

General Lee in English Eyes

A Review by D. R.

ROBERT E. LEE, *THE SOLDIER*. By Major General Sir Frederick Maurice. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co. \$4.00.

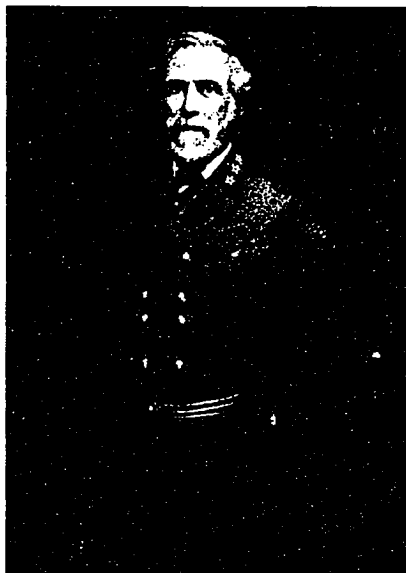
SIR FREDERICK MAURICE has added one more volume to the steadily accumulating literature on General Lee. Every incident in his career, every trait in his character, every action — military and civil — has been so closely scrutinized and so carefully appraised that the necessity for further investigation may not strike the layman as obvious. General Maurice's contribution to a just consideration of General Lee's achievements is, however, valuable for a variety of reasons.

In the first place, his position as a foreigner enables him to approach the subject uninfluenced by any of those prejudices or feelings from which few Americans are altogether free. Secondly, while many military critics of first-rate ability have studied Lee's campaigns, General Maurice is the first man, thoroughly acquainted with the "inside history" of the World War, who has studied our Civil War in the light of the lessons of the greater struggle. This knowledge and experience give him an advantage greater than would appear at first. Earlier students of the Civil War had nothing with which to compare it, nothing vaguely comparable to the problems of statesmanship, strategy, and even of tactics, by which to measure the accomplishments of the chief actors in the American drama. The only important war following it, before the Great War, was the Franco-Prussian, a short, sharp struggle between two autocratic powers, utterly dissimilar in every way from the effort of peaceful democracies to create armies, make over their institutions, turn their energies into warfare, and carry on a series of protracted campaigns.

In the World War such an effort was made by England and later by the United States. In the Civil War, two democratic governments carried on a bloody and exhausting combat for four years. Neither was organized for war. Both, in spite of their traditions and institutions, were forced by the logic of events into a modification of the fiction that the civil executive shall act as commander in chief of the Army and Navy, and both developed in the end that unity of command essential to a coherent grand strategy. In the North, the process of adaptation was more complete and successful than in the South. Lincoln had the great quality of learning by experience. After his and Halleck's and Stanton's unhappy attempts at strategy, after his series of disappointments with incompetent commanders, he

appointed Grant lieutenant general of the Army in March, 1864, and "placed the entire technical control of the war in his hands, with the solemn assurance that he would support him politically and with the whole military resources of the North. Thenceforward," says General Maurice, "the conduct of the war by the North is . . . in my judgment, the best example in existence of the coördination of political and military effort in a democracy."

He compares Grant's stubborn and bloody wilderness campaign with the Allied attacks on the Somme in 1916, the



GENERAL LEE

"A greater commander than Wellington"

shaken morale at home as the rolls of the casualties became known, the alarm of the politicians that the campaign was a disastrous failure. Lincoln, however, stuck by his man, "and so made victory possible in 1865. Had the Allies possessed the Lincoln of 1864 in 1916, it is well within the bounds of possibility that they could have ended the war victoriously in the following year."

Lee, in the South, was not as fortunate as Grant. A faulty system, by which Jefferson Davis did and did not function as commander in chief, hampered and handicapped his strategy. Undoubtedly, the improvised Confederate Government was less qualified than the Northern to endure the strain, and beyond any question, Jefferson Davis was a lesser man than Abraham Lincoln.

General Maurice, possibly affected by the recent publication of Mr. Gamaliel

Bradford's "Lee, the American," announces that his book is an estimate of Lee, the soldier; but in spite of himself he cannot help dwelling on General Lee's qualities of character and heart, to which he pays a noble and convincing tribute.

HIS discussion of Lee's strategy is a remarkably clear exposition, based on knowledge of the terrain, the documents, — official and unofficial, — his own training as a staff officer, and his experience in the greatest of all wars. Nowhere have I seen the campaign of 1862 described with such clarity and precision. Of this period he says that "Lee's campaigns of 1862 are . . . supreme in conception, and have not been surpassed, as examples of strategy, by any other achievement of their kind by any other commander in history." Lee's strategy after the failure at Gettysburg was one of delay and defense, and his performance as masterly as it had been in offense.

General Maurice ranks him, on the whole, as a greater commander than Wellington, his equal in all respects — except in firmness in directing subordinates — and his superior in what one might call strategic genius. As his mistakes, he lists the sending off of Stuart at the beginning of the Seven Days', and again before Gettysburg, he criticizes the attack on Malvern Hill and considers Antietam an unnecessary battle; and he says that on two critical occasions Lee failed to control and direct Longstreet. "Of how many generals, who have commanded for three years in the field, is it possible to sum up the mistakes committed in so few words?"

General Maurice finds that criticisms of Lee balance one another. Ropes found him rash, Grant described him as of a slow and cautious nature; "Stonewall" Jackson said he was cautious, he ought to be. But he is not slow." Whereas Longstreet said his defect was "headlong combativeness."

TO all of these and other critics General Maurice gives a very definite answer and makes good, as it seems to me, his position. He shows Lee as apparently rash when offensive action offered hopes of great results, but always careful in his estimate of chances and provident in his preparations for defeat. This he demonstrates by time table, ruler, and map — the only method, beside the event, to justify apparent violations of sound strategical doctrine.

General Maurice's book is not only valuable and informative. It is interesting, well written, and sympathetic — a tribute from one officer and gentleman to another.