

**ADDRESS ON THE LIFE AND CHARACTER  
OF GEN. ROBERT E. LEE: DELIVERED ON  
THE 12TH OF OCTOBER, 1871, BEFORE THE  
SOCIETY OF CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS  
AND SAILORS, IN MARYLAND**

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Address on the Life and Character of Gen. Robert E. Lee: Delivered on the 12th of October, 1871, before the Society of Confederate Soldiers and Sailors, In Maryland by Wade Hampton

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**WADE HAMPTON**

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BY LIEUT. GENERAL WADE HAMPTON.

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## ADDRESS.

MR. PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY:

THE survivors of the Confederate Army and Navy in Maryland, have done me the honor to invite me to address them on this anniversary, so full of mournful interest to the South, and they have given me the grand theme which has already engaged, and will engage for generations to come, the ablest pens and the most eloquent tongues in Christendom, "THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF ROBERT LEE."

Whilst appreciating the compliment that brings me before you, it is with a profound sense of my inability to "rise to the height of this great argument," that I assume the duty your kindness has imposed. Nor would I venture to do so, comrades of the Confederate service, were it not that it seems to me no duty can be more sacred than that which bids every true man of the South, at all times, by all means, in all places, to pay homage to the character, and honor to the memory of our great leader. To myself, whose good fortune it was to follow that illustrious Chief, from the beginning to the close of the marvellous career, which has placed his name by the side of those of the world's greatest captains,—who witnessed his grand magnanimity in the flush of his proudest triumphs,—his sublime serenity in the hour of disaster,—who was sustained by his constant faith in the justice of our cause, encouraged by his kindness, and honored by his friendship,—this call to join in doing honor to his memory, has the sanctity and the tenderness that death, and death alone, can give. Once again, and for the last time, I seem placed on duty in the service of my old Commander, and the voice that summons me here, waking many of the proudest, though saddest, emotions of my heart, comes from the tomb of him, who, though "dead, yet speaketh."

It would ill become any Confederate soldier, who is not a renegade to the faith for which he fought, to refuse to deck the honored grave of Lee, and while the humble garland I would reverently and tenderly place on that hallowed spot, seems but poor and withered by the side of those rare flowers the world has, with such lavish hand, scattered there, let me hope that my votive offering will be accepted in the spirit in which it is made. Believe me, it comes from a heart which feels profoundly that calamity which, while taking from the bereaved South that son of hers in whom centered so much of the just pride, the heartfelt gratitude, the passionate love of his countrymen, has stricken down the first soldier of his time, and deprived humanity and Christianity alike of one of their highest ornaments.

It is fortunate for you, my friends, as well as for myself, that the subject you have given me, needs not the adventitious aids of rhetoric, the embellishments of fancy, or the persuasive power of eloquence, to commend it to your hearts. The story of that grand life, which has so recently come to an end, is best told in the simple and severe language of truth, and the character of him who made that life so noble and so virtuous, will be best delineated by the plain recital that recalls the virtues which gave it lustre, and tells of the genius that has crowned it with undying glory. To do this properly, is a task of no ordinary magnitude, for the bare enumeration of the deeds that made Lee great, and of the virtues that made him good, would more than consume the time allotted to this occasion, and the picture then presented to you, though drawn from life itself, by the hand of truth, would seem almost too bright to belong to humanity.

But to those,—should there be such,—who regard the portrait as too highly colored, let the record of a life full to overflowing with heroic deeds, and of a character crowned with every virtue, speak for itself. By thus holding up to your view the record of that heroic and unblemished life, my task will be best discharged, while the lessons such a life should teach will sink deeper into our hearts and those of our children than any words of eulogy, how-



ever deserved, or any power of language, however eloquent, could inculcate. But while a proper respect for the great dead, as well as for ourselves, impels us to do reverence to his memory, the fulfilment of this duty overwhelms us with bitter grief, for it recalls to our weary hearts, all those hopes that lie buried in the grave of Lee. When the Trojan Chief, flying from his ruined city, under whose "high walls" he had prayed to die, was urged by the Carthaginian Queen to recount the misfortunes of his country, with a heart broken by the loss of friends, of kindred, and of native land, he exclaimed: "*Infandum, Regina, jubes renovare dolerem; quasque miserrima ipsi vidi.*"

These pathetic words of the Trojan exile wake a sorrowful echo in the heart of many a patriot in the desolated South, as standing amid the ruin of his country, he looks, with moistened eye and saddened heart, on the grave of him who was that country's ablest defender. It is with feelings such as these, where the deepest grief for the failure of our cause,—exulting pride in the heroic struggle we have made,—profound sorrow for the martyrs of that cause,—and a strong sense of the duty we owe to their memory are all blended,—that I come to speak to you of Lee.

ROBERT EDWARD LEE,—*clarum et venerabile nomen*,—comes of a race whose names have won honorable mention in history for centuries past. The founder of the family, Launcelot Lee, came to England with William the Conqueror. Farther on, in the old English annals which tell of the Crusades to the Holy Land—that romantic episode in the history of the world—we read that Lionel Lee, at the head of a goodly retinue of gallant knights and brave men-at-arms, fought under the banner of Richard Cœur de Lion, on the plains of Palestine, and as a reward for his great gallantry was created first Earl of Litchfield. Richard Lee, a younger scion of this noble house, came to America during the reign of Charles the First, and became the founder of a family which has given to our country many of its most devoted patriots, its most distinguished soldiers, and its most able statesmen. It would be impossible to record here the deeds, or to recall even the names of those who

have made this family so illustrious in our annals. Nor, perhaps, would this be the proper occasion to do so. This task belongs more appropriately to the biographer, and it cannot fail to be a source of gratification to the countrymen of the great Confederate Commander-in-Chief to know that in this instance this duty devolves on one eminently qualified to fulfil it,—that gallant officer, who was distinguished as his Aid, and honored as his friend. It seems too, peculiarly fit and proper, that a kinsman of that Marshall, who recorded the mighty actions and the sublime virtues of our Washington, should tell of the mightier actions and the equal virtues of our Lee.

Though time forbids me to do more than glance at the distinguished ancestry of Gen. Lee, I cannot omit to mention one name dear to every lover of liberty—that of Henry Lee—Light Horse Harry of our first Revolution—who, besides achieving for himself a noble fame in the same great cause for which his son fought—the right of self-government—will be immortalized as the friend of our first Washington and the father of our second. During all these centuries, through which the descent of Gen. Lee has been traced, we find representatives of the stock whence he sprung, winning for themselves distinction and renown on sea, as well as on land, claiming a proud place alike in English and American History, and proving themselves worthy ancestors of one, who was destined to make their name, already illustrious, immortal for all time to come. Blessed as Gen. Lee was in his descent from ancestors so distinguished, he was scarcely less so in the land of his nativity,—that grand old Commonwealth from whose prolific womb have sprung so many heroes, sages, and patriots,—proud, heroic, but now mourning Virginia! By a strange coincidence, to which his subsequent character and career gave peculiar significance, the place of his birth in Westmoreland county was within a few miles of the spot where Washington first saw the light. The natural objects and scenes that surround the boy exercise a powerful influence in forming the character of the man. We see how potent is this mysterious power of nature, not only upon indivi-

duals, but upon nations, for we find the spirit, genius, and characteristics of different peoples, transmitted unchanged from generation to generation, through centuries of national existence. Not only do the physical features of a country tend to form the character of its people, but its traditions, its associations, and its memories, contribute to the same result. During the boyhood of Gen. Lee, these natural influences must have exerted a powerful effect on his mind and his heart.

Descended from one of the most ancient and honorable families of a State, every page of whose history was blazoned by glorious deeds and noble names; gazing from his proud ancestral home up to the same sky and over the same fields upon which the eyes of Washington, of Monroe, of Richard Henry Lee and of Henry Lee had first opened; listening to the words of his patriotic father, as he recounted the glorious deeds of the Revolution, while the sound of the same British guns, which had waked the slumbering echoes of Virginia in that war, was borne by every breeze that swept the broad bosom of the Potomac, to his young ears,—is it strange that the soul of the boy should have been filled with high and noble aspirations, and that his heart should have been stirred by the hereditary fire of his heroic ancestry? “The child is father to the man;” and though but few reminiscences of the boyhood of Lee have been given to the public, we have every reason to suppose that the scenes which surrounded him at this period, induced him to choose arms as his profession, while the teachings and the example of his parents implanted then in his heart those seeds of virtue, which were destined to bear in his later years such full and rich harvest. But while there are, as I have said, but few public memorials of Gen. Lee’s boyhood, there are nevertheless some, which seen in the light cast on them by subsequent events, possess great interest. These shew, not only what his disposition was, but how that disposition was encouraged and his character formed by the earnest exhortations of his father, and the tender care of his mother. He had the misfortune to lose his father in early youth, just at the time his example and instruction were most needed, but