Fitzhugh Lee Returns, and Returns

By D. W. THOMPSON

The story of the bombardment of Carlisle has often been repeated in print. The chief actors on both sides, Gen. Fitzhugh Lee and Gen. William F. Smith, have remained little more than names in local accounts, and hence a sketch of the career of each may be of interest.

Carlisle and Fitzhugh Lee seemed to take a special interest in one another. Lee served a tour of peacetime duty at Carlisle Barracks before he returned in 1863 to attack it. There was an exchange of letters with some Carlisle citizens in 1882; in 1896 he returned to make a public appearance at the Indian School; and there was a final correspondence with Capt. Miller in 1903.

Fitzhugh Lee, a nephew of Gen. Robert E. Lee, was born in Fairfax County, Va., in 1835. After schooling in the neighborhood, he was graduated at West Point, where his uncle was superintendent, in 1856, near the bottom of his class in academic grades but a good horseman, so that his West Point record reminds one of General Grant's.

Lee came to Carlisle Barracks as instructor of cavalry for the rest of 1856 and all of 1857. He enjoyed the post and the social life of the town and always spoke warmly of his stay here. In January, 1858, as second lieutenant of the 2nd Cavalry he joined the Indian fighting in Texas and was dangerously wounded. Late in 1860 he returned to West Point as instructor, and there six months later resigned his commission to join the army of Virginia as first lieutenant. In August of the same year he became lieutenant colonel of cavalry. He distinguished himself at Chancellorsville, where his cavalry screened Jackson's attack on the flank of the XI Corps.

Lee was only 28 years old when he commanded the brigade that shelled Carlisle on July 1, 1863. On the 2nd he reached Gettysburg, and on the 3rd fought vigorously in the cavalry battle, for which Stuart praised him. After Gettysburg, he was promoted to major general. He was seriously wounded at Winchester in September, 1864, where three horses were shot under him, and he was out of action until 1865. In the closing months of the war he was the senior cavalry commander of the Army of Northern Virginia.

After the war Lee turned to farming in Stafford County, Va., remarking that he had been accustomed to draw corn from the quartermaster, and found it harder to draw from the obstinate soil. He also developed a flair for politics. He could attract votes not only by his reputation, but by a talent for public address. A speech at Bunker Hill in 1874 gained national attention, and in 1882 he was preparing to start on a speaking tour of southern states in behalf of the Southern Historical Association when he received a letter from a Mr. Delancy of Carlisle, to which he replied. It would be interesting to have this exchange of letters, for they might throw some light on the one letter that has come down to us. Delancy wanted to know why his lumber yard, beside the barracks, had been burned in 1863. General Lee, who probably had no idea how the "boardyard" had come to be fired, made a polite reply, which Delancy thought evasive. So his friend, I. T. Zug of the Carlisle Manufacturing Company, repeated the query, and Lee's reply to this letter we have. It is not evasive, as he says simply that he has no recollection of the matter, but it might be called diplomatic, for he is sure that there was some mistake, and the lumber was presumed to be public property.

Now, there is no doubt that private property was generally respected by the invaders of 1863. Theirs may well have been the

most peaceful and orderly occupation by large armies of hostile country in wartime, in all history. Nevertheless immense damage was done, much of it intentional. The Cumberland Valley Rail Road was so thoroughly destroyed that it was at first considered impractical to rebuild it. This was the work of the main army. Stuart's men burned the lumberyard and the neighboring gas works also. The Confederates cannot have supposed that railroads, lumberyards and gas works, in 1863, were government or public property. Railroads were destroyed as assets to the Northern war effort. But Gen. Ewell had not thought of burning the barracks, gasworks, or lumberyard. These fires were not the result of mistaken orders or mistaken ownership. They were part of the hostilities that nearly became a battle, and a foretaste, to soldiers and citizens in Carlisle, of the destruction to follow if Gen. Smith persisted in refusing to surrender his troops. This is implied later in Lee's letter ("there was nothing left but to fight for it"), which ran as follows:

Richland Stafford Co Va
Aug. 25, 1882

Mr I. T. Zug Sec:
Carlisle Manufacturing Co

My dr Sir:

I am very much obliged for your kind and interesting letter of the 10th Inst: Mr O. Delancy is mistaken if he thought I intended in my reply to his letter, to give an evasive answer. I would only be too glad to be of service to him. I think it is most probable his property was burned under the impression it was public or U. S. property—from your description of its character & position—but I cannot give a certificate to that effect, for the reason that I do not recollect nor can I recall the circumstances—My Uncle Gen R. E. Lee's orders were very strict as to the destruction of private property while his army was in your state/.— My cavalry was a part of his army and I was particularly strict in carrying out his instructions in that respect. I mention this that you may draw a general inference that Mr D's property was not burned as private property for no man in my command would have so flagrantly disobeyed orders— because if his own sense of duty did not prevent him, his offence would have been seen and punished. There were no troops in front of Carlisle in the afternoon & night of July 1st 1863 except my command— at that time I commanded a brigade of 4 regiments— On July 1st our cavalry corps under Stuart were marching on Carlisle— my brigade in advance— the other two brigades were under Hampton & Chambliss — the three under Stuart— We left our army in Va & crossing the Potomac above Washington moved through Rockville & Westminster Md. & Hanover in Penn: Our objective point was York— but hearing our army had evacuated that place, we turned on Carlisle hoping to unite with it there, but en route Stuart got a communication from Gen Lee saying he was concentrating his army at Gettysburg & ordering him to proceed thither— so he turned off when probably some 12 miles of Carlisle with Hampton & Chambliss, while I being in advance and some distance ahead was directed to go on to Carlisle & then come on during the night or early as possible the next morning & follow the column which had taken a shorter route to G. Our move through Maryland & Pennsylvania interposed the Federal army between our army & ourselves & hence it was difficult to get information as to Gen Lee's position &c. I did not know that Carlisle was occupied by hostile troops until I got within a mile or two of the place— & in all statements as to the affair of July 1st there, it must be borne in mind that Carlisle was occupied by troops & their commander refused to surrender it. Of course there was nothing left but to fight for it & when that alternative was presented I sent a staff officer to Gen Smith telling him I was going to attack & that

I would wait for him to put the women & children in places of safety, & suggesting the cellars.— I moved off during the night in consequence of an urgent dispatch from Stuart to come on at once after him, (he having again heard from Gen Lee)— & after I had made my plans to attack again at light in the morning. Sometime when I can get leisure I will give you some to the incidents of that night. Now I have only time to say that it was with much regret that I proceeded with hostile intent against Carlisle. My first military service after graduating at West Point was there. I knew and had received the hospitalities of most of its citizens. I had warm & earnest & good friends among its inhabitants. Some of the most pleasant days of my life was passed in the hospitable homes of her people— but war— horrid war— was raging then between them & those with me & my paths & their paths had separated.

Your letter recalled many memories of the past. You mention the Watts & Mr. Brown Parker & Todd & Sponsler & John Noble &c &c all of whom I used to know so well. What of Johnston Moore & his family? But I must bring this to a close—'auld lang syne' capturing me must be my excuse for letting my pen run away with me

& I am very respec. & truly
Yours— Fitzhugh Lee

P.S,

Excuse this letter—it is so warm the ink runs as well as the pen

The writer of this letter, which shows his affection for the town and its people, was ready to forgive and forget past enmities. The spirit of reconciliation was not new in Carlisle. As early as 1881 the Carlisle post of the G.A.R. held a friendly reunion with the veterans of the C.S.A. of Page County, Va., at Luray. Lee went on to serve as governor of Virginia for four years, and then devoted himself to writing his well known life of his uncle, General Lee. In 1896, 33 years after the bombardment, Gen. Pratt invited him to speak at the annual commencement of the Carlisle Indian School, Feb. 26-28. Pratt was dedicated to the reconciliation of the Indian to American civilization, and so became a civilizing force himself. He liked to draw famous personages to his commencements, but they were persons who would represent the sharing of a good civilization by all Americans. So in 1896 he invited Gen. O. O. Howard, commander of the XI Corps of the Army of the Potomac, to share his platform with Fitzhugh Lee, to show that North and South were united with East and West in a common life, hope, and allegiance. Lee fitted well this program. He told his audience, on Feb. 27: "On these parade grounds I drilled recruits after my return from West Point. Afterwards I was ordered to Texas as the agent of Van Dorn, and there I became acquainted with the red rovers of the plains, receiving as a memento a scar which I still bear, made by the swift-flying arrow of a Comanche. I came past this town on my way to Gettysburg and asked the commander of Carlisle to surrender the place, which he refused to do. What might have been the result of our little difficulty cannot be known, for the next morning the order reached me to proceed to Gettysburg.

"But all this is past, and I rejoice with you that there is rust on the sword. I rejoice that I am here today to add my humble tribute to . . . Capt. Pratt. . . . This is a great country and it is our chief duty to support this great flag of ours. If you can't do it with Pennsylvanians take Virginians. The South rejoices in the peace progress and prosperity of the Country . . ."

But not surprisingly the reunion in peace and brotherhood of former enemies met strong objections from some Carlislers who remembered the shelling. It had been thought at the time, as shown by the first published ac-

count, that Lee had shelled the streets filled with women and children without any warning. The Carlisle Herald on Feb. 28 appeared with a column headed "What He Did." After quoting Donovin's account to show that no time was offered to non-combatants to seek safety, it went on: "There are many things in war and even in rebellion that can be overlooked, but firing upon women and children is not one of them . . . It was a disgrace . . . It was a mistake to invite him to come here again. It was a mistake not because he was a rebel but because he did a disgraceful and unsoldierly thing that can not be justified."

Replies to this sentiment appeared immediately. That same evening Gen. Howard gave an address before the G.A.R. in the Court House. Judge Henderson, a veteran officer, introduced him, and deplored the hostility to Lee. Howard said he had known "all the Lee's" and thought Fitzhugh "a thoroughly good man . . . I suppose he did some mischief when he shelled Carlisle, but you must remember that it was the fate of war. We shelled Vicksburg, Richmond, Columbia . . . I am glad the people of this town gave Gen. Lee so kind a welcome as they did."

THE SENTINEL also, sensing some ill-feeling, had already remarked editorially two days earlier: "We are pleased to see the kindly welcome to old Carlisle which has been extended to Gen. Fitz Hugh Lee, the ex-confederate veteran. Though once our hostile foe, he is now our friend, our fellow-countryman, interested in our public institutions, and here by invitation to visit the Nation's school at this place. We do well to welcome him heartily."

So better spirits prevailed, and Carlislers that year could hope that charity and brotherhood might increase and spread.

In the year of his visit to the Indian School, 1896, Fitzhugh Lee commenced his service as consul at Havana, where he remained during the increasing tension leading to the war with Spain. He re-entered the U. S. Army and as a major general commanded a division in Cuba. Afterwards he helped to promote the Jamestown Exposition but did not live to see it, dying in 1905. From this last period of his life we have one more letter, written to Capt. William E. Miller, who had evidently inquired what battery of artillery had shelled Carlisle. Lee wrote:

Westmoreland Club
Richmond, Va.
February 3, 1903.

My dear Colonel: (corrected by Capt. W. E. Miller to "Capt.")

Your letter would have received an earlier reply except for my absence.

I have no official document here at hand, but am very nearly certain that Breathed's Battery was with me at Carlisle, as it was attached to my command and always accompanied it. I do not know that I can say anything that is not already known, or that you cannot ascertain from the official reports. As you remember, Stuart's cavalry crossed the Potomac from Virginia to Maryland about fourteen miles above Georgetown, and in their march to Gettysburg had the whole federal army between it and their own army. As Carlisle was situated not far from their line of march I attacked the place near dark; stopped the advance after night and threw the whole command around to the other end of the town, after leaving a secure line where the firing that evening terminated; my intention being to attack it at light next morning, but during the night I got orders to proceed with all haste to Gettysburg, and so left. After all we did not reach the battle field there until the second day's fighting.

I am very glad I did not have the opportunity to attack Carlisle, because I had so many good friends and acquaintances in that town and had been treated so kindly in former days by them.

I hope you are quite well, and

beg to be remembered to my friends around you. I am

Very sincerely yours,

Fitzhugh Lee

From the two letters and the spoken reminiscences of Lee and the official reports of Generals Stuart and Smith, we can gather one truth, namely, that anyone who tries to reconstruct in accurate detail the events of the attack on Carlisle will have a difficult task. Some parts of the reports of these participants are flatly contradictory. It may be noted that the official reports were written after the close of the Gettysburg campaign, full of exciting and confusing actions, and that Lee's recollections came 20 and 40 years after the events.

For example, Stuart definitely reports that he was in person before Carlisle. He ordered the bombardment if surrender were refused, and left Lee to execute it when he hurried away. He gives as his reason for attacking, his urgent need for rations. He also says that when approaching the town he was surprised to be fired upon from buildings at the edge, and thought a trap had been intended. He replied to this fire, which might explain the tradition of no warning, and agrees with Smith's report that enemy fire had been delivered before he, Smith, had reached town from conferring with Gen. Ewen on the Holly Pike. Lee, on the other hand, speaks always of being alone in command at Carlisle. He did not remember Stuart as present at all, but recalled that Stuart turned off to Gettysburg some 12 miles back, or in the neighborhood of Dillsburg. Both Lee and Stuart said they demanded surrender before bombarding, and Lee adds that he suggested the cellars for civilians. Lee mentions no need for rations. He is alone in recalling that because his brigade was far ahead of the others and near Carlisle when the call to Gettysburg reached Stuart, he was ordered to go on to Carlisle and take the Gettysburg road from there, as shorter than turning back along the York road he was following. At Carlisle he surprised the enemy in arms in possession of the town, and by his rules of war they had to surrender or fight.

Lee's last letter was written when he was 68 years old, two years before his death, and perhaps shows real confusion, for he seems to be writing of some other fight altogether. He speaks of attacking and stopping the advance after dark where the firing had terminated, as though he had met some considerable opposition in the field, of which we know nothing. He adds that he then threw his command around to the other end of the town, or the west end. It is odd that no one seems to have been aware of this movement and counter movement of regiments of men during the night. His recollection may be at fault, and we would do well, as he suggests, to consult the official reports.

On one point Lee is consistent from first to last. He enjoyed his tour of duty in Carlisle in 1856-57, and recalled, some by name, the friends then made, long afterward, and remembered Carlisle always with pleasure and affection.

In Lee's letter of 1882 one phrase must have struck the reader as strange, when he said that war, horrid war, raged between him and his former friends. Horrid is not a word that one expects from the veteran warrior. Although cognate with horror, it had become a colloquialism by the 18th century, and in 1882 was too trite to use of the Civil War. Contemporary usage is well shown in the little poem, popular after 1870, and first attributed to Longfellow in the same year of 1882, about the little girl who had a little curl right in the middle of her forehead, and when she was good she was very, very good; but when she was bad she was horrid. The word belongs mostly to feminine vocabulary. Some fashions, foods, and persons were horrid, but hardly war.

And regardless of usage, the

repetitive phrase, war, horrid war, is so close an echo of Virgil's "bella, horrida bella" as to leave little doubt that Lee was referring to the Aeneid. The allusion is apt enough. When Aeneas visits the prophetess in her cave at Cumae to learn his future fate, she recites her vision of it. "Bella, horrida bella / Et Thybrim multo spumantem s a n g u i n e cerno." She saw war, horrid war, and the Tiber, like the James, would foam with much blood.

So we know what earlier reading had impressed the mind of Fitzhugh Lee, and how, sometimes at least, he thought of the Civil War. We may even be helped to understand why the Lees behaved as they did. Aeneas as a leader accepted his painful responsibilities. His first duty was to his family and to his household gods. Every opportunity to advance and settle his own people in a prosperous state he had to seize, and every disaster to endure with fortitude, and in either case he prayed, because the gods ruled over all.

His task was to discover his fate, to fulfill it in action and accept it in humility. Without supposing the Aeneid to have been any more than one of a great many influences forming the code of the men of their time and place, one is nevertheless struck with the thought that in the Lees of Virginia Americans might see the virtues of the pious Aeneas as imagined by Virgil better exemplified than among the Romans who applauded the first reading of the poem. These virtues may be not quite enough for every occasion or circumstance, but they will do to go on with, if one can find them.