The Annual Meeting of The American Friends of Lafayette

The annual meeting of The American Friends of Lafayette will take place as is our custom on May 20th, the anniversary of the death of Lafayette in 1834; this day set aside across the land at that time as Lafayette Day and so celebrated.

This year we meet in New York at the Federal Memorial Hall, the former Sub-Treasury, at Wall and Nassau Streets. There will be a public meeting on the steps of the Hall at noon, addressed by a distinguished personage. After this short public meeting there will be a luncheon in Federal Hall, attended by members and guests. This will be followed by the Annual Meeting, at which reports will be submitted, officers elected, and proposals from the members considered. It is our earnest hope that all members will reserve this date, making every effort to be with us upon this occasion so important to all lovers of Lafayette, France and America.

La Rochefoucauld Liancourt

Professor Gilbert Chinard of Princeton has generously communicated the following excerpt from the unpublished diary of La Rochefoucauld Liancourt. The refugee duke was eager to be presented to President Washington and had brought with him several letters of introduction. However, Washington, with his strong sense of propriety, felt that he could not receive such a distinguished exile lest his action might be construed as a recognition of elements hostile to the government of France. As Professor Chinard remarks: "That La Rochefoucauld understood the conduct of the President and did not resent it appears in the portrait he drew of 'greatest man of the century.'"

F. M.

Lundi, 23 février 1795

... Eté au bal donné pour le jour de la naissance du Président. J'ai vu avec respect et admiration cet homme, le plus grand de son siècle par les circonstances sans exemple dont sa vie est, on peut dire dédiée. Je ne sais si cet homme aurait été grand ailleurs, mais je sais qu'il a toujours été supérieur à toutes les grandes circonstances ou il s'est trouvé; qu'au milieu des revers, des malheurs dont une partie de sa carrière militaire comme général a été remplie, il a toujours conservé la confiance, l'amour de cette armée composée de citoyens manquant presque toujours de tout et souvent battue; qu'il n'a usé de cette confiance que pour le bien de son pays, sans jamais avoir donné prise au moindre reproche pour son intérêt personnel d'aucun genre; que le même dévouement pour son pays l'a amené à la place de président et y a dicté sa conduite; au milieu de l'effervescence des opinions, il conserve l'estime, la confiance, le respect généraux; un tel homme mérite le nom de grand, nom que je ne crois pas de ce siècle avoir connu qu'au roi de Prusse et à lui. La simplicité de ce roi temporaire de ce grand état, de cet homme sur qui repose la reconnaissance et l'espoir de l'Amérique, l'espèce de respect dans la connaissance avec laquelle on l'approche dans cette foule où il était fréquent comme le dernier jeune homme, a quelque chose d'imposant et de touchant. Il a l'air, beaucoup plus jeune qu'il ne l'est—l'expression de son visage est la réserve, la froideur et la bonté.

The Lafayette Ambulance

The American Field Service sends us the following news of the Lafayette Ambulance:

"This ambulance worked with the British Forces of the Eighth Army all through the Desert Campaign. Afterwards, it was transferred to the Fighting French, where the service it rendered was outstanding.

"After many miles of service, our overseas Headquarters have just sent us word that the ambulance has been put out of action. They are endeavoring to locate the plaque.

"If and when the plaque is found, it will be placed on another car which will go into service with the Fighting French Unit now being formed. We will of course keep you advised as to whatever we may hear regarding the plaque."
The great hiatus in Lafayette portraiture corresponded to the hiatus in his popularity. Abandoning the Revolution in 1792 he spent the next twenty-five years in the obscurity of prison, exile, and private life in the country. When in 1817 he resumed political life as leader of the liberal opposition to the reactionary Bourbon regime of Louis XVIII, his popularity was re-established and the world wanted pictures of him.

But a change had taken place in the pictorial arts. The lithographic process was discovered or invented in 1796, and in the later period of Lafayette portraiture lithography was a common practice. While the work of the masters of lithography in some ways excelled that of the engravers, the later Lafayette prints generally seem inferior to the eighteenth century pieces.

Psychological and other causes perhaps account for some of this. No artist, whatever the process used, can give to a man who is burdened not only with years but with several layers of heavy woolen garments (which an old man must wear to keep warm) the charm that is inherent in a young man in the splendor of military costume. Possibly a preference for the classic and aristocratic 18th century to the bourgeois 19th century affects one's judgment. Or possibly we see in the earlier prints, as in the high-spirited portrait by de Bucourt, illustrations of Wordsworth's lines on the French Revolution:

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, And to be young was very heaven."

THEODORE E. NORTON

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1824. At the Cree Indian Reservation near Macon, Georgia. Part of the speech of the old chief: "Father, it will be long said among us that you came back to visit our forests and our cabins, you whom the Great Spirit had formerly sent from the other side of the great lake to drive out the enemies of man, the English in their blood-colored coats. The youngest among us will tell their grandchildren that they have touched your hand and seen your face; they will perhaps see you again, for you are a favorite of the Great Spirit and you never grow old."

On The Eve Of A Great Battle

Benjamin Franklin to John Paul Jones, at L'Orient fitting out the "Bon Homme Richard": "The Marquis de La Fayette will be with you soon. It has been observed that joint expeditions of land and sea forces, often miscarry through jealousies and misunderstandings between the officers of the different corps. This must happen when there are little-minds, actuated more by personal views or profit or honor to themselves, than by the warm and sincere desire of good to their country. Knowing you both, as I do, and your just manner of thinking on these occasions, I am confident nothing of the kind can happen between you, and that it is unnecessary for me to remind either of you of that condescension, mutual good will and harmony, which contribute so much to success in such undertakings."

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John Paul Jones to Franklin: "No misunderstanding will arise between the other commander and myself because we like and esteem each other."

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Jared Sparks

On Lafayette

Jared Sparks on Lafayette: "The part he acted during the war, his influence in gaining effectual aid from the French government, his deep and lasting attachment to Washington, the ardor and consistency with which he adhered to the interests of his adopted country to the end of his life, and the affection which the people of that country have ever manifested for his person and character, all conspire to make the day on which he entered the service one of the most remarkable in the revolution."

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Lafayette: "The only effect fatigue has upon me is to increase my appetite."

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"I read, I study, I examine, I listen, I reflect, and the result of all is the endeavour at forming an opinion, into which I infuse as much common sense as possible."—Valley Forge, Dec. 16, 1777. To Duc de Ayen.
Harvard University Exhibit

At the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, there is an important exhibit honoring Washington, Franklin and Lafayette. Here in several rooms are gathered many mementos which will be on display through May 25th.

Perhaps of the most outstanding interest is the full-length portrait of George Washington, painted in 1784 by Charles Willson Peale; now being shown for the first time. It is called 'The Lost Portrait.' Until recently it has been in the Chateau de Noailles, in the possession of the descendants of Vicomte de Noailles. Jefferson and Franklin were asked to select a sculptor to create a likeness of Washington for the Virginia State House and this large portrait was sent over to be used as a model. The sculptor selected was of course Jean-Antoine Houdon. (He, however, preferred to work from life and came to America the next year on the same ship which brought Franklin back to America. Houdon arrived at Mt. Vernon at eleven o'clock at night when the household was abed. He stayed for three weeks and made the clay bust still at Mt. Vernon, the only one ever made of Washington from life and considered his best likeness.)

Other items on display: Houdon's beautiful bust of Lafayette (1790) in Sévres porcelain, as well as his Benjamin Franklin (1803), given by Johnathan Williams to the American Philosophical Society, in Philadelphia, founded by Franklin.

The handsome sword presented to Lafayette when he became Commander-in-chief of the new National Guard. The blade is damascened in gold; inscribed on one side "Vaincre ou mourir" and on the other "Pour la Nation." There is a display of six lithographs relating to Lafayette and Louis-Philippe. All of the prints but one were from the Society's collection, and all were brilliant examples of superior political cartooning and fine craftsmanship. Two were by Daumier, one of these the magnificent "Enfonce Lafayette!" loaned by Mr. Stuart W. Jackson. This piece shows Louis-Philippe as a hypocritical mourner at Lafayette's funeral. There is a reproduction of it in Blanchetean's Le General Lafayette: Catalogue, 1934 (No. 571). Blanchetean describes the print as not only one of Daumier's greatest works, but one of the masterpieces of the art of lithography. (This print is also shown in the Harvard exhibit, a note on which is published in this issue of the Gazette.)

-T. E. N.

Lafayette's Whimsical Humor

When Lafayette's friend, Ary Scheffer, was painting his portrait (1818), someone asked the General how he was posed. He said, "I am taking a walk — my hat and cane in my hand — like this."

"And the other hand?"

"It is in my pocket, which is much better than having it in somebody else's."

Good-bye, Fare Ye Well

Of ageless beauty and worthy of continuous repetition are the words of farewell spoken by President John Quincy Adams to Lafayette at the White House, Washington (September 7, 1825):

"We shall look upon you always as belonging to us, during the whole of our life, and as belonging to our children after us. You are ours by that more than patriotic self-devotion with which you flew to the aid of our fathers at the crisis of our fate; ours by that unshaken gratitude for your services which is a precious portion of our inheritance; ours by that tie of love, stronger than death, which has linked your name for the endless ages of time with the name of Washington."

Lafayette to Washington (1784): "At the first opening of the prospect of peace, I had prepared to go to America ... but on a sudden, I have been obliged to defer my darling plan. ... Happy, ten times happy, shall I be in embracing my dear General, my father, my best friend, whom I love with an affection and respect which I too well feel, not to know, that it is impossible for me to express. ... Tell her [Martha Washington] that I hope soon to thank her for a dish of tea at Mt. Vernon. Yes, my dear General, before the month of June is over, you will see a vessel coming up the Potomac and out of that vessel will your friend jump, with a panting heart, and all the feelings of perfect happiness."

George Washington on war: "My first wish is to see this plague to mankind banished from off the earth, and the sons and daughters of this world employed in more pleasing and innocent amusements than in preparing implements and exercising them for the destruction of mankind."
GAZETTE OF THE AMERICAN FRIENDS OF LAFAYETTE

Some Recent Publications of Franco-American Interest


Bond, D. F., and others. Anglo-French and Franco-American Studies, a current bibliography. (In The Romantic Review, Columbia University Press.) These bibliographies are mainly concerned with comparative literature and general cultural relations, but include much historical material. Six annual compilations have been published: in the issue of Dec. 1936, and the April numbers of 1939, 1940, 1941, 1942 and 1943.


Murphy, Edmund R. Henry de Tonty, Fur Trader of the Mississippi. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1941. 129 p. (Published for the Institut Fransais de Washington.)


Société Historique Franco-Américaine. Les Quarante Ans de la Société... 1899-1939. Boston [1940] 878 p. There are three pieces on Lafayette in this collection and many more on cultural and religious topics.


— T. E. N.