be most useful. Yet if he were assigned to duty and Virginia seceded at a sunsequent date, he would be forced to resign under orders, something no soldier, as a matter of pride, could do. Lee discussed the question at length with his brother, but could not reach a conclusion, so the two agreed to meet again before taking any action.[11] As Lee crossed the Potomac on his way home, he little dreamed that seventeen months would elapse before he crossed it

[9]Lee to Reverdy Johnson, Feb. 25, 1868, in Jones, Reminiscences, 141.
[10]Ibid.; Mason, op. cit., 73, probably on the authority of Mrs. Lee; and Nat. Republican (Washington, D. C.), July 12, 1861.
[11]Lee to S. S. Lee, Apr. 20, 1861, Jones, Life and Letters, 134.

again, and then at the head of a great Southern army.

Next morning, when he went into Alexandria with Mrs. Lee, he learned that Virginia had seceded. Unlike most of the townspeople, he felt no exhilaration at the news. To him it meant a nation wrecked and a war begun, and he had seen too much of war to view it lightly. "I must say," he remarked sadly to a merchant into whose store he went to pay a bill, "that I am one of those dull creatures that cannot see the good of secession."[12]

Other members of his family felt the same way. Agnes, who had remained at home, learned the news while out walking. "I cannot realize it, it seems so dreadful," she write that night to Mildred. "But she [Virginia] had to take one side or the other, & I truly hope she has chosen the right one...Nothing here is talked or thought of but our troubles."[13]

Lee knew that the ordinance of secession had yet to be ratified by the people of Virginia, but expected hostilities to begin at any moment. Now that Virginia had seceded, the state would undoubtedly seize Federal property within its borders, and the Federal government would have to act promptly in order to defend Washington. Under such circumstances, a collision was almost inevitable, and before that happened, he would have to resign his commission in the United States Army. "The severest struggle of his life," Mrs. Lee would term the decision he had to make, later on.[14]

Arlington blazed with lights on Friday night, April 19, 1861. Downstairs, anxious relations and friends excitedly discussed recent events, especially the surrender of Fort Sumter. Finding it impossible to think

[12]Charles R. Russell, ed., The Memoirs of Colonel John S. Mosby (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1917), 379.

[13]Agnes Lee to Mildred Lee, Apr. 19, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[14]MS statement of Mrs. Lee, Sept., 1866, DeButts-Ely MSS.

amid the confusion, Lee went outside and paced back and forth under the trees that bordered the east side of the garden. Then he came in and went up to his bedroom. Downstairs, they could hear his footsteps as he paced the floor, sometimes stopping when he knelt to pray. Midnight came and still he paced the floor. Finally the footsteps ceased, when Lee, his mind made up, sat down to write a brief letter of resignation from the United States Army and a longer one to General Scott. With them in his hand, he came downstairs to where his wife was waiting.

"Well, Mary," he said quietly, "the question is settled. Here is my letter of resignation, and a letter I have written to General Scott."

"Whichever way you go will be in the path of duty," Mary is reported to have replied. "You will think it right, and I shall be satisfied."[15]

Probably he let her read the letters before he sent them off. The shorter one read:

Arlington, Virginia (Washington City, P. O.)
20 April, 1861.

Hon. Simon Cameron
Secty of War

Sir:
I have the honor to tender the resignation of my commission as Colonel of the 1st Regt. of Cavalry.

Very resp'y Your Obedient Servant
R. E. Lee,
Col. 1st Cav'y. [16]

Explaining his decision to General Scott must have been especially painful, for the older man had always been a trusted friend as well as a respected superior. It read:

[15] Jones, Life and Letters, 132; George B. Upshur, As I Recall Them: Memories of Crowded Years (New York: Wilson-Erickson Inc., 1936), 161.; and Brock, Lee, 321.

[16] Quoted in Freeman, Lee, I, 440.

Arlington, Virginia, April 20, 1861.

General: Since my interview with you on the 18th inst. I have felt that I ought no longer to retain my commission in the Army. I therefore tender my resignation, which I request you will recommend for acceptance. It would have been presented at once but for the struggle it has cost me to separate myself from a service to which I have devoted the best years of my life, and all the ability I possessed.

During the whole of this time-more than a quarter of a century-I have experienced nothing but kindness from my superiors and a most cordial friendship from my comrades. To no one, General, have I been as much indebted as to yourself for uniform kindness and consideration, and it has always been my ardent desire to merit your approbation. I shall carry to the grave the most grateful recollections of your kind consideration, and your name and fame shall always be dear to me.

Save in the defense of my native State, I never desire to again draw my sword.

Be pleased to accept my most earnest wishes for the continuance of your happiness and prosperity, and believe me most truly yours,

R. E. Lee. [17]

That his wife and children understood, and accepted his position, as they did, made his mind easier. "Whatever I have thought, & even now think of the commencement of this horrible conflict," Mrs. Lee wrote to Mildred a week or two later, "now our duty is plain-to resist unto death." To their old friend, Benson Lossing, she explained with some heat: "I had no sympathy in the hasty course of South Carolina & prayed & hoped for the Union 'till the course of the Administration left us no alternative....The idea of coercing a free people into Union is perfectly absurd & there is a spirit here that will not be coerced." [18]

The children, too, shared their father's convictions. Robert was too young to be a soldier, and so would remain to look after his mother; if possible, he would return to school in the fall. Down the Potomac, at Fort Washington, Custis was finishing up some work, so that he would be free to resign and join his father. Rooney, too, was expecting to get a

[17] Printed in R. E. Lee, Jr., op. cit., 25.

[18] Mrs. Lee to [Mildred ?] Lee, May 5, 1861, typescript copy furnished the author by Mr. Harnett Kane, New Orleans, La.

commission in the Confederate army.[19] Lee had tried hard not to influence his sons. "The present is a momentous question which every man must settle for himself," he told Mary.[20]

Saturday morning, after he had dispatched his letters to Secretary Cameron and General Scott, Lee sat down to write another to his sister, Mrs. Marshall, who shared her husband's Unionist sentiments. As tactfully as he could, he explained his position:

> My Dear Sister: I am grieved at my inability to see you....I have been waiting for a 'more convenient season,' which has brought to many before me deep & lasting regret. Now we are in a state of war which will yield to nothing. The whole South is in a state of revolution, into which Virginia, after a long struggle, has been drawn; and though I recognize no necessity for this state of things, and would have forborne and pleaded to the end for redress of grievances, real or supposed, yet in my own person I had to meet the question whether I should take part against my native State.
>
> With all my devotion to the Union and the feeling of loyalty and duty of an American citizen, I have not been able to make up my mind to raise my hand against my relatives, my children, my home. I have therefore resigned my commission in the Army, and save in defense of my native State-with the sincere hope that my poor services may never be needed-I hope I may never be called on to draw my sword.
>
> I know you will blame me; but you must think as kindly of me as you can, and believe that I have endeavoured to do what I thought right. To show you the feeling and the struggle it has cost me, I send you a copy of my letter of resignation. I have no time for more...May God guard and protect you and yours, and shower upon you everlasting blessings, is the prayer of
>
> Your devoted brother,
> R. E. Lee. [21]

[19]Rob went to the University of Virginia in October, 1861, for which see R. E. Lee, Jr., op. cit., 44. That Custis and Rooney shared their father's views on the war is evident in Lee to Markie Williams, Jan. 22, 1861, in Craven, "To Markie," 58; and Agnes Lee to Mildred Lee, Apr. 19, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS; though according to a first cousin of General Lee's, a Miss S. L., ("War Time in Alexandria," South Atlantic Quar., IV (July, 1905), 255f.), Custis Lee told her that secession was nothing but revolution, and that if he had the power, he would seize Arlington Heights and fortify them.

[20]Lee to Mrs. Lee, May 15, 1861, in Fitz Lee, op. cit., 94. Lee believed that Custis intended to join him, judging from his letter to Mrs. Lee, May 8, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS, in which he asks Custis to bring camp equipment for both of them.

[21]Same to Mrs. Anne Marshall, Apr. 20, 1861, Jones, Reminiscences, 139f

He also wrote to Smith Lee, explaining why he had resigned without consulting him:

> My Dear Brother Smith: The question which was the subject of my earnest consultation with you on the 18th inst. has in my own mind been decided. After the most anxious inquiry as to the correct course for me to pursue, I concluded to resign, and sent in my resignation this morning. I wished to wait till the Ordinance of Secession should be acted on by the people of Virginia; but war seems to have commenced, and I am liable at any time to be ordered on duty which I could not conscientiously perform. To save me from such a position, and to prevent the necessity of resigning under orders, I had to act at once, and before I could see you again on the subject, and have no other ambition than to remain at home. Save in defense of my native State, I have no desire ever again to draw my sword. I send you my warmest love.
>
> Your affectionate brother,
>
> R. E. Lee. [22]

The rest of that day he spent at Arlington, putting his affairs in order. In the evening a message came from Judge Robertson, of Richmond, asking to see him sometime the following day; and in reply, Lee offered o meet him in Alexandria. But after attending services in Christ Church the following morning, instead of the judge, he talked for a time with three unidentified strangers thought to have been sent by Governor Wise to ask him to serve the State.[23]

This was to be Lee's last Sunday at Arlington, for that evening he received another message from Judge Robertson, this time asking him to confer in Richmond with the Governor. Without hesitation, Lee agreed to go--he would meet Robertson in Alexandria in the morning and go with him to Richmond.[24]

Never did he regret his decision, though it led him in time to Appomattox. "I did only what my duty demanded," he would write a comrade

[22] Same to S. S. Lee, Apr. 20, 1861, in R. E. Lee, Jr., op. cit., 26f. Smith joined his brother at Richmond in early May, for which see same to Mrs. Lee, May 15, 1861.

[23] Freeman, op. cit., I, 445; and Harrison, op. cit., 24f.; also, Alexander J. Weddenburn, Tercentennial of Historic Alexandria, Va. (Alexandria, Va: H. J. Wedderburn, 1907).

[24] Freeman, Lee, I, 447.

after the war. "I could have taken no other course without dishonour. And if it all were to be done over again, I should act in precisely the same manner."[25]

Monday morning, April 22, 1861, he rose and breakfasted with his family. Afterwards, he got his things together, then said goodbye to his family. Dressed in a black suit and wearing a silk hat, he drove off down the hill to Alexandria.[26] Two days later, in Richmond, he accepted the command of the military forces of his state.

Though he did not realize it, he had also said farewell to his beloved Arlington. Before him were the long hard years of a bitter war from which he would gain unfading glory. But never again would he be sheltered by the friendly roof of his old home. A year after the war he would get a glimpse of it from a passing train, and again perhaps four years later, not long before his death.[27] Then he would not want to approach it more closely.

Because Arlington occupied a commanding position overlooking Washington, Lee assumed that Federal forces would occupy it within the near future, in which case it might be the scene of the first fighting. Even if it were not occupied, he wrote Mary, "ruffians" might cross the river and plunder the house, "especially since it is known to be the residence of one of the Rebel leaders." For this reason, he wanted her to have everything ready so that she could leave on short notice. He appreciated Mrs. Fitzhugh's offer to put his family up at Ravensworth, but feared that their

[25]Lee to Wade Hampton, June, 1868, Jones, Reminiscences, 142.

[26]W. W. Scott, "Some Reminiscences of Famous Men," Southern Magazine, IV (July, 1894), 628.

[27]Lee to Markie Williams, Apr. 7, 1866, in Craven, "To Markie," 69. He may have seen Arlington from the train when he visited it again in 1869.

presence there might make her own situation more difficult, though he thought their plate and the more valuable furnishings could be safely stored there. Concerned, because Mary was reluctant to leave, he wrote, May 8th: "I grieve at the necessity that drives you from your home. I can appreciate your feeling on the occasion & pray that you may receive Comfort & Strength in the difficulties that surround you. When I reflect upon the calamity impending over the Country my own sorrows sink into insignificance....Be content & resigned to God's will."[28]

Only the knowledge that her presence at Arlington would be a constant source of anxiety to her husband could induce Mrs. Lee to leave there. "Except to relieve the mind of your Father & brother...," she wrote Mildred, who was still at Staunton, "I would not stir from this house, even if the whole Northern army were to surround it." Her heart sank at the thought of leaving. "...My dear Parents are both laid low in their graves," she wrote a friend at this time, "where but for my children I would most gladly lay down beside them."[29]

Across the river in Washington, the arrival of large numbers of troops helped to quiet the fear that the Confederates were about to advance on the city, but rumors of an impending clash continued to be as wild and numerous as ever. According to one story, the Virginians planned to shell the city with batteries they had ready to move into position on Arlington Heights. Lee had already offered the estate to Virginia for that purpose, said another.[30] Reading these fabrications, and others like them in the newspapers, Mrs. Lee was not amused. "Arlington is entailed on my son, nor

[28] Same to Mrs. Lee, Apr. 30, May 2, May 8, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[29] Mrs. Lee to [Mildred ?] Lee, May 5, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS; and same to [B. J. Lossing ?], May 1, 1861, copy furnished by Harnett Kane.

[30] "I am certain, from personal observations, that there are twenty-two guns of light artillery, 18 and 24 pounders, back of Arlington Heights," N. Y. Times, May 2, 1861.

has there been any thought of offering it to the State," she wrote Benson Lossing indignantly, underscoring her words: "Tho' if she should need it, I am sure we should be willing to make any sacrifice for her good."[31]

Though she realized that she must leave her home, and soon, still she could not bring herself to do it, until one afternoon, early in May, when she was sitting in her "morning room" copying an oil portrait of her youngest son, Markie's brother, Orton, burst into the room. Orton, who worked in General Scott's office often came over from the city, so there was nothing unusual in his being there, but the look on his face startled Mrs. Lee.

"You must pack up all you value immediately and send it off in the morning," he exclaimed. "The enemy force will cross the long bridge tomorrow and take possession of these heights!" Though Orton did not say so, Mrs. Lee was certain that General Scott had sent him.[32]

Now the moment she had long dreaded was upon her. Heartsick, she and her daughters set the servants to packing. Leaving Arlington, perhaps forever, seemed much like dying: a flood of memories passed through her mind, but there was too much to do to give way to her sorrow. First off, she had the family silver packed in sturdy boxes to be dispatched to Richmond early next morning. Next she stowed the Washington and Custis family letters and papers, together with some smaller mementoes and valuables, in another box; her husband's papers went into still another. By then, it was too late to do more, and since the rest of the household had retired, she too went to bed. But tired as she was, she could not sleep. Instead, she lay thinking of the past and the uncertain future, trying to accept the thought that this might be the last night she would ever spend at Arlington.

[31] Mrs. Lee to [B. J. Lossing ?], May 1, 1861, copy furnished by Harnett Kane.

[32] MS statement of Mrs. R. E. Lee, Sept., 1866, DeButts-Ely MSS.

Dawn found her still awake, and she had just gotten out of bed and was looking out the window, when she saw Orton emerging from the forest, his uniform damp with the morning dew. Getting dressed, she went downstairs to greet him, and was happy to hear from him that the movement of the Federal troops had been indefinitely postponed. "Still, it will certainly be made, & you had better prepare for it," said Orton.[33] For a moment, her spirits lifted at the thought that even yet the evil day might be avoided. Her better judgment, however, told her that she had been given only a reprieve of a few days in which to set her house in order.

Once she had hardened her heart to that thought, she set about leaving with something like her usual efficiency. The boxes already packed were sent off to Richmond; the family portraits and the more valuable paintings were taken from their frames to be carried to Ravensworth, as were the most important Washington relics and some of their ordinary furniture. Carpets were rolled up and curtains--including a set of damask ones once owned by Martha Washington--were taken down and laid away in the garret. Except for a few left on the shelves in the dining room, all the books were put away in closets, their engravings, "ornamental books," and miscellaneous relics and mementoes being placed in the small room off the staircase landing. Finally, the remaining Washingtonrelics, such as the famous punch bowl, were packed in boxes and locked up in the cellar. The house seemed strangely bare when they had finished.[34]

She was most annoyed that the young people, inspired by the excitement, seemed undisturbed about losing their home. "Custis astonishes me with his calmness with a possibility of having his early & beautiful home

[33] Ibid., and Mrs. Lee to R. E. Lee, May 9, 1861; same to [Mildred] Lee, May 5, 1861; Agnes Lee to Annie Lee, May 6, 10, 1861; all in DeButts-Ely MSS.

[34] Ibid.

destroyed...," she wrote her husband. "He never indulges in invective or a word of reflection on the cruel course of the administration. He leaves all that to his Mama & sisters." She was indignant when she received a letter from Mildred complaining about the food at school and a new bonnet that had been sent her. "I must confess," wrote her mother, "I was both hurt and mortified that a daughter of mine, at a time when her Father's life is in peril, her home in danger of being trampled over...should allow a disappointment about a bonnet to be so deep in her mind & the craving of her appetite." Agnes, too, was inclined to make light of their situation. "Tell Charlotte," she wrote Annie, who was then at the White House farm, "the Repub./licans/ will probably enter the house without permission, & we can already see a piece in the Intelligencer...to the effect of the cool, airy rooms...for summer quarters on 'Arlington Heights,' &c...."[35]

But when she and Mary reached Ravensworth, where their mother was to join them, Agnes began to realize that she might have left her home forever. "I dare not tell you how I long to be back," she wrote Annie. "It is so perfectly beautiful there now....The bare walls & empty presses look so desolate..." To her mother, waiting back at Arlington for Custis to escort her to Ravensworth, the situation seemed strangely unreal. "This /is/ a lovely morning," she wrote her husband in Richmond, May 9, 1861. "I never saw the country more beautiful, perfectly radiant. The yellow jasmine /is/ in full bloom & perfuming the air, but a death like stillness prevails everywhere. You hear no sounds from Washington, not a soul moving about."[36]

Nevertheless there were signs of the storm about to break. One morning, two Confederate officers rode up from Alexandria to look over the estate for some unknown purpose. Mrs. Lee hoped that Virginia forces

[35] Ibid.
[36] Mrs. Lee to Lee, May 9, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS.

were planning to occupy it, and even suggested--though her eldest son only smiled, much to her annoyance--that the Confederates post a detachment at the culvert down on the farm. More significant was the procession of ships going up to Georgetown--transports, steam tugs and vessels of all kinds. Orton Williams, when he had tried to resign his commission, had been arrested and sent to Governor's Island, so she had no way of finding out why the armada was being gathered. Another straw in the wind was the fact that a few of the servants had decamped, though most were still going about their duties as usual.[37] Most disturbing, if she read them, were the reports in the newspapers to the effect that Federal forces would soon be stationed on Arlington Heights.[38]

That she kept putting off her departure in the face of these portents greatly alarmed her husband. "You had better complete your arrangements & retire further from the scene of the war," he warned her. "It may burst upon you at any time." He had become resigned he told her, to whatever fate might befall Arlington once the war began. "It is sad to think of the translation, if not ruin, it may bring upon a spot so endeared to us. But God's will be done." Only the knowledge that she was unnecessarily adding to his burden of worry brought her finally to the point of leaving. "Were it not that I would not add one feather to his load of care," she wrote General Scott, in a brief note of farewell, "nothing would induce me to abandon my home."[39]

But even as she was being helped into the carriage by her weeping servants, she continued to cling to the hope that the Federal authorities

[37] Ibid.; and same to same, May 12, 1861; same to Mildred Lee, May 11, 1861; same to Agnes Lee, n. d.; and Agnes Lee to Annie Lee, May 6, 1861; all in DeButts-Ely MSS.

[38] For example, N. Y. Tribune, May 10, 1861.

[39] Lee to Mrs. Lee, May 11, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS; and same to Gen. W. Scott, May 5, 1861, Fitz Lee, op. cit., 93f.

might still abandon their plan to occupy Arlington, in which case, she consoled herself, she could come back home in a few weeks.[40] Driving past the garden, which had never appeared lovelier, she found it impossible to believe she might be seeing her cherished flowers for the last time.

Twelve years were to pass before she again saw Arlington House--a grey-haired, crippled old woman, with but a few months to live. Her warm brown eyes would be dim, not with age but sorrow, reading the grim sign over the west door: "CEMETERY HEADQUARTERS."[41]

[40] MS statement of Mrs. Lee, Sept., 1866, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[41] The sign appears in a photograph of the west side of the house made, apparently about 1870 and now in the DeButts-Ely MSS. For Mrs. Lee's appearance, see Brock, Lee, 321.

CHAPTER XIX

"OUR OLD HOME, IF NOT DESTROYED..."

For almost a fortnight everything went on much as usual at Arlington. Overseer M'Guire saw to it that work went on at the farm, and the housekeeper, Selina Gray, kept the servants at their customary tasks. Almost it seemed as if the family had only gone off on a visit and might return at any moment.[1]

Selina Gray

But it was far from quiet across the river as regiment after regiment of militia poured into the city. Each day brought its crop of rumors to agitate the camps. One soldier took it upon himself to keep Arlington under observation by means of a large telescope, and-perhaps as the result of eyestrain caused by excessive zeal-was eventually able to report to his superiors that he had discovered several enemy officers, one of whom he took to be General Lee, laying out fortifications on the heights across the river.[2] Again, it was reported that the Confederates were laying out a mortar battery near the mansion. Actually the city was in no danger, for no one at Richmond except a few excitable newspaper editors had any intention of attempting to seize the national capital; in fact, the commander of the Virginia troops at Alexandria had been ordered to avoid doing anything which might alarm or provoke the Federal forces into

[1] Decker and McSween, op. cit., 60.

[2] B. J. Lossing, Pictorial History of the Civil War (2 vols. Philadelphia: G. W. Childs, 1866), I, 420 and n. Lossing believed the story, and credits Mansfield's decision to occupy Arlington Heights to it. For similar rumors, see George W. Smith, "A Critical Moment for Washington," Col. His. Soc. Records, XXI (1918), 105ff.

crossing the Potomac.[3]

Nevertheless, if Washington was to be defended, Arlington Heights had to be occupied. Reasoning thus, General Mansfield, commanding officer of all the troops about Washington, began to make plans for moving about ten thousand troops across the river.

Gen Mansfield

May 23, 1861

The night of May 23, 1861, was bright and clear. Under a full moon, a long column of eight thousand men marched quietly over the rickety old Long Bridge to the Virginia shore, where they fanned out towards Alexandria. Simultaneously, two miles upstream, a smaller column crossed over the Aqueduct Bridge from Georgetown, while downstream a regiment of Zouaves was put ashore at Alexandria under the protection of Federal gunboats. A few shots were exchanged with retreating Confederate pickets, but the entire movement was accomplished with but one casualty; the officer in command of the Zouaves, handsome young Colonel Ellsworth, was shot by an irate civilian for taking down a Confederate flag flying over his hotel. His death would bring home to people of the North, where he had been a popular figure, the seriousness of the conflict upon which they had now entered.[4]

When morning came, the troops breakfasted, then began setting up bivouacs and constructing earthworks to cover the approaches to the city. A few, more fortunate, were able to scout about the "enemy" country in which they now found themselves, and naturally were attracted to so conspicuous a landmark as Arlington House, which was generally known to be

[3] MS Diary of S. P. Heintzelman, entry for May 23, 1861, Heintzelman Papers; and Lee to P. St. George Cocke, April, n. d., 1861, Va. State Papers, XI, 112.

[4] Lossing, Civil War, II, 484ff., gives an excellent account of the operation; also Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, XII (June 1, 1861), 28.

the home of the leader of the opposing forces. "Not far from us is visible the great white mansion...which now belongs to the Ex-Col. Lee," a member of the famous New York Seventh wrote home that morning, using his knapsack as a desk.[5] Like most of his comrades, he was either unaware of or indifferent to the fact that Arlington actually belonged to Mrs. Lee, not her husband; to him all that mattered was the fact that it had been General Lee's home. Similarly, the thousands of soldiers who would come later would refer to it as "Lee's home," "residence," or "mansion"--an association that has persisted down to the present and is embedded in its official name.

Within a few months it was to become famous as the home of the greatest Southern general, visited first by hundreds, then by thousands of sightseers, military and civilian. But only a few persons took the trouble to climb the hill to it the day Arlington was occupied. As far as is known, only a reporter, a poet, and the general in command of the Federal forces in Virginia, came to see it. The reporter, from the New York Tribune, talked to the servants but otherwise left no record of his impressions. The poet, Charles Russell Lowell, dined there on corn bread and milk; he had seen "no place like it in this country for position and well-improved natural advantages," he wrote home. The officer, Maj. Gen. C. W. Sandford, who planned to place a guard about it if necessary, stopped by to see that it had not been disturbed. Learning that only the servants were there, he decided to set up his headquarters close by in order to safeguard it and the remaining furnishings.[6]

[5] N. Y. Times, May 28, 1861.

[6] N. Y. Tribune, May 25, 1861; Edward W. Emerson, Life and Letters of Charles Russell Lowell (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1907), 207; and Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington: Govt. Printing Office, 1880-1919), Series I, vol. 2, p. 37; hereafter cited as O. R. Unless preceeded by Roman numerials, reference will be to Series I. Some of Sandford's staff rode over next day to decide on the exact location of the tents.

Nor had the place been molested when, two days later, Lee's old friend, Colonel S. P. Heintzelman, rode up with some of his staff. Heintzelman was relieved to find all as it should be, but was angered to hear from the overseer that minor depredations were being committed elsewhere on the estate. "He told us with tears in his eyes that some of the volunteers had shot his pet rabbits & chickens & frightened his wife," the general recorded in his diary. "How provoking to hear these things, & not be able to remedy them."[7]

Heintzelman may have prompted General Sandford to move the 8th New York Regiment up close to the house that afternoon. "These grounds are hallowed as once being the estate of the Custis family from whence sprang the wife of Washington," wrote a newspaper reporter who accompanied the regiment. "The garden is a mass of flowers," wrote another, impressed by the "luxuriance and beauty" of the grounds. According to him, the Lees had taken most of the furniture with them, and Sandford had written to assure General Lee that his house would be safeguarded.[8]

The trickle of visitors continued during the next few days. Some, like artist Emanuel Leutze, came as old friends, sorrowful at the harsh necessity that had turned a peaceful home into an armed camp. Others, less sympathetic, saw only an old, somewhat run-down building: "Arlington House is the antipodes of gingerbread, except that it is yellow, and disposed to crumble," wrote one soldier from a nearby regiment. "It has a pompous propylon of enormous stuccoed columns...." Most were impressed by its historic associations. President Lincoln's son, Bob, with John Hay, the President's secretary, saw it a week or twolater. "I do not know when it was built," Hay noted in his diary, "but it was evidently

[7]MS Diary of S. P. Heintzelman, entry for May 26, 1861, Heintzelman Papers, L. C. Heintzelman had visited by himself the day before.

[8]N. Y. Times, May 29, 1861; and N. Y. Tribune, May 27, 1861.

in its day a grand affair." He noted that some family portraits still hung on the walls, and remarked the large number of deer antlers ranged in the back hall. "Altogether, a historic and traditional atmosphere seemed to pervade the house...," he wrote. An artilleryman, from a battery nearby, thought it "very antique and romantic."[9]

Near the end of the month, a new commanding officer, Brigadier General Irvin McDowell, took over the headquarters his predecessor had set up in three large tents just south of the mansion. Like Colonel Heintzelman, McDowell was well acquainted with General Lee, and he, too, was resolved to carry out General Scott's orders that the mansion be protected. Two days after he assumed command of the Federal forces in Virginia, he wrote the following letter:

Hdqrs. Department Northeastern Virginia
Arlington, May 30, 1861.

Mrs. R. E. Lee:

Madam: Having been ordered by the Government to relieve Major-General Sandford in command of this department, I had the honor to receive this morning your letter of today, addressed to him at this place.

With respect to the occupation of Arlington by the United States troops, I beg to say it has been done by my predecessor with every regard to the preservation of the place. I am here temporarily in camp on the grounds, preferring this to sleeping in the house, under the circumstances which the painful state of the country places me with respect to its proprietors.

I assure you it has been and will be my earnest endeavour to have all things so ordered that on your return you will find things as little disturbed as possible. In this I have the hearty concurrence of the courteous, kind hearted gentleman in the immediate command of the troops quartered here, and who lives in the lower part of the house to insure its being respected.

Everything has been done as you described with respect to your servants, and your wishes, as far as they are known or could be anticipated, have been complied with. When you desire to return, every facility will be given you for so doing.

I trust, madam, you will not consider it an intrusion if I say I have the most sincere sympathy for your distress, and that,

[9] Ibid., Theodore Winthrop, "Washington as a Camp," Atlantic Monthly, VIII (July, 1861), 117; Diary of John Hay, entry for May 31, 1861, quoted in Nicolay, op. cit., 374f.; and N. Y. Tribune, June 1, 1861.

as far as is compatible with my duty, I shall always be ready to do whatever may alleviate it.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

Irvin McDowell

P. S. I am informed it was the order of the General-in-Chief, if the troops on coming here found the family in the house, that no one should enter it, but that a guard should be placed for its protection. [10]

To foreign observers, used to European armies, it seemed most strange that the commanding general of the largest American army in the field should choose to live in a small tent containing only a camp bed, a stove, a rough table and a trunk, when only a few feet away was the large comfortable home of one of his enemies. They were struck, too, by the simplicity of his headquarters, for instead of the swarm of staff officers and orderlies usually to be seen about the headquarters of European armies, McDowell had only a handful of aides and never more than two or three orderlies standing by their horses. [11]

Everywhere one looked blue-clad soldiers were to be seen drilling or working at one task or another. To most of them, the war was still a lark, a welcome change from farm or workshop, and a holiday atmosphere pervaded the camps, which by the end of the month extended from above the Aqueduct Bridge clear across Arlington Heights and on down below Alexandria. The knowledge that a move was being contemplated against the Confederate forces to the west and south, in the hope that the enemy would be crushed by one heavy blow, added to their anticipation. Naturally there was much confusion and wasted effort as inexperienced officers

[10] McDowell was to have assumed command on May 27, 1861, but arrived at Arlington too late at night to do so; he therefore took command the following day. O. R., II, 653. Also Gen. Irvin McDowell to Mrs. Lee, May 20, 1861, ibid., II, 655.

[11] Nat. Republican (Washington, D. C.), July 12, 1861; also, William Howard Russell, My Diary, North and South (Boston: T. O. H. P. Burnham, 1863), 394f. A sketch of McDowell's headquarters, showing a large flag flying over the portico appeared in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, XII (June 29, 1861), 187.

labored to make soldiers out of militiamen, who at best were unruly, if enthusiastic. Inevitably, Arlington suffered in the process of forging them into a semblance of an army. Meadows, now drilling-fields, were worn bare of grass, paths were made in every direction, and roads were cut through the forest to connect up the various camps, forts, batteries, log blockhouses, and trenches which were being built to protect the camp and the approaches to the city. The Arlington Mill on Four Mile Run, on which Lee and old Mr. Custis had spent so much money and labor was situated on the line of outposts of McDowell's army; partially dismantled by soldiers who wanted boards for one purpose or another, it was irreparably damaged during a skirmish which was fought there on June 1st.[12]

Though at first glance McDowell's army appeared to be little more than an over-large militia muster, it employed some surprisingly modern military techniques. Since no accurate map of the section had ever been made, McDowell had officers detailed from the Coast Survey make one, and their work was then reproduced by tracings and photographs for use by subordinate headquarters.[13] Another innovation was the military telegraph linking McDowell's headquarters with the War Office and the more important camps, forts and outposts of his command. Visitors found the telegraph office--with the operator bending over his key and the officers waiting to take the messages to General McDowell--one of the most interesting features of his headquarters.[14]

[12] O. R., II, 37. The ruins of Arlington Mill are depicted in The Pictorial War Record, I (May 20, 1882), 305; and in The London Illustrated News, Oct. 26, 1861.

[13] H. L. Whiting to A. D. Bache, May 27, 1861, in Military and Naval Service of the U. S. Coast Survey (Washington: Govt. Printing Office, 1916), 33; and Ann. Report of the Supt. of the U. S. Coast Survey (Washington: Govt. Printing Office, 1861), 39c., 79, and 164.

[14] Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, XII (June 8, 1861), 57; Nat. Intelligencer's, June 22, 1861; MS Diary of S. P. Heintzelman, entry for June 20, 1861, Heintzelman Papers, L. C.; and William R. Plum, The Military Telegraph in the Civil War (2 vols. Chicago: McClury & Co., 1882), I, 68f.

But the greatest novelty were the large observation balloons that often floated high over Arlington or the line of outposts to the west. Though European armies had used them, at least experimentally, for many years, but never before had they been used by an American army. To determine their potential military value, McDowell assigned an officer of the Topographical Bureau, Captain A. W. Whipple, to decide which, if any, of the professional aeronauts--John Wise, James Allan, and "Professor" Thaddeus S. C. Lowe--should be employed by the Federal government to accompany his army in the field. Of the three, Lowe had been most successful. In almost daily flights he had shown that he could navigate his craft over the enemy lines and then safely return by utilizing the different air currents to be found at various heights. He had also demonstrated that a telegraph line could be rigged between his balloon and the ground, had flown his balloon at night, and had succeeded in locating several Confederate outposts and bivouacs which could not be seen from the ground. But it remained to be seen whether the balloons and their gas-generating apparatus would be practical for active military operations.[15]

Ravensworth

From the overseer, who came over to see her at Ravensworth, where she passed her first days away from home, Mrs. Lee learned of the sad transformation taking place at Arlington. "He was so nervous that he could scarcely refrain from tears," she wrote General Lee. McGuire's life had been threatened by some volunteers, she said, and General McDowell had found it necessary to post guards about the house. "I fear there is nothing but the special protection of Heaven which can save it from ruin,"

[15] N. Y. Times, June 26, 27, 1861; and 3 O. R., 257. For a definitive account of balloon warfare in the Civil War, see F. Stansbury Haydon, Aeronautics in the Union and Confederate Armies (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1941), 23, 84.

she said.[16]

To her husband, the possible loss or destruction of Arlington--like the war itself--was a manifestation of divine wrath, to be borne with patience. "I sympathize deeply in your feelings at leaving your dear home," he wrote Mary. "I have experienced them myself, and they are constantly revived. I fear we have not been grateful enough for the happiness there within our reach, and our Heavenly Father has found it necessary to deprive us of what he has given us." As the weeks passed, Mrs. Lee became more reconciled to her situation. "I never saw her more cheerful, and she seems to have no doubt of our success," wrote another "refugee," who met her at Chantilly, the home of another relative, a little later. By the time she reached Richmond, Mrs. Lee was in even better spirits. A lady who met Lee in a Richmond church about this time later recalled how calmly he spoke of the occupation of Arlington and the flight of his wife. "She has moved out of the way of the enemy twice, and now says they will have to take her--she will move no more," he told her with a smile.[17]

Chantilly

She was at "Kinloch," in Fauquier County, where she stayed during most of July, when she received a letter from Markie Williams, who had recently been at Arlington to get her things. She had gotten a permit from General Scott, Markie said, to give to the sentry posted at the door. "The poor House looked so desolate," she wrote. Inside, she had gone upstairs to her room, closed the door, and cried. Afterwards, she had packed her trunk and then gone up to the attic where Tom Tita, their old cat, had taken refuge. "Oh, how many fond recollections of the past

Markie W. Kinlock

Tom Tita

[16] Mrs. Lee to Lee, May 30, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[17] Lee to Mrs. Lee, May 25, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS. Mrs. Judith W. McGuire, Diary of a Southern Refugee during the War (New York: E. J. Hale & Son, 1868), 26; and Mrs. Julia Tyler to Mrs. Gardiner, in Lyon G. Tyler, The Letters and Times of the Tylers (2 vols. Richmond: Whittet and Shepperson, 1885), II, 651f.

did that poor little cat bring up," she wrote. "He looked so pitiful there in his lonely garret home..." She had also seen some of the family servants, among them Selina, Daniel and Ephraim. "All asked after you with interest."[18]

Had Markie cared to notice, she would have also observed the hurry and bustle at Arlington as McDowell's staff and his subordinate commanders prepared plans to attack the Confederate army near Manassas Junction, Virginia, not many miles distant.[19] The public had long since been demanding such a move, and administration leaders feared that unless it were made, Northern zeal in prosecuting the war might fall off. On July 16, McDowell set his army on the march for Centerville, near which, five days later, he attacked the Confederate army stationed above a little stream called Bull Run. For a time it appeared that the Federal forces would win out, but eventually the Confederates turned the tide and the anticipated victory turned rapidly into a retreat, then a rout. Many of the fleeing soldiers, soaked to the skin by a downpour that fell during the night, halted only when they were safe within the defenses of Arlington; others kept on, into Washington, which by this time was in a state of near-panic.

Once back in his old headquarters, McDowell set about strengthening the defenses of the capital and reorganizing his army. Aware that he was being blamed for the defeat, however unjustly, he was not surprised when, a few days later, General George B. McClellan was put in command. Since McClellan chose to live in the city, McDowell kept the headquarters of his now subordinate command at Arlington, living as before, in a small

[18] July 13, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[19] MS Diary of S. P. Heintzelman, entry for July 14, 1861, Heintzelman Papers, L. C.

tent near the mansion.[20]

News of the defeat caused a deep sense of humiliation in the North, and ended all the hope that the conflict might be won by a single decisive victory. But as the weeks went by and the Southern regiments did not advance towards Washington, despair gradually gave way to a sober determination to see the struggle through regardless of how long it took or cost.

The new spirit was reflected in the camps and headquarters at Arlington. McClellan was a superb organizer and an energetic worker, and under his direction the army was slowly transformed into an efficient fighting force during the months of inaction that followed the defeat in July. With the Army of the Potomac, as it was christened, growing daily in size and complexity, McDowell found it necessary to take over more of the mansion for his staff. The drawing room, of which the Lees were so proud, was given to McDowell's adjutant-general, and it was there that a number of colonels, still smarting from the defeat inflicted on them at Bull Run, learned that they had been promoted to the rank of brigadier general. Several like Erasmus D. Keyes and William B. Franklin, were to win a measure of fame during the war, but one was to be especially famous--William Tecumsah Sherman.[21]

[20]Russell, op. cit., 475. There is no evidence whatsoever that Arlington House was used as a hospital after the first battle of Bull Run, or at any subsequent date. The misconception, like many others, can be traced to Decker and McSween, op. cit., 61, who describe the hospital tents at Arlington and mention that the staff surgeon "of the hospital corps" had his "headquarters" in the house. No doubt they meant that the "medical director"--his official designation--of McDowell's corps, had his office, like other staff officers, in the mansion. This officer, Surgeon W. S. King, wrote numerous official reports dated Arlington House; but at no time does he mention the house being used for a hospital. Neither does John W. Buckley, surgeon in charge of the Patent Office Hospital, in his list of homes and buildings used for hospitals in and about Washington, for which see Marcus Benjamin, ed., Washington During War Time (Washington: G.A.R., c. 1901).

[21]William T. Sherman, Memoirs (2 vols. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1875), I, 191. Sherman was then in command of the Third Brigade, First Division, of McDowell's army.

For a number of reasons, military and political, the Confederates made no effort to follow up their initial victory with an advance on Washington, although their flag flying above their earthwork on Munson's Hill just a few miles west of Arlington, was a constant reminder of their presence. To guard the capital and protect his army while it was in the process of being organized, McClellan ordered the existing forts, especially those on Arlington Heights, strengthened and enlarged and directed that others be constructed on commanding hills and ridges surrounding the city. To link them, roads were cut through the woods, and gradually a net of trenches and rifle pits were added to support them. A number of forts covered the approaches to Arlington Heights, of which three--Cass, Tillinghast, and Whipple--were situated on the estate itself, not far west of the mansion. The famed Arlington Forest resounded with the blows of axmen and the shouts of teamsters as fields of fire were cleared in every direction, devastating what an English correspondent described as "some of the finest woods I have yet seen in America." Though some of the trees near the mansion were spared, it was a desolate scene when the work was finished, forts and entrenchments standing here and there like yellow islands in a sea of stumps. Elsewhere on the estate, efforts were made to prevent the wanton destruction of timber. Placards were posted to protect the fine old trees, but nevertheless Arlington continued to suffer from the hard usage given it by the troops which occupied much of it. Fences disappeared, burnt up in a thousand campfires; roads and drives were cut to pieces and new ones made in every direction to satisfy military necessities and the convenience of the thousands of blue-clad soldiers who bivouaced there during the winter of 1861-1862.[22]

[22]Russell, op. cit., 895; and Anthony Trollope, North America (New York: Harper & Bros., 1863), 315ff.

The forts and encampments, the artillery parks and wagon trains, the rumble of cannon being practice-fired, the sharper reports of musketry target practice--all combined to make Arlington almost like a battlefield. On one exciting occasion a balloon with which Professor Lowe was seeking to impress General McDowell by landing near the mansion was driven off by rifle fire in the mistaken belief that it was Confederate.[23] Even the old ferryboat George Washington Parke Custis had been transformed. Taken over by the Navy, its upper works had been removed to provide a flush deck for balloon ascensions, while below decks apparatus for generating hydrogen gas and machinery for inflating and flying a balloon had been installed in the space formerly occupied by the engines and boiler, so the vessel had to be towed by a tug or propelled by long poles or oars. Despite this handicap, the Custis' shallow draft made it well suited for use on shallow rivers that cut deep into much of Virginia, and as the first vessel of its kind in the world, it was to prove most useful that fall in observing the Confederates from otherwise inaccessible points along the Potomac.[24]

To the soldiers and the cicilians who visited their camps, it was a grim but inspiring scene. A Northern lady, Julia Ward Howe, found it especially so, that autumn. She had witnessed a review at a crossroads west of Arlington, and night was coming on as she returned to the city in her carriage. Ahead of her was a Wisconsin regiment, which whiled away the dusty march by singing its favorite song, "John Brown's Body," Inspired by the singing, the "burnished rows of steel," and the "hundred circling camps" she had seen on Arlington Heights, Mrs. Howe sat down that night in her hotel room to write new words to the stirring song she had

[23] "The Comte de Paris and his Experiences in our Civil War," Illustrated American, III (Sept. 27, 1890), 536. Also, 3 O. R., III, 257.
[24] Ibid., III, 265ff; Haydon, op. cit., 256ff., and plate 27.

heard that afternoon. The result was "The Battle Hymn of the Republic,"[25] one of the most famous and inspiring songs to come out of the Civil War.

Amidst the warlike scene, the old house on the hill seemed strangely serene. To all who saw it, it seemed to symbolize the tragic pass to which the nation had come. Though its rooms now echoed to the tread of boots, the jingle of equipment, it still retained much of its former charm, having as yet suffered comparatively little from the martial uses to which it had been put. "After the vandalism I have witnessed..., it was a pleasurable relief to find here...respect for the property and furniture," wrote an army surgeon, in November, 1861. "The garden, with its fences is preserved, and the walls of almost every room in the immense old building are covered with the rich paintings and old family pictures.... The antique bureaus and side-boards, calling up impressions of generations long passed away, are still tenants of the building; and the halls recall Scott's description of the Halls of the Douglas, where the arms of the hunters and the trophies of the hunt mingled with the trappings of the warrior..."

A New York cavalryman, touched by the desolate atmosphere in "the quaint old building," wrote home: "Instinctively a feeling of sadness took possession of the heart at the mournful contrast between the past and present of this beautiful spot."[26]

[25]Julia Ward Howe, Reminiscences, 1819-1899 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1899), 275f. Also Rufus R. Dawes, Service with the Sixth Wisconsin Volunteers (Marietta, Ohio: E. R. Alderman & Sons, 1890), 28f.

[26]Alfred L. Castleman, The Army of the Potomac (Milwaukee: Strickland & Co., 1863), 53f.; and John A. Edwards, ed., Sword and Pen: or the Ventures and Adventures of Willard Glazier (Philadelphia: Ziegler & Co., 1881), 123.

By winter, Mrs. Lee's arthritis had gotten worse, but otherwise she was in good health and spirits. Next to her family, her greatest concern was for her old home, about which friends kept her informed in letters smuggled through the lines. "She is very cheerful, and showed me the other day a picture of Arlington, in a number of Harper's Magazine, which had mistaken its way and strayed to Dixie," wrote another refugee, a lady who met her at the Hot Springs, in October. "She thought the representation good, as it certainly is what Arlington was; but it is said that those fine trees are living trees no more-all felled to make room for the everlasting fortifications. She clings to the hope of getting back to it..."[27]

Mrs. Lee spent the first Christmas of the war at the White House plantation, where she was joined by the rest of the family except her husband, her eldest son and Mildred. Though regretful that they had to celebrate the holiday away from home, they made the most of their reunion. Young Robert, especially, enjoyed the holiday season; he thought the White House a fine place. "The farm is lovely," he wrote Mildred, "the land lying level near the river & breaking into beautiful hills as you go back inland. The House is small, but very comfortable & very nicely furnished; the grounds around the house are being improved daily."[28] Too young to worry, he little thought that within a few months the war would sweep over the place, destroying everything that he had admired.

Christmas Day found General Lee in South Carolina, where he had been sent to organize the coast defenses of that state. Most of the day he devoted to catching up with his correspondence with his family, and as he wrote he fell to thinking of their old home and the hard times which

[27] Mrs. Lee to Annie Lee, Sept. 21, 1861; same to [Mildred?] Lee, n.d., but c. Nov., 1861; both in DeButts-Ely MSS; and McGuire, op. cit., 65f.
[28] R. E. Lee, Jr., to Mildred Lee, Jan. 5, 1862, DeButts-Ely MSS.

had befallen it. With a natural resentment but a bitterness unusual for him, he wrote to one of his daughters:

> Among the calamities of war, the hardest to bear, perhaps, is the separation of families and friends. Yet all must be endured to accomplish our independence and maintain our self-government. In my absence from you, I have thought of you very often, and regretted that I could do nothing for your comfort. Your old home, if not destroyed by our enemies, has been so desecrated that I cannot bear to think of it. I should have preferred it to have been wiped from the earth, its beautiful hill sunk, and its sacred trees buried, rather than to have been degraded by the presence of those who revel in the ill they do for their own selfish purposes. 29

His sense of fairness and his old self-control must have reasserted themselves soon afterwards, judging from the letter he wrote to his wife, later in the day.

> I cannot let this day of grateful rejoicing pass, dear Mary, without some communication with you. I am thankful for the many among the past that I have passed with you, and the remembrance of them fills me with pleasure....As to our old home, if not destroyed, it will be difficult even to be recognized. Even if the enemy had wished to preserve it, it would almost have been impossible. With the number of troops encamped around it, the change of officers, the want of fuel, shelter, &c, all the dire necessities of war, it is vain to think of its being in a habitable condition. I fear, too, books, furniture & the relics of Mt. Vernon will be gone. It is better to make up our minds to a general loss. They cannot take away the remembrances of the spot, & the memories of those that to us rendered it sacred. That will remain to us as long as life will last, & that we can preserve. 30

The following month his duties took him to Florida for a short time, where he had the opportunity of going over to Cumberland Island to see his father's grave. On his return to South Carolina, he found several letters from his family awaiting him, including one from Mrs. Lee, from which he learned that Mrs. Fitzhugh, at Ravensworth, had not been disturbed by the Federal army. "That is some comfort," he wrote his wife. "I am glad also to hear that dear Arlington is extant." 31

A few days later he received a court decree regarding the settlement

[29] Lee to one of his daughters, Dec. 25, 1861, in Jones, Reminiscences, 385f.

[30] Same to Mrs. Lee, Dec. 25, 1861, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[31] Same to same, Jan. 18, 1862, DeButts-Ely MSS.

of his father-in-law's estate. According to it, the Custis slaves were to be given their freedom by the end of the year, and the legacies of the girls were to be paid by selling some of the White House and Romancock land in the event the sale of Smith's Island and the personal property not devised by the will proved insufficient. Except to free the slaves, he could do nothing about the decree at the moment. Arlington and Smith's Island were in the hands of the enemy, and it would not be possible to sell any land while the war was in progress.[32]

White House
Romancock
Smith's Is.

It was about this time--as Lee had anticipated--that some of the Mount Vernon relics disappeared from Arlington. The housekeeper, Selina Gray, had kept their presence a secret, thinking to safeguard them. But to her dismay, she found one morning that the basement room in which they were stored had been broken into and some of the boxes opened. Wishing to be relieved of the responsibility, she turned over her keys to General McDowell to whom she reported the theft. A further search revealed that the door to the attic had also been broken open, so McDowell had both doors closed and set about moving the remaining relics to a safer place. In this, he had the assistance of Congressman Caleb Lyons, of Rhode Island, who had visited Arlington several times during Mr. Custis' lifetime, and so was able to identify some of the relics when McDowell showed them to him in the cellar. The rest they identified by the help of some of the older servants and drawings and descriptions of them in a book on Mount Vernon Benson Lossing had recently published. They were happy to

[32]Same to same, Jan. 28, 1862, DeButts-Ely MSS. Reports that Smith's Island was being used by smugglers caused it to be occupied by the Federal forces blockading the coast of Virginia, for which, see O.R., V, 715.

find that some of the famous "Cincinnati" china, two pieces of Martha Washington's "States" china, the Vaughn vases, the war tent of Washington, Martha Washington's tea table, and a number of miscellaneous relics were still there. The most important piece missing, they discovered, was the large Washington punch bowl.

McDowell, who had only recently moved into the mansion because of an injury he had sustained in a fall from a horse, was chagrined that the theft had occurred despite his presence. "I have during the time I have been here endeavoured to take the greatest care of this house and its furniture, and of the grounds, &c.," he wrote to one of his friends on General McClellan's staff, "but from what has been done and what will be done in the changes to take place in the different persons who may occupy the house with their staff, servants, followers, &c., and the crowd of curiosity-seekers constantly coming here, this place is not a safe one for the preservation of anything that is known to have an historical interest small or great." He thought that the relics, together with the family papers in the attic should be placed for safekeeping in either the Patent Office or the Smithsonian Institute. Markie's brother Lawrence, a major in the U. S. cavalry, suggested that they be turned over to Mrs. Lee's aunt, Mrs. Peters of "Tudor Place," Georgetown, but higher headquarters chose to follow the general's advice, so the precious mementoes were packed up and taken over to the Patent Office.[33]

Maj. U.S.A. Lawrence Williams

Mrs Peters Tudor Place

Exactly which Washington relics had been stolen, or which disappeared later, cannot be said; some not identified by McDowell and Lyons may have been carried away at one time or another, and apparently some of Mrs. Lee's

[33]Gen. I. McDowell to Brig. Gen. S. Williams, Jan. 7, 1862, quoted in Enoch A. Chase, "George Washington's Heirlooms at Arlington," Current History, March, 1929, 975f; and Caleb B. Smith to Gen. I. McDowell, Jan. 21, 1862, Letters Sent, Sec. of Interior, Misc. No. 2 (Feb. 23, 1856-Mar. 31, 1862), 328. Also, Nat. Republican (Washington, D. C.), Jan. 28, 1862.

relatives, with her permission, took others away, which presumably were returned to her after the war.[34]

In the spring, after McClellan's army departed for Fort Monroe to begin its advance up the Peninsula towards Richmond, Arlington seemed strangely deserted, even though several thousand soldiers remained behind to guard the city. Seen from the city, it looked much as it had in the old, peaceful days. An Englishman, looking at it from across the river, thought that the national capital owed what natural beauty it possessed to the fine trees that remained on the hills across the river. But when he reached there, he was depressed to find the park dreary and neglected, so full of stumps and brush that his horse could hardly push through. He came across no soldiers on his lonely ride, though occasionally the whir of a rifle bullet reminded him unpleasantly that some were still about, occupying their leisure by firing at any object that pleased their fancy. "Great attempts have been made to put a stop to this practice in the grounds of the park," he wrote in his journal, "but it was found impossible to enforce the prevention of this promiscuous shooting."[35]

From nearby Fort Tillinghast, a youthful cannoneer described to his mother how sadly the mansion and its grounds had deteriorated.

> There is nothing here to keep up one's spirits, [he wrote] for we are away from everybody and everything, with the exception of the Arlington House...It has been a splendid place, but now everything has been destroyed, the magnificent forest around it having been cut down, and the flower gardens neglected. The pictures have nearly all been taken away, and the house much injured. The rooms are very large, and there is a long entry running the entire length of the house, adorned with stags' heads, and a few

[34] For a family Bible taken from Arlington, see Mrs. Lee to Miss Fannie Nottingham, May 6, 1866, in "Letters from an Old Trunk," Va. Mag. of His. & Bio., XLIV (Oct., 1936), 335.

[35] Edward Dicey, Six Months in the Federal States (2 vols. London: The Macmillan Co., 1863), II, 15ff.

splendid paintings still remain.[36]

Meanwhile, at the White House, Mrs. Lee had found herself in the path of the Union advance up the peninsula, though fortunately for her, McClellan allowed his army to be held up at Yorktown until the middle of May, after which it slowly followed the retreating Confederates towards Richmond. Having left her own home under similar circumstances, she now had to abandon that of her son. In her annoyance, she penned a note before leaving and pinned it up on an inside door. It read: "Northern soldiers who profess to reverence Washington, forbear to desecrate the house of his first married life, the property of his wife, now owned by her descendents. A Granddaughter of Mrs. Washington." To this, a captain of a Federal gunboat who took charge of the few valuables, books and portraits he found in the house a few days later, intending to return them to Mrs. Lee, replied: "Lady--A Northern officer has protected your property in sight of the enemy, and at the request of your overseer."[37]

As chief military advisor to President Davis, Lee had much to do with the operations that eventually brought McClellan's army to a grinding halt almost in sight of Richmond, and when General Johnston was severely wounded at the Battle of Fair Oaks, succeeded him as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia. Then, in a series of desperate battles, he beat the Federals back to a point where McClellan had to either retreat further or shift his base from the White House to the James River for another try at the Confederate capital. In the midst of these crucial operations, Lee was dealt a hard blow when news came that his little grandson had died. "I cannot help

[36]Robert G. Carter, Four Brothers in Blue (Washington: Gibson Bros. Press, 1913), 54f.

[37]Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, XIV (June 7, 1862), 155. Mrs. Lee was in error in ascribing the house to Washington's early married life. The original house was gone by 1820, when another and simpler structure was built on the old foundations, for which, see Swem, op. cit., 132.

grieving at his loss," he wrote to Mrs. Lee, "& know what a void it will occasion in the hearts of his parents."[38]

Lee must have been concerned, too, when he learned that his wife, who had taken refuge in the home of a friend, was now behind Federal lines; rumor had it that she was being held as a hostage. Instead, however, she was treated courteously by the Federals, and eventually was allowed to pass back through the lines. Lee was on hand to greet her when her carriage reached the Confederate lines--the first time he had seen her in fifteen months--and from there he took her to Richmond, where she remained throughout most of the remainder of the war.[39] About this time, too, Lee learned that Rooney's house had taken fire and burned to the ground during the excitement attending McClellan's change of base. He appears to have accepted its loss as part of the destruction inevitable in war, and seems to have been more irked that "Grace Darling," his old mare and companion of the Mexican War, had been stolen. "She was seen bestrode by some Yankee, with her Colt by her side," he wrote Mrs. Lee. "I could be better resigned to many things than that. I must try and be resigned to that, too."[40]

Rooney's house burned

Triumphs on the battlefield, and occasionally defeat, accompanied by privations and deeply-felt personal losses--such was to be the pattern of their lives until the end of the war.

Annie died of typhoid fever in October, 1862, a little over a month

[38] Lee to Mrs. Lee, July 7, 1862, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[39] "Journal" of Mrs. Henry G. Dulany, entry for June 9, 1862, quoted in Andrews, Scraps of Paper, 18. MacDonald, op. cit., gives a detailed account of Mrs. Lee's adventures inside the Union lines.

[40] Aug. 3, 1862, DeButts-Ely MSS. An illustrated article about the White House and its destruction appeared in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, XIV (July 26, 1862), 278.

after her father fought McClellan's army to a draw at bloody Antietam, in Maryland. Mrs. Lee saw her daughter buried in the little town in North Carolina where she had died; someday, she hoped, Annie's body could be brought back to "her own dear home" at Arlington. Another sad blow came two months later, in December, when Rooney's second child, an infant girl, died. "I was grateful at her birth," Lee wrote sadly to Charlotte, Rooney's wife. "I felt that she would be such a comfort to you, such a pleasure to my dear Fitzhugh, and would fill so full the void still aching in our hearts."[41] More misfortune came to Rooney, now a general in the Confederate cavalry, in June, 1863, when he was wounded at the Battle of Brandy Station and captured by the enemy. For almost a year he would be kept in prison, first at Fort Monroe and then at Fort Lafayette, New York, and by the time he was exchanged would have lost his Charlotte forever, she having died the day after Christmas, 1863.[42]

That summer, too, Orton Williams, whom they had known since a boy, was hung as a spy in Tennessee where he had been captured in civilian clothes while on some mysterious mission. Worn down by privations and sorrow, Mrs. Lee was now so badly crippled that she could seldom leave her wheel chair. Almost it seemed that tragedy must touch all who had once been happy at Arlington.[43]

Through it all, Lee accepted the personal blows dealt him by fate with the same calm patience and resignation to the will of God with which he faced those dealt him on the battlefield. The qualities developed in him over the years by his experiences in the army and his home life now made him the military champion of the embattled South and its greatest hero.

[41] Mrs. Lee to Miss Mary Lee, Oct. 25, 1862; and same to "my dear child," Oct. 26, 1862; both in DeButts-Ely MSS. Also Lee to Mrs. Charlotte Lee, Dec. 10, 1862, in E. J. Lee, op. cit., 442.

[42] For Rooney's capture, see R. E. Lee, Jr., op. cit., 93ff; also Freeman, Lee, III, 210f.

[43] Ibid., III, 211f. Also, Torrence, op. cit., 171f.

His self-discipline rarely deserted him, and his religious beliefs, deepened by his experiences in the war, gave him a humility and simplicity sufficient to withstand the greatest discouragements. His splended presence on the field of battle, his kindliness and courtesy to all regardless of rank, won him the devotion of his officers and men, while his brilliant leadership gave hope and fighting spirit to the entire South. Always he was a knightly, Christian gentleman, humane and magnanimous whether in victory or defeat.

Despite the immense responsibility he bore as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, he took the necessary legal steps to free the Custis slaves in the fall of 1862, giving them the choice of going their own way or remaining on in their old home.[44] Like his wife, he never ceased to look forward to the time when the war would be over and they would be reunited at Arlington. "I have pleased myself in reminiscences today of the happy Christmases we have enjoyed together at our once ahppy home," he wrote Mildred from Fredericksburg, Christmas Day, 1862. "Notwithstanding its present desecrated & pillaged condition, I trust that a just & merciful God may yet gather all that he may spare under its beloved roof. How filled with thanks & gratitude will our hearts then be!"[45]

Nor did his sense of humor entirely desert him. "I send you, Mrs. Lee, a likeness of your husband that has come from beyond the big water," he wrote Mary in March, 1863. "He is a hard favoured man & has a very rickety position on his pins. I hope his beard will please you for the artist seems to have laid himself out on that."[46]

[44]For the emancipation of the Custis slaves, see Lee to Mrs. Lee, Dec. 21, 1862; Jan. 8, Nov. 11, 1863; and Jan. 24, 1864; all in DeButts-Ely MSS. See also, same to Amanda Parks, Mar. 9, 1866, R. E. Lee, Jr., op. cit., 222f.

[45]Same to Mildred Lee, Dec. 25, 1862, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[46]Same to Mrs. Lee, May. 21, 1863, DeButts-Ely MSS.

Because he was too modest to allow many painters and photographers to take his picture or make his portrait, few were made of him during the war. A word-portrait, one of the best that survives, was made by an English correspondent who met him late in 1862:

> It is difficult for the traveller who, after infinite difficulty, wins his way into the presence of men whom events have made so famous as General Lee...to resist the inevitable tendency of human nature which prompts him to idealize and set upon a pedestal, the plain, unpretending man whom he sees before him. It is true that he cannot be long in General Lee's presence without discovering a plain, unaffected simplicity which would lead him to dread a newspaper panegyric more than a wound....
>
> General Lee is, I believe, between 50 and 60 years of age, but wears his years well, and strikes you as the incarnation of health and endurance, as he rears his erect soldier-like form from his seat by the fireside to greet courteously the stranger. His manner is calm and stately, his presence impressive and imposing, his dark brown eyes remarkably direct and honest as they meet you fully and firmly, and inspire plenary confidence. The shape and type of the head a little resemble Garibaldi's, but the features are those of a much handsomer man. On the rare occasions when he smiles, and on the still rarer occasions when he laughs heartily, disclosing a fine unbroken row of white, firm set teeth, the confidence and sympathy which he inspires are irresistable. A child thrown among a knot of strangers would be inevitably drawn to General Lee first in the company, and would run to claim his protection. The voice is fine and deep, but slightly monotonous in tone. Altogether, the most winning attributes of the General is his unaffected childlike guilelessness. It is very rare that a man of his age, conversant with important events, and thrown to the surface of mighty convulsions, retains the impress of a simple, ingenuous nature to so eminent a degree....It is obvious that the most entire and trusting confidence is placed in General Lee by his subordinate officers, whose respect and affection he seems to have won....In all the varied attributes which go to make up the commander-in-chief of a great army, it is certain that General Lee has no superior in the Confederacy, and it may fairly be doubted whether he has any equal. [47]

As the conflict dragged on and Lee won ever greater fame as the hero of the South, Arlington continued to take on a character of its own because of his association with it. More and more, it was becoming a symbol of the war, respected or despised according to the emotions of those who beheld it.

[47] The Times (London, Eng.), Dec. 30, 1862.

After the Second Battle of Bull Run, or Manassas, the old house, now the headquarters for the defenses west of the Potomac, again witnessed the spectacle of a defeated Federal army reeling back on Washington. "The column passing with its ragged banners, and the long ambulance train with its awful freight of torn and battered humanity, burdened us with a crushing sense of the business we were engaged in," wrote a soldier who saw it while stationed in one of the Arlington forts. General McClellan ordered the mansion burned if the enemy moved on Washington, but fortunately the tide of battle came no closer, and it was spared.[48] An incidental result of the battle, however, was the construction of a large new earthwork, Fort Whipple, about a thousand yards due west of the mansion; when finished, this was one of the most important fortifications on the Virginia side of the Potomac.[49]

After December, 1862, the mansion was no longer used as a headquarters, but a number of officers stationed nearby continued living there. Some had their families with them, and the presence of the women and children--one general had nine offspring--made the old place seem almost a home again. To these temporary occupants, living at Arlington was an unforgettable wartime experience highlighted by the little social affairs that they put on for their guests and such chance events as a moonlight serenade by a military band from some nearby garrison.[50]

[48] Harold A. Small, ed., The Road to Richmond: The Civil War Memories of Major Abner R. Small (Berkeley, Calif.: U. of California Press, 1939), 41ff.; and S. O. No. 218, Hq. of the Army, Sept. 2, 1862, cited by Kenneth P. Williams, Lincoln Finds a General (2 vols. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949), I, 352.

[49] J. G. Barnard, Report on the Defenses of Washington (Washington: Govt Printing Office, 1871), 32; and Osborne, op. cit., 29. No trace remains of Fort Whipple. Fort McPherson, similar in size and shape, was begun in 1864, but never completed. Its remains were razed in 1947, but its outline is perpetuated by the road net work about the site.

[50] MS Diary of S. P. Heintzelman, entries for Oct. 6-9, 18, 19, 22, Nov. 1862; and Jan. 6, 1863, Heintzelman Papers, L. C. Also, G. C. No. 11, ... Defenses of Washington, Dec. 6, 1862, published in Nat. Republican (Washington, D. C.), Dec. 9, 1862. Mathew Brady made a photograph of some of the officers standing on the portico steps with their wives, December, 1862,

Some of the occupants, like General Heintzelman, had known the Lees in happier days, and regretted the harsh necessity that had deprived their old friends of their home, and everyone more or less expected that the estate would be returned to its owners when the war was over. But Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton felt otherwise. Gloomy, boorish and vindicative, a ruthless disciplinarian who deemed secession no different than treason, Stanton was determined that General Lee should never again enjoy his old home at Arlington.[51]

Accordingly, he put the estate to every possible use. One of the sights of wartime Washington was the vast corral and enormous stables for Army remounts near Arlington Springs.[52] Up on Arlington Heights, a large hospital for convalescent patients was constructed early in the war, though later it was moved farther west to what was believed to be a more healthful location.[53] And on the southern part of the estate was "Freedmen's Village," established in 1863 to provide for the thousands of runaway slaves, many unable to support themselves, who had streamed into Washington after the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect on the first day of that year, following the precedent established early in the war for caring for the Arlington slaves.[54] A model of its kind for several years, the village normally housed about 2,000 freedmen in rows of two and a half story, white frame houses on streets named in honor of prominent abolitionists. A

[51]This generalization will be supported below in connection with the establishment of the Arlington National Cemetery.

[52]Two of the stables were 325 feet long. M.C. Meigs to E.M. Stanton, Sept. 28, 1865, W. D., Rec. of Q. M. Gen. Off., Nat. Archives.

[53]MS Diary of S. P. Heintzelman, entries for Nov. 28, 1862 and Jan. 6, 1863, Heintzelman Papers, L. C.

[54]For an early item regarding the need for caring for the Arlington slaves, see N. Y. Times, May 29, 1861. The Adjutant-General directed, Jan. 2, 1862, that they be given subsistance because their care had hitherto been the responsibility of the owner and must now be assumed by the government, as temporary owner. Gen. L. Thomas to Col. J.P. Taylor, Jan. 2, 1862, W. D. Rec., Q. M. Gen. Off., Nat. Archives.

church, a hospital, a schoolhouse, and a home for the aged took care of the spiritual and physical needs of those who were unable to work, while the able-bodied, both men and women, were taught useful trades in various workshops or cultivated the fields down by the river.[55]

The use of the estate for such purposes could be justified only during wartime, so early in January, 1864, steps were taken to deprive the Lees permanently of Arlington under war-time laws levying a direct tax on real estate "in the insurrectionary districts." In case of default, the commissioners who were responsible for assessing and collecting the tax, were empowered to sell the property, and since the intent of the act was to penalize "rebels" by confiscating their property within the Federal lines, the commissioners ruled that the owners must pay the tax in person.

The tax levied on Arlington was small--$92.07, plus a fifty percent penalty, payable in Alexandria. Too crippled to undertake such a journey even if she could have gotten a pass through the lines, Mrs. Lee sent a relative, Phillip R. Fendall, to pay the tax, but the tax commissioners turned him away on the grounds that he was not the owner of the property. The estate was then advertised for sale at public auction, along with the Four Mile Run Tract (against which a similar tax had been levied) and a number of other properties in the neighborhood, including "Abingdon,"[56] the one-time home of Mrs. Lee's grandfather, John Parke Custis.

Abingdon

[55]For detailed descriptions of Freedman's Village see Harper's Weekly, VIII (May 7, 1864), 294; George T. Barrett, Letters from Canada and the United States (London: J. E. Adlard, 1865), 233f.; and Appleton's Handbook of American Travel-Southern Tour (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1872), 322. See also Lt. Col. E.M. Greene, to Brig. Gen. M. C. Meigs, July 22, 1863, W. D. Rec., Q. M. Gen. Off., Nat. Archives. Late in 1863, Col. Greene was ordered to break up all the contraband camps about Washington and transfer their inmates to Arlington, for which see Nat. Intelligencer, Dec. 17, 1863.

[56]The facts of the case and the laws applicable are set forth in Lee v. Kaufman, Fed. Case No. 8191 (1879), 3 Hughes 163. For a comprehensive study of the "tax sale," and its final settlement, see Enoch A. Chase, "The Arlington Case," Va. Law Review, XV (Jan., 1929), 207-233.

1864 1100 acres valued 34,100 brought 26,800 Four Mile Run 7,000 N. at 4,100 S. of

Despite the extreme cold weather that day, the sale held in Alexandria on January 11, 1864, was well attended. Arlington--1100 acres valued at $34,100--was the first property put on the block; it was bought by the government for $26,800. The Four Mile Run Tract, valued at $7,000 went next, to a private citizen for $4,100.[57]

Bidding might have been more spirited had there been less doubt as to the legality of the proceedings. There was always the chance that, after the war, the courts might rule the direct taxes unconstitutional, in which case the estate would revert to the Lees. Again, the courts might hold that the tax commissioners had exceeded their authority in rejecting the payment proffered indirectly by Mrs. Lee, with similar results. It was also possible that the courts might invalidate the government's title because Mrs. Lee was not paid the balance, over and above the taxes owed, paid by the government for the property.[58]

Stanton

Stanton and his associates were of course well aware of these flaws in the government title to Arlington, and therefore cast about for some sure means to keep its former owners from ever regaining it. Nor were they long in finding one. For some time the War Department had been under fire because of the perfunctory, often callous, manner in which fallen soldiers were being buried in out-of-the-way places; Arlington because of its natural beauty, would make an ideal cemetery. If one were established there, public criticism would be allayed; at the same

[57]The sale was widely reported in the newspapers, for example, in Nat. Intelligencer, Jan. 13, 1864; Nat. Republican (Wash., D. C.), Jan. 12, 1864; and N. Y. Tribune, Jan. 12, 1864. Smith's Island was subsequently sold for taxes under the same laws. The furnishings were also to have been sold that summer but for some reason the sale was called off. See Daily News (N. Y.), undated clipping in Townsend Coll., Columbia U. Lib., XLVI, 484.

[58]The last objection was made by the attorney who wrote the deed for the property in 1866, Thomas H. Talbot, a prominent Boston attorney, who was later Assistant U. S. Attorney General. See his letter to Sec. of War H. Taft, May 26, 1876, W. D. Rec., Q. M. Gen. Off., Nat. Archives.

time it would be politically, if not legally, impossible to remove the bodies of Federal soldiers in order to return the property to the Lees. Therefore, in May, 1864, the Secretary of War ordered that a national cemetery be established at Arlington--"a happy thought," said a radical newspaper, which also praised him for having personally selected the site for the cemetery.[59]

After the war, General Montgomery C. Meigs, Stanton's Quartermaster General, would be quoted as saying that his one-time associate, General Lee, was "a model of a soldier and the beau ideal of a Christian man."[60] In 1864, however, Meigs was the willing instrument of Stanton's punitive policy, personally making certain that the Lees could never return to Arlington. As far as natural beauty was concerned, the cemetery could have been established almost anywhere on the estate, but Meigs insisted that it be located as close as possible to the house--"encircling" is the word he used. Having ordered that the first burials be made in its immediate vicinity, he was considerably put out when he learned that the officers then living in the mansion had refused to allow any graves to be dug near it, and instead had sent the burial parties down over the hill to the northeast part of the estate, a half mile distant, near where the Custis' had formerly buried their"people."[61] Here the first burials

[59] Nat. Republican (Wash., D. C.), June 17, 1864. Stanton's motives are made clear by his subsequent directives, cited below, regarding burials at Arlington.

[60] Meigs is quoted by Long, op. cit., 44.

[61] Gen. M. C. Meigs to Sec. of War, Aug. 5, 1871, W. D. Rec., Q. M. Gen. Off., Nat. Archives. No evidence can be found to support Decker and McSween's story that Meigs induced President Lincoln to authorize burials at Arlington; op. cit., 62-67; However, they also attribute Meigs' action in locating graves close to the house to his desire to keep the Lees from being able to re-occupy the house as a home. Their statement that public criticism forced the selection of a more attractive burial site than those in use, is partly borne out by Meigs to Stanton, June 16, 1864, 3 O. R., IV, 434f. For Stanton's official explanation that the Soldier's Home Cemetery in Washington was filled, making a new cemetery necessary, see U. S. Govt. Message from the President...with the Reports of the Heads of Departments..., 1864 (Washington, Govt. Printing Office, 1864), 634.

were made May 13, 1864, beginning with a soldier of the 67th Pennsylvania, Private William Christman. The first Confederate, L. Reinhart of the 23rd North Carolina, was buried a few days later. By the end of the month, the two had been joined by hundreds of their comrades who had died in the hospitals and prison camps about the city.[62]

When Meigs learned that his orders had miscarried, he again ordered that all internemnts, then averaging sixty a day, to be made close to the mansion. But once more the officers in the mansion refused to allow the burial parties to come near it, this time sending them off some distance to the west. Having discovered this second "error," as he termed it, the irate Quartermaster General took steps to settle the controversy once and for all. In a letter dated June 15, 1864, he recommended that "the land immediately surrounding the Arlington Mansion" be used as a national cemetery and that the bodies buried in the northeastern section be moved to it." This Stanton endorsed, directing Meigs to lay out a cemetery of no more than two hundred acres at this location, the grounds to be surveyed and suitably enclosed.[63]

This time Meigs took it upon himself to see that the Secretary's directive was carried out. First, he had a detailed sketch made of the

[62]Decker and McSween, op. cit., 62-67, perhaps on the authority of the superintendent of the cemetery with whom they collaborated, state that Reinhart was first to be buried at Arlington. However, the Record of Original Entries, Arl. Nat. Cem. Rec., lists Christman as having died May 11, 1864, and having been buried in grave No. 1. "L. Reinhart, Rebel, N.C.," is listed as "Running No. 1" in a later register than the one cited above, which may account for Decker & McSween's error. Reinhart died May 17, 1864.

Osborne, op. cit., 30, cites a veteran of a Wisconsin regiment to the effect that one of his comrades was buried with military honors, near the Custis graves early in the war. This may well be so, for a number of Wisconsin soldiers did die at Arlington in 1861 and 1862, for which see C. A. Batabrook, Wisconsin Losses in the Civil War (Madison: State of Wisconsin, 1915-34ff.), and it was common practice to make temporary burials at camps and forst, removing the bodies later on to national cemeterys.

[63]Memo. of Gen. M. C. Meigs, dated Apr. 12, 1863, and same to E. M. Stanton, June 15, 1864; both W. D. Rec. in C. M. Gen. Off., Nat. Archives.

grounds to be used for the cemetery; then, to forestall any misunderstanding, intentional or otherwise, he went over the ground with the surveyor. To clinch the matter, he had a long row of graves made on the east side of Mrs. Lee's flower garden, just outside the white picket fence which enclosed it; on the west side he selected a spot for a large underground vault for the remains of unknown soldiers. He then got Stanton to order the soldiers out of the house so that it might be used by the civilian employees of the cemetery.[64]

Newspaper comment on the new cemetery varied according to the political views of the various editors. The National Intelligencer, with whose editor the Custises and Lees had had such a long and pleasant relationship, barely mentioned the new cemetery. On the other hand, the Morning Chronicle, a radical paper, lauded what it termed the "righteous use of the estate of the rebel General Lee." It predicted that "the people of the entire nation will one day, not very far distant, heartily thank the creators of this movement."[65]

No prediction could have been more certain of fulfillment. To the soldier dead it mattered not where they lay whether on some deserted battlefield or in a well-tended, respected graveyard; but to the living there was comfort in the thought that their lost ones--brother, father, husband or son--would rest forever in a consecrated national cemetery. They neither knew nor cared that the Arlington cemetery had been conceived in malice. To them, and to the nation, it would be hallowed as

[64]Memo. of Gen. M. C. Meigs, dated Apr. 12, 1875; same to Gen. D. H. Rucker, June 15, 1864; and Gen. D. H. Rucker to M. C. Meigs, July 8, 1864; all in W. D. Rec., Q. M. Gen. Off., Nat. Archives. The grave of Capt. A. H. Packard, one of those buried along the flower garden, is still there (Record of Original Entries, Arl. Nat. Cem. Rec.). The bodies of the eleven enlisted men buried with him were subsequently moved to the enlisted section of the cemetery and those of officers put in their places according to Decker and McSween, op. cit., 69.

[65]Nat. Intelligencer, June 18, 1864; and Morning Chronicle (Washington, D. C.), June 17, 1864.

the last resting place of the nation's heroic dead.

A few people realized the injustice that had been done and were saddened by it. One, an Englishman who visited Arlington in the fall of 1864, wrote feelingly:

> Four miles from Washington we found ourselves at Arlington House, standing at the open window of the dining room and looking back across the Potomac at the glorious view of the distant city. The house is placed in a lovely situation on the crest of a beautifully wooded slope. It is a queer, old-fashioned place, with heavy columns and flights of steps, strangely like what it is being now turned into-a mausoleum. The doors were all wide open, and we walked in unquestioned by the soldiers who were lounging about the entrance. The rooms had been sacked of their best furniture and looked dreary and desolate. A few pictures remained upon the walls, one or two apparently of merit, which chance had saved from the bayonet...The carpets and curtains were gone; a few tables and chairs alone were left for the use of the soldiers who occupied the building. In front workmen were busy restoring the outer wall, for the park has become enclosed as a cemetery....To see the home of Robert Lee sacked and made into a cemetery, and to fancy the thoughts that would fill that great heart...were so strange to me, and in their strangeness so painful, that I doubt whether I ever had a sadder walk than that visit to the heights of Arlington. [66]

He little dreamed that one day the despoiled house would be a national memorial, maintained by the people of the United States in honor of General Lee.

[66] Barrett, op. cit., 234ff.

CHAPTER XX

"THE PLACE DEAR TO THEIR AFFECTIONS...PROPERLY PRESERVED"

These words, which General Lee wrote in July, 1855 when Arlington was being "renovated," may serve as a period for its postwar history. The storm which swept the Lees from their old home has long since subsided, like the hate and bitterness which deprived them of it forever. Left is the memory of great issues contested on the battlefield with strength and self-denial, courage and conviction by both sides. Long reunited, the nation will always remember the great leaders in that conflict and the ideals for which they stood. Of these, none will be remembered longer, or with more affection and admiration, than Robert E. Lee.

The inspiring leadership which Lee had given his people during the war did not cease with Appomattox. Had he wanted to, he could have capitalized on his prominence and reputation. Instead, he chose to share the fate of his people in defeat. As president of Washington College (now Washington and Lee University), he modestly devoted himself to restoring the South culturally, economically, and politically. Magnanimous in peace as in war, he urged his countrymen to forswear hatred and revenge, and set them an example by laboring to make the little college at Lexington a vigorous influence in the process of rehabilitating his war torn State.

Washington College

Recognizing that harmony in a common purpose was needed above all else, he steadfastly refused to take part in any controversy regarding the causes or the conduct of the war. "I have felt so little desire to

recall the events of the war since the cessation of hostilities, that I have not read a single work that has been published on the subject," he wrote an acquaintance in 1867.[1] Seldom would he even talk about it, even to his closest old comrades. "I think it wisest not to keep open the sores of war, but to follow the example of those nations who endeavoured to obliterate the marks of civil strife, and to commit to oblivion the feelings it engendered," he wrote a year before he died.[2] As always, he chose to follow the path of duty and advised others to do the same, as when he wrote Governor John Letcher shortly after the war:

> The duty of its citizens, then appears to be too plain to admit of doubt. All should unite in honest efforts to obliterate the effects of the war and to restore the blessings of peace. They should remain, if possible, in the country; promote harmony and good feeling, qualify themselves to vote and elect to the State and general Legislatures, wise and patriotic men, who will devote their abilities to the interests of the country and the healing of all dissensions. I have invariably recommended this course since the cessation of hostilities, and have endeavoured to practice it myself. [3]

As executor of the Custis estate, Lee felt obligated to his family to recover as much of their confiscated property as possible. Neither he nor Mrs. Lee had any intention of trying to get the cemetery at Arlington removed, should they regain it in the courts; still he hesitated to take any legal steps for fear such action might provoke a clamor which would jeopardize the return of the other confiscated properties.[4]

[1] Lee to E.A. Pollard, Jan. 24,1867,Lee Letter Bk. No4,DeButts-Ely MSS.
[2] Same to W. F. Broaddus, n.d., 1869, Jones, Reminiscences, 234.
[3] Same to Gov. John Letcher, n. d., R. E. Lee, Jr., op. cit., 163.
[4] Same to Reverdy Johnson, Jan.27, 1866; same to F.L. Smith, Apr. 5, 1866 (both in Lee Letter Bk. No.5); and same to J.S. Black, Jan. 13, 1869, Lee Letter Bk. No.4; all in DeButts-Ely MSS. For the official response to his inquiries, or those of his agents, see Meigs to Stanton, Feb.23,1866, requesting authority to have the title to Arlington searched and corrected at once, if found faulty. See also Lt. Col. J.M. Moore to Maj. Gen. D.H. Rucker, Dec. 11, 1865, relaying a remark of Smith Lee to the superintendent of the cemetery while visiting Arlington to the effect that the house could still be used as a "pleasant residence." Moore's suggestion that another thousand bodies be buried close to the house in order to "more firmly secure the grounds...to the Government by rendering it undesirable as a future residence," was endorsed by Gen. Meigs and presumably was carried out. The last two letters cited are in W. D. Rec., Q. M. Gen. Off., Nat. Archives.

Events demonstrated the wisdom of his caution. Before long, Rooney Robert had the two Pamunkey farms in hand, working to restore them to their former prosperous condition, and Smith's Island was regained in a court action in 1868. But it was otherwise with Arlington and the Four Mile Run Tract. Mrs. Lee was able to get official permission to remove any of her belongings still at Arlington, but when she sought to recover the Washington relics in the Patent Office which President Johnson had directed to be given back to her, a hostile Congress intervened to prevent their return.[5]

From the bitterness displayed on this occasion, it was apparent that Mrs. Lee had not the slightest chance of getting back Arlington. Still she never entirely lost hope. "If I could forget my dear home I would be content and happy, though I often feel as if I could not die in peace ywhere else," she wrote a friend in 1866.

Though confined to her wheelchair, she was as animated and energetic as ever as she went about making a new home for her family at Lexington. To one who voiced his admiration of her courage, she replied: "Providence has spared me the use of my hands & eyes, & I have to employ them all the time." A favorite pastime was to color photographs of the old portraits which had once hung at Arlington. A new edition of her father's Recollections

[5] Smith's Island was restored Apr. 23, 1868; for which see Lee to H.L. Neale, May 11, 1868, DeButts-Ely MSS. For Lee's comment on Congress not allowing the return of the relics in the Patent Office, see Lee to James May, Mar. 13, 1861, Lee Letter Bk. No. 4, DeButts-Ely MSS; and same to Hon. T. L. Jones, Mar. 22, 1869, in Jones, Reminiscences, 230. For newspaper comment, see Evening Express (Washington, D. C.), Mar. 2, 1869; and Daily Globe (Washington, D. C.), Mar. 3, 1869. For Mrs. Lee's petition to President Johnson, dated Feb. 10, 1869, see Dept. of Interior, P. and M. File, Box 144; and for the action taken by Congress, Congressional Globe, 3d sess., 40th Cong., Mar. 1, 1869, 1742f. For the report of the committee declaring the relics the property of the United States, not to be released without the consent of Congress, see ibid., 1395, and appendix, 295-97. For the furnishings at Arlington, see Lee to M. Fisher, Oct. 29, 1866, DeButts-Ely MSS.

published in 1867, required no additional work on her part.[6] Her heart warmed by the kindness shown her by the townspeople, of Lexington, yet she could not help dwelling wistfully on her old home. "Her thoughts were ever in the past at Arlington--always Arlington," wrote her daughter Mildred.[7]

General Lee saw the old house once, perhaps twice, after the war, both times from a railroad train en route to Washington. "I did not approach Arlington nearer than the railway which leads to the city," he wrote to Markie in 1866. "I know only too well how things are there..."[8] He may have glimpsed it again when he visited the national capital for the last time in 1869, but if he did, he failed to mention it to anyone. A year later, on October 12, 1870, he died at Lexington, worn out at last by his labors.

Certain now that Arlington would never be returned to her, Mrs. Lee asked only that she be fairly compensated for it when she petitioned Congress to that effect, two years later, in 1872. Even so, her plea got into the newspapers and became the subject of a controversy that reverberated for many months, and in the end nothing came of it.[9]

She saw her old home for the last time on the afternoon of June 2, 1873, when she drove over from Ravensworth, where she was visiting Mrs.

[6] Mrs. Lee to ?, Feb. 12, 1866, in Brock, op. cit., 347. Some were sold for the benefit of the Lexington church she attended.

[7] Same to ?, Dec. 22, 1866, Craatz MSS, His. Soc. of Pa.; and same to R. M. Devers, Feb. 5, 1866; DeButts-Ely MSS. MS statement of Mildred Lee, Jan. 22, 1887, appended to MS Diary of Agnes Lee, DeButts-Ely MSS.

[8] Lee to Markie Williams, Apr. 7, 1866, in Craven, "To Markie," 69. For an apocryphal story that Lee visited Arlington while in Washington, see N. Y. Tribune, reprinted in Nat. Intelligencer, Feb. 22, 1866.

[9] Mrs. Lee to C. F. Lee, Jan. 3, 1872, in R. J. Lee, op. cit., 454f. See also, "Petition of Mary Ann Randolph Lee," Sen. Misc. Doc. No. 38, 42d Sess., 42d Cong., 1871-72. For newspaper comment, pro and con, see N. Y. Times, Feb. 19, 1872; and for the renewal of the controversy, a year later, The Nat. Republican (Washington, D. C.), June 4, 13, 1873; and Louisville, (Ky.) Commercial, May 31, 1873.

Fitzhugh. Too crippled to get out of her carriage, she could only gaze sadly about the scenes so dear to her memory. Some of the old servants were still there, and these came out to greet her. From them she learned that there was little left to salvage in the way of furnishings, so after having a cup of water from the well, she asked her coachman to take her away. "I rode out to my dear home," she wrote of her sad visit, "but so changed it seemed but as a dream of the past. I could not have realized that it was Arlington but for the few old oaks they had spared & the trees planted on the lawn by the Genl & myself..."[10]

Strange indeed, it must have seemed to see the old house deserted, the old garden which she and her mother had loved so dearly now outlined by graves, each with its white headboard. Seeing it thus, she wanted never to see it again.

Five months later, on November 5, 1873, she died at Lexington. Mary d. 1873

To the veterans who came to revisit the scene of their first months of soldier life or locate the grave of some fallen comrade, Arlington must also have seemed vastly changed. Beginning in 1865, every effort had been made to restore the original natural beauty of the estate. Old lanes had been repaired, and new ones made; denuded areas had been planted with ornamental shade trees; the slopes, formerly marred with drain-pits and camp fire sites, were now covered with smooth lawns. Even the gardens had been restored to something of their earlier beauty. "The place [is] so transformed as to hardly be recognized by persons who had previously visited it," the officer in charge of the cemetery reported with

[10] Alexandria (Va.) Gazette, June 4, 1873; and Long, op. cit., 33; and Mrs. Lee to ?, quoted in MacDonald, op. cit., 295; and statement of Mildred Lee, Dec. 11, 1890, appended to MS Diary of Agnes Lee, DeButts-Ely MSS.