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LAFAYETTE'S FIRST VISIT TO AMERICA.

From Sparks' Edition of Washington's Writings, now in Press.

LAFAYETTE was but eighteen years old, when he first conceived the project of joining the Americans, and risking his fortune and reputation in their cause. In the summer of 1776 he was stationed on Military duty at Metz, being then an officer in the French army. It happened at this time that the Duke of Gloucester, brother to the King of England, was at Metz, and a dinner was given to him by the commandant of that place. Several of the principal officers were invited, and among others Lafayette. Despatches had just been received by the Duke from England, and he made their contents the topic of conversation. They related to American affairs, the recent declaration of independence, the resistance of the colonists, and the strong measures adopted by the ministry to crush the rebellion. The details were new to Lafayette. He listened with eagerness to the conversation and prolonged it by asking questions of the Duke. His curiosity was deeply excited by what he heard, and the idea of a people fighting for liberty, had a strong influence upon his imagination. The cause seemed to him just and noble from the representations of the Duke himself, and before he left the table the thought came into his head that he would go to America and offer his services to a people who were struggling for freedom and independence. From that hour he could think of nothing but this chivalrous enterprise. He resolved to return to Paris and make further inquiries.

When he arrived in that city he confided his scheme to two young friends, Count Segur and Viscount de Noailles, and proposed that they should join him. They entered with enthusiasm into his views; but as they were dependent on their families, it was necessary to consult their parents, who repudiated the plan and refused their consent. The young men faithfully kept Lafayette's secret. His situation was more fortunate, as his property was at his disposal, and he possessed an annual revenue of nearly two hundred thousand livres.

He next explained his intention to the Count de Broglie, who told him that his project was so chimerical and fraught with so many hazards, and without prospect of the least advantage, that he could not for a moment regard it with favor, nor encourage him with any advice which should prevent him from abandoning it immediately. When Lafayette found that thus determined, he requested him at least he would not betray him, for he was resolved to go to America. The Count de Broglie assured him that his confidence was not misplaced; but said he, "I have seen your uncle die in the wars of Italy, I witnessed your father's death at the battle of Minden, and I will not be necessary to the ruin of the only remaining branch of the family." He then used all his powers of argument and persuasion to divert Lafayette from his purpose, but in vain. Finding his determination unalterable, the Count de Broglie said as he could render him no aid, he would introduce him to the Baron de Kalb, who he knew was seeking an opportunity to go to America, and whose experience and counsels might be valuable.

Through this channel Lafayette procured an interview with Silas Deau, who explained to him the state of things in America, and gave him encouragement. Deau was formally spoke little French, and the conversation was not very copious. As he had not yet been acknowledged in any public character, and was surrounded by the British Ambassadors spies, it was thought advisable that to avoid suspicion, no more interviews should take place. The affair was afterwards managed by the intervention of Mr. Carnichel. An agreement was at length concluded, by the terms of which Marquis de Lafayette was to join the American service, and to receive from Congress the appointment of Major General. A vessel was about to be despatched with arms and other military supplies for the American army, in which it was proposed he should take passage.

At this juncture came the news of the evacuation of New-York, the loss of Fort Mifflin, the retreat across Jersey, and the numerous disasters attending the campaign. The friends of

America were in despair. The plan of sending a vessel with munitions of war was abandoned. Lafayette was advised to give up the scheme, and not to make so hopeless a sacrifice in an adventure, that at best must end in utter disappointment. These representations and prospects so far from disheartening him, rather increased his ardor in the pursuit of his object. "My zeal and love for liberty," said he "have perhaps been hitherto the prevailing motive; but now I see a chance for usefulness, which I had not anticipated. I have money, I will purchase a ship, which shall convey to America myself, my companions and the freight to Congress." By this time Franklin and Arthur Lee had joined Deau as commissioners. To a proposal so disinterested and generous they could not object; they could only advise the spirit which dictated it, and he hastened immediately to put it into execution.

He entrusted his secret to Dubois Martin, secretary to the count de Broglie, whom he despatched to Bordeaux, with instructions to purchase a vessel. This was done; but the vessel wanted repairs, and other preparations were necessary. To prevent discovery during the delay in getting things ready, he took the opportunity to fulfil a previous engagement, which was now claimed by the Prince de Poix, to visit England in company with him. The two friends arrived in London, where they received many marks of civility, and attention from the King and persons of rank. It was the policy of the Ministers at this time to make it appear, that a good understanding existed between the English and French courts, and the visit of these young noblemen was a circumstance favorable to that end. They stayed about three weeks in London, when Lafayette received intelligence that his vessel was ready at Bordeaux, and he returned to France; but not without some displeasure on the part of the Marquis de Noailles, the French ambassador in London, who thought his departure too abrupt and unceremonious. The British King and Ministry always supposed, that the Marquis de Noailles was acquainted with Lafayette's design to go to America during the visit. But this was a mistake. Lafayette had often been heard to say, that neither Marquis de Noailles nor any other individual in London, had a knowledge of his purpose. British writers have also charged him with having gone there to obtain information, which would be useful to the Americans. This suspicion is equally without foundation. So far from taking advantage of his situation for such a purpose, his delicacy restrained him from making such a use of his opportunities, as would under other circumstances, have been particularly agreeable to him. It was on this ground alone that he declined accepting a proposal to visit the naval armament at Portsmouth, which was then fitting out for America.

He did not enter Paris on his return, but went to Passay, where he remained concealed, and saw only Segur & a very few other friends. After three days he set off for Bordeaux; but on arriving there he found that his vessel was not entirely ready. He soon discovered, also, that his precautions had not been effectual, that his departure was known at Versailles, & that an arrest by order of the King would immediately follow him. He adopted the only mode of escape, that of setting sail without delay. He proceeded to Passay, the nearest port in Spain, where he proposed to wait for his ship's papers. He had hardly reached that harbour, when two officers arrived to land from Bordeaux, with a letter de cachet from the King prohibiting his departure. At the same time came letters from the ministers and his family, insisting on his return. Lord Stormont's spies detected his movements and that ambassador had communicated the intelligence to Lafayette's father-in-law. The letter de cachet commanded him to repair to Versailles, and there wait for further orders. The letters from the Ministers were severe, charging him with violating his oath of allegiance to the King, and of rashly committing an act, which might involve the government with other powers. His family censured him in a tone of pointed reprimand, assuring him that his conduct if persisted in, would ruin both them and himself. It must be observed, however, that his wife did not join in this out cry; she approved of his enterprise from the beginning, and threw no obstacles in his way. The family were preparing for a tour in Italy, and the design was, that he should meet them at Marseilles, go with them on this tour, and thus be diverted from his American project.

From Passay he was obliged to return with the officers to Bordeaux, where he reported himself to the commandant. He wrote to the Ministers and his friends, replying to their charges and vindicating himself in the best manner he could. He reminded them that an officer in the King's Irish regiment had been permitted to go o-

ver and join the British forces, and added that he saw no reason why the same privilege should not be allowed to other officers in regard to the Americans, who were an independent people and contending for just principles. Indeed, this had already been done in the case of Duportail, and three other engineers belonging to the King's army, who had obtained special permission to enter the American service. These reasons and precedents he thought would justify him in asking the same permission. To his family he wrote that his resolution was fixed, and he hoped they would aid his views. As to his oath of allegiance, he observed to some of his correspondents, that when the ministers should be faithful to their people, they might with a better grace talk about a violation of an oath of the government. "This hint got to the ears of the ministers and gave offence.

In short, he had little hope of succeeding in his petition; and he accordingly wrote to Mr. Cogry, a particular friend very intimate at court, requesting him to watch carefully what passed, and should he be convinced a prohibition would be issued against his American plan to let him know it with all possible despatch. He sent a trusty courier to Versailles, who speedily came back with a letter from Cogry informing him, that there was excitement against him at court, that the British ambassador had made strong representations, and there was not the remotest prospect of his receiving a favorable reply.

Lafayette lost no time in taking the course, on which he had already resolved.—He intimated to the commandant, that he would proceed to Marseilles, and commenced the journey. An officer by the name of Mauroy, who wished to visit America was his companion. They entered the carriage together, but as they left the environs of Bordeaux, Lafayette disguised himself in the dress of a courier, mounted a horse, and rode forward to procure relays at the post houses. They soon diverged from the road to Marseilles, and took the direction to Bayonne. In that city they were obliged to stop for two or three hours. While Mauroy executed some important commission of business, Lafayette lay on the straw in the stable. Fresh horses were procured, and they continued their route, Lafayette still preserving the costume and character of a courier. At the little village of St. Jean de Luz, while calling for horses, he was detected by the daughter of the man who kept the post house. She had seen him a few days before on his way from Passage to Bordeaux. He made a signal to the girl to keep silence, which she understood; and when Lafayette's pursuers came up, and inquired if such a person had passed she was faithful to the signal, replying that a carriage had gone along, but it contained no such person as they described. This answer occasioned much uncertainty as to the object of their pursuit, and it is believed to have been the cause of his not being overtaken by them before he reached his vessel at Passage. A favorable wind wafted him quickly to sea. Baron de Kalb, and eleven other officers of different ranks seeking service in America, constituted his retinue.

His time was employed on the voyage, as far as a severe attack of seasickness would permit, in studying the English language, and reading books on military tactics. The ship's papers were taken out for the French Islands in the West Indies, and the Captain sailed in that direction. While on the voyage Lafayette told him, that it was his intention to run directly for the coast of America. This was promptly declined by the Captain, on the ground that the papers protected the ship only to the French Islands, and should they be taken by the English in attempting to go into an American port, they would all inevitably be sent prisoners to Halifax, and be detained in captivity, no one could tell how long. This was a dilemma, which Lafayette had not anticipated, and he finally told the Captain that the vessel was his property, that every person on board ran an equal risk; that he was determined at all hazards to sail by the shortest course to the American coast; and that if he refused to put the vessel upon that track, he would deprive him of the command and give it to the next officer. The Captain acceded, but with reluctance, which made Lafayette suspect there were other motives besides personal apprehension; and he found, on inquiry, that the Captain had goods in the ship to the amount of eight thousand dollars. When this was known he offered a pledge of security, that in case they should be captured, and the cargo lost, he would pay this amount to the Captain, although the goods had been put on board without his authority. He also feared, what proved to be true, that orders would be sent to the West Indies to arrest them.

At some distance from the coast a privateer was descried making towards them.—It was supposed to be English, and hasty preparations were made for

defence; but it turned out to be American, and no molestation was offered. Land was soon discovered; and they approached the shore near Georgetown in South Carolina, having fortunately escaped two British cruisers. The same strong north easterly wind, which brought the French vessel to the coast, had driven the cruisers to the south, and thus left an open passage for that vessel, which otherwise would probably have been captured.

It was dark before they came so near the shore as to be able to land. Lafayette and some of the officers entered the ship's boat, which was rowed to the beach. Here they debarked and a distant light served to guide them. When they arrived near the house whence the light proceeded, the dogs growled and barked, and the people within supposed them to be a party of marauders from the enemy's vessels. Before gaining admittance, it was demanded of them who they were and what they wanted. Baron de Kalb was their interpreter, he having before been in America, and acquired some facility in speaking the English language. At length suspicions were removed, and the strangers were received with a cordial welcome and a generous hospitality. Lafayette retired to rest rejoiced that he had at last attained the haven of his wishes, and was safely landed in America beyond the reach of his pursuers. The morning was beautiful. The novelty of every thing around him, the room, the bed, with mosquito curtains, the black servants who came to ascertain his wants, the beauty and strange appearance of the country as he saw it from his window, clothed in luxuriant verdure, all conspired to produce a magical effect, and to transport him with indescribable sensations. He found himself in the house of Major Huger, a gentleman not more remarkable for his hospitality, than for his worth and respectable character. Major Huger provided horses to convey him and his companions to Charleston. The vessel likewise went into Charleston harbor. A letter written by Lafayette to his wife will explain his situation and feelings at this time.

Charleston, 19 June, 1777.
"My last letter to you, my dear love, has informed you, that I arrived safely in this country, after having suffered a little from sea-sickness during the first weeks of the voyage; that I was then, the morning after I landed, at the house of very kind officers; that I had been nearly two months on the passage, and that I wished to set off immediately. It spoke of every thing most interesting to my heart; of my sorrow at parting from you, and of our dear children; and it said, besides, that I was in excellent health. I give you this abstract of it, because the English may possibly amuse themselves by seizing it on its way. I have such confidence in my lucky star, however, that I hope it will reach you. This star has befriended me, to the astonishment of every body here. Trust to yourself, and be assured that it ought to calm all your fears.—I landed after having sailed several days along a coast, which swarmed with hostile vessels. When I arrived, every body said that my vessel must inevitably be taken, since two British frigates blockaded the harbor. I even went so far as to send orders to the captain, both by land and sea to put the men on shore and set fire to the ship, if not yet too late. By a most wonderful good fortune, a gale obliged the frigates to stand out to sea for a short time. My vessel came in at midnight, without meeting a friend or foe."

"At Charleston I have met Gen. Howe, an American officer now in the service.—The Governor of the State is expected this evening from the country. All with whom I wished to become acquainted here, have shown me the greatest politeness and attention. I feel entirely satisfied with my reception, although I have not thought it best to go into any detail respecting my arrangements and plans. I wish first to see Congress. I hope to set out for Philadelphia in two days. Our route is more than two hundred and fifty leagues by land.—We shall divide ourselves into small parties. I have already purchased horses and light carriages for the journey. Some French and American vessels are here, and are to sail together to-morrow morning taking advantage of the moment when the frigates are out of sight. They are armed, and have promised me to defend themselves stoutly against the small privateers which they will certainly meet. I shall distribute my letters among the different ships."

"I will now tell you about the country and its inhabitants. They are as agreeable as my enthusiasm had painted them. Simplicity of manners, kindness, love of country and of liberty, and a delightful equality every where prevail. The wealthiest man and the poorest are on a level; and, although there are some large fortunes, I challenge any one to discover the slightest difference between the manners of these two classes, respectively towards each other. I first saw the country life at the house of Major Huger. I am now in the city, where

every thing is very much after the English fashion, except that there is more simplicity, equality, cordiality, and courtesy here than in England. The city of Charleston is one of the handsomest and best built, and its inhabitants among the most agreeable that I have ever seen. The American women are very pretty, simple in their manners, and exhibit a neatness, which is every where cultivated even more studiously than in England. What most charms me is, that all the citizens are brethren. In America there are no poor, nor even what we call peasantries. Each individual has his own honest property, and the same rights as the most wealthy landed proprietor. The farms are very different from those of Europe; the host and hostess sit at a table with you, and do the honors of a comfortable meal; and on going away, you pay your bill without haggling. When one does not wish to go to an inn, there are country houses where the title of a good American is a sufficient passport to all those civilities paid in Europe to one's friend.

"As to my own reception it has been most agreeable in every quarter; and to have come with me secured the most flattering welcome. I have just passed five hours at a grand dinner, given in honor of me by an individual of this city. Genls. Howe and Moultrie, and several officers of my suite were present. We drank healths and tried to talk English. I begin to speak a little. To-morrow I shall go with these gentlemen to call on the Governor of the State, and make arrangements for my departure. The next day the commanding officers here will show me the city and its environs, and then I shall set out for the army."

"Considering the pleasant life I lead in this country, my sympathy with the people, which make me feel as much at ease in their society as if I had known them for twenty years, the similarity between their mode of thinking and my own, and my love of liberty and of glory, one might suppose that I am very happy. But you need not with me; my friends are not with me; and there is no happiness for me far from you and them. I ask you, if you still love me; but I put the same question to myself, and my heart always responds. Yes, I am impatient beyond measure to hear from you. I hope to find letters at Philadelphia. My only fear is, that the privateer, which is to bring them, may be captured on her passage. Although I suppose I have drawn upon me the special displeasure of the English, by taking the liberty to depart in spite of them, and by landing in their very face, yet I confess they will not be in arrears with me, should they capture this vessel, my cherished hope, on which I so fondly depend for letters from you.—Write frequent and long letters. You do not know the full extent of joy with which I shall receive them.—Embrace Henrietta tenderly.—May I say embrace tenderly our children? The father of these poor children is a rover but a good and honest man at heart; a good father, who loves his family dearly, and a good husband who loves his wife with all his heart."

"Remember me to your friends and my own, to the dear society, once the society of the court, but which by the lapse of time has become the society of *W. C. de S.* We republicans think all the better. I must leave off for want of paper and time; and if I do not repeat to you ten thousand times that I love you, it is not from want of feeling, but from necessity, since I have the presumption to hope that I have already continued you of it. The night is far advanced and the heat dreadful. I am devoured by insects; so, you see the best countries have their disadvantages.—Adieu. LAFAYETTE."

All things being in readiness, the party left Charleston and travelled to Philadelphia, with as much expedition as the extreme heat of the weather and the badness of the roads would permit. They visited Governor Caswell in North Carolina, and stopped a short time at Annapolis in Maryland. Here my became acquainted with Major Brice, to whom they had a letter from Carnichel, and who was afterwards Lafayette's aid-de-camp. The vessel had been left at Charleston, where it was loaded with rice for the French market.—It intended in going out of the harbor, and both the vessel and cargo were lost.

When Lafayette arrived in Philadelphia he put his letters in the hands of Mr. Lovell, Chairman of the Committee of Foreign Affairs. He called the next day at the Hall of Congress, and Mr. Lovell came out to him and said, that so many Foreigners had offered themselves for employment, that Congress was embarrassed with their applications, and he was sorry to inform him that there was very little hope of his success. Lafayette suspected his papers had not been read, and he immediately set down and wrote a note to the President of Congress, in which he desired to be permitted to serve in the American Army on two conditions; first that he should receive no pay; secondly that he should set as volunteer. These terms were so different from

those demanded by other foreigners, and presented so few obstacles on the ground of an interference with American officers, that they were at once accepted. His rank, zeal, perseverance, and disinterestedness overcame every objection, and he was appointed a major-general in the American Army more than a month before he had reached the age of twenty.

Washington was expected shortly in Philadelphia, and the young general concluded to wait his arrival before he went to head-quarters. The first introduction was at a dinner party, whose several members of Congress were present. When they were about to separate, Washington took Lafayette aside, spoke to him very kindly, complimented him upon his noble spirit he had shown and the sacrifices he had made in favor of the American cause, and then told him that he should be pleased if he would make the quarters of the Commander-in-chief his home, establish himself there whenever he thought proper, and consider himself at all times as one of his family; adding in a tone of pleasantry, that he could not promise him the luxuries of a court, or even the conveniences, which his former habits might have rendered essential to his comfort, but since he had become an American soldier he would doubtless contrive to accommodate himself to the character he had assumed, and submit with a good grace to the curtains and privations of a republican army. If Lafayette was made happy by his success, with Congress, his joy was redoubled by this flattering proof of friendship and regard on the part of the Commander in chief. His horses and equipage were immediately sent to camp, and ever afterwards, even when he had the command of a division, he kept up his intimacy at head quarters, and enjoyed all the advantages of a member of the General's family.—The day after the dinner, Washington inspected the fortifications of the Delaware River, and invited Lafayette to accompany him.

"Being now in the army, he continued with it as a volunteer, though without any command, till the battle of Brandywine. He there engaged in the hottest part of the action, exposed himself to danger, and exhibited a conspicuous example of coolness and courage. While the troops were retreating in disorder, he dismounted, entered the ranks, and endeavored to rally them. As he was performing this service a musket ball passed through his hat, but the wound did not retard his efforts; till his aid told him that the blood was running from his head, and then he mounted his horse. He met a surgeon in the rear, who put a slight bandage round his leg, and he rode to Chester. The soldiers, in the mean time, were retreating in a hurried and straggling manner and regardless of himself, his first precaution was to place a guard near the bridge at the entrance of the village, with orders to stop all the retreating soldiers at that place. His wound was then dressed, and the next morning he was taken to Philadelphia. The following letter to his wife was written the day after the action:

Philadelphia, 12 September 1777.
"I write you a few words, my dear love by some French officers, who came over with me, but who not receiving any appointment in the army, are about returning to France. I begin by telling you, that I am well, because I must end by telling you that we fought yesterday in good earnest, and that we were not the stronger party.—The Americans, after a long and brave resistance were at last routed. As I was attempting to rally them, the English honored me with a musket ball, which wounded me slightly in the leg; but this is nothing; the ball touched neither bone nor artery, and I shall escape without further inconveniences, than having to keep my bed for some time, a thing which puts me much out of humor. I hope you will not be alarmed; indeed this is a reason why you should be less so than before, since it keeps me from the field for some time, as I intend to take good care of myself, be very strict of it."

"I think this affair will lead to unpleasant consequences, which we must try to repair.—You must have received many letters from me, unless the English bear the same spite against my letters as to my legs. I have as yet received only one from you, and I long for news. Adieu. I am forbidden to write longer at present.—For some days past I have not had time to sleep; the last night was employed in our retreat, and in my journey to this place, where I am well taken care of. Let my friends know that I am well. Many tender regards to Madame d'Ayen; many compliments to my sisters. The officers will depart shortly; they will see you, how happy they are, good night; I love you more than ever. LAFAYETTE."

From Philadelphia he proceeded to Bristol. Mr. Honey Laurens on his way to Yorktown, after the adjournment of Congress, took the route through Bristol, and conveyed Lafayette in his carriage to Bethlehem. This act of kindness was long remem-