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MAJOR GENERAL
THE EARL OF STIRLING



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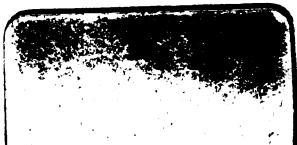


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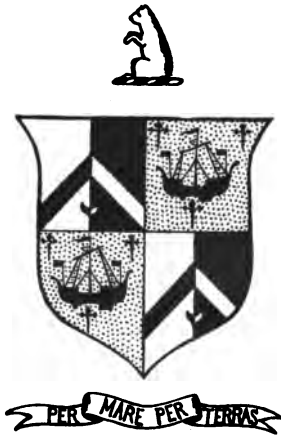
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MAJOR-GENERAL THE EARL OF STIRLING

AN ESSAY IN BIOGRAPHY

BY

LUDWIG SCHUMACHER

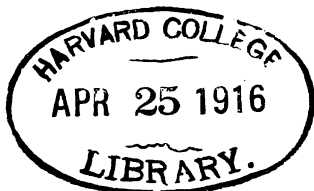


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CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. FOREWORD - - - - -	5
II. ANCESTRY AND AMERICAN ESTATES	11
III. BIOGRAPHY (1726-1765) - - -	18
IV. BIOGRAPHY (1765-1783) - - -	32
V. PERSONALITY - - - - -	49
VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY - - - - -	55

MAJOR-GENERAL THE EARL OF STIRLING

I.

FOREWORD.

IF it were possible to put aside our prejudices, and give an impartial analysis of the pleasure we take in those two classic fictions, "Henry Esmond" and "The Virginians," perhaps we should be surprised to find that a large measure of our delight is in the existence of a certain aristocratic element on our own shores. The dainty graces of a post-Elizabethan England, the formal etiquette of a country gentry, the artificial elegance of the Court, a state church, all had a reflex in the Old Dominion. Like the Canadians of to-day, if we may take the testimony of Mr. Goldwin Smith, they were more English than the English themselves.

This is readily understood when we recall the significance of the very term "The Old Dominion"—a compliment paid to the loyal Colony of Virginia for its devotion to the cause of the Stuarts. Richard Lee, a member of the Privy Council of Charles I., came to Virginia before the outbreak of the Civil War that eventually brought Charles I. to the scaffold. He and Sir William Berkeley remained loyal to the house of Stuart; and when some three hundred royalists migrated to Virginia in 1649, they united with them in an invitation to Prince Charles to come over to Virginia as ruler. On the accession of Prince Charles as Charles II. they issued a proclamation of allegiance to him as "King of England, France, Scotland, Ireland, and Virginia." In recognition of its loyalty, Charles II. allowed Virginia to quarter its arms with those of England, France, Scotland, and Ireland, with the motto :

En dat Virginia quintam.

So the royal refugees naturally found an asylum there rather than with the stern Puritans of New England, after the establishment of the Commonwealth. "And what more prolific mother of nobility was there in the eighteenth century than the Old Dominion?" asks Shoulder, in his "History of the United States." A few generations of these transplanted gentry developed in the New World a really *noble* type,—the Conservative Patriot. Its perfect exponent was George Washington. Nor is he a solitary instance. The signatures of the Declaration of Independence suggest to the genealogist the Peerage and the "Country Gentry" more frequently than the "Vox Populi." Their devotion to the mother-country, the home of their ancestors, was profound. Their attachment to all that is covered by the word Tradition was instinctive, and was a tenacious element in the social structure of the Colonies.

But they were none the less good Republicans,

as the event proved; and the Old Dominion gentleman was second not even to the stern New England Puritan when the question was one of the Rights of Englishmen. Nevertheless, the counterpart of the great forces of 1776 is found in the ranks of neither the Roundheads nor Cavaliers. It is a composite of the best elements of each.

Some of us are beginning to question the dictum, "All men are created equal." The interpretation of these memorable words has been all too literal. When in December, 1782, the heartbroken George III. announced to Parliament in a faltering voice the loss of the American Colonies, and recognized their independence, it was quite possible there was cause for emotion this side the Atlantic as well. It was quite possible that in separating from England we broke more irreparably with the glorious tradition of the Anglo-Saxon race than we either imagined or desired. It is quite possible that

in offering a home here for all mankind we have lost something well worth guarding. The immigration to our shores, particularly during the middle decades of this century, of crowds of illiterate emigrants of all nations and peoples, has again raised the question whether "a nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure."

The assimilation of these diverse elements within our borders has not been complete. The spirit of lawlessness that has now and again developed is something quite foreign to the spirit of "Liberty" as conceived by the framers of the Declaration of Independence.

From a consideration of such problems we turn with renewed reverence to a study of the conservative patriot of the last century. Of such was Major-General William Alexander, the Earl of Stirling.

There is a certain glamour of romance attached to this solitary British Peer in the ranks of the

Continental Army. True, his claim to his title was denied by the House of Lords; but that august body, as will later appear, exceeded its jurisdiction in pronouncing on the legitimacy of a Scotch peerage.

Like the ancestors of the Virginia gentry, the ancestor of Major-General William Alexander, the Earl of Stirling, found it necessary, or at least wise, to find a new home across seas, in consequence of his devotion to the royal house of Stuart; for the Jacobites of 1715 were the successors of the Cavaliers of 1649. Like the royal Charles, his grandson, the Pretender, won to his cause some of the best blood of Britain. Small wonder, then, if we find a counterpart of the Virginia gentleman in the New Jersey nobleman.

II.

ANCESTRY AND AMERICAN ESTATES.

THE ancestry of Major-General William Alexander, the Earl of Stirling, and his claim to the title is a story of romantic interest. The house was not an ancient one, the fifth and last Earl of Stirling in direct descent having died in 1739.

The founder of the house, Willam Alexander the poet (1580-1640), was the friend and pet of James VI. of Scotland, who succeeded Elizabeth as James I. of England. This monarch, and his son and successor, Charles I., demonstrated their affection for the Court poet by creating him successively:

Lord Alexander of Tullibrodie,
Viscount of Canada,
Viscount and Earl of Stirling,
Earl of Dovan.

Nor were these merely barren and high-sounding titles. Along with them came the following trifling gifts, by charter or letters patent, in the New World:

- (1) Nova Scotia.
- (2) Canada, "including fifty leagues of bounds on both sides of the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes."
- (3) A "tract of Maine and the island of Stirling (Long Island), and islands adjacent."

The "tract of Maine" embraced all east of the Kennebec River to Nova Scotia, or Acadie, and included Newfoundland. It was the most prodigious gift ever bestowed on a subject by a British sovereign, and is significant of the royal ignorance of the value of the New World and the possibilities of colonization. These gifts were in part, however, granted in recognition of efforts made and expenses incurred in colo-

nizing the New World. Yet, huge as was this territory, the claims were subsequently confirmed or recognized by Charles I. and his successors.

Along with these titles and gifts came tremendous political and administrative powers. Among others, he had the power of appointing one hundred and fifty baronets, called "Baronets of Nova Scotia," who were to take precedence of all other baronets. Under this power the first Earl actually created over one hundred baronets. Nearly fifty of the baronets of the Great Britain of to-day hold their titles from patents granted by the first Earl of Stirling.

In 1635, "the Council for Affairs in New England in America" granted to William Alexander, Earl of Stirling:

"All that island or islands theretofore called by the name of Matawock, or Long Island, and thereafter to be called by the name or names of the Isle or Isles of Stirling."

It was then within the bounds of the Plymouth Company's grant. When that Company surrendered its rights to the Crown, the second Earl of Stirling secured from it a patent for the "county of Canada, Long Island and adjacent islands," and the patent was confirmed by Charles I.

When New Amsterdam was under the governorship of Peter Stuyvesant (1639), the Earl of Stirling sent an agent to America to claim the proprietorship of Long Island. The agent took possession of Shelter Island, but his claims soon conflicted with the Dutch, who arrested him. In 1647, another agent arrived, and the doughty Dutch Governor had him promptly arrested and shipped to Holland.

The "Remonstrance to Nieuw Nederlandt," addressed to the States-General in 1640, says:

"We shall treat of Long Island more at length because the English greatly hanker after it."

In a petition to the King (Charles II.) in 1663,

Henry, third Earl of Stirling, says: "Your petitioner's grandfather and father, and himself theyre heyre, have respectively enjoyed the same, and have at great cost planted many places on the Island, but of late the Dutch have intruded on several parts thereof."

But no permanent colonization was effected under Lord Stirling's proprietorship.

In 1663, the third Earl of Stirling sold his right to Long Island to James, Duke of York, when the latter came into possession of New York. The price fixed was £7,000. But the Stuarts were royally indifferent in the matter of debts, and, nine years later, the money not being paid, the Duke granted in lieu the sum of £300 per annum of the revenues arising from his province of New York. Nor was this annuity paid. In 1760, Major-General, the Earl of Stirling, thinking, doubtless, his title clear, and two other heirs to the estates of Stirling, petitioned the King, praying for payment of pur-

chase money for Long Island granted to their ancestors.

It was afterwards discovered and claimed by his descendants that the Maine grant was also included in the instrument of transfer, quite by accident. A descendant of the first Earl in the female line, as late as the middle of the present century, attempted to establish a claim to this country, as well as to the Canada grant. But, as stated above, Henry, fifth and last Earl in direct descent, died in 1739, childless, in full possession of his titles, but shorn of the American estates of his ancestors.

When Nova Scotia fell into the hands of the French in 1667, the British Government granted the Earl of Stirling £10,000 in compensation for loss, but the grant distinctly stated that it was "in nowise for quitting title to New Scotland."

When, some hundred years later, the question of claims to American estates was inquired into



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by the heirs of the third Earl of Stirling, it was claimed that the £10,000 had never been paid by the Government. So vanished the vast American estates of the first Earl of Stirling. A village near the New Jersey home of the last Earl of the house of Stirling preserves the name. But the "Isle or Isles of Stirling" exist only on the original parchment recording the grant, for the "long Island" referred to in that document is still Long Island.

III.

BIOGRAPHY.

(1726-1765.)

THE immediate ancestor of Major-General, the Earl of Stirling, was James Alexander. He was an engineer-officer in the army of the Old Pretender in the Jacobite rebellion of 1715. In consequence of his attachment to the house of Stuart, and the failure of their cause, he took refuge in America. Soon after his arrival he found employment in the office of the Secretary of the province of New York. A skilled mathematician and engineer, he soon received the appointment of Surveyor-General of both New York and New Jersey. He then studied law and was admitted to the provincial bar, and appointed a member of the Provincial Council.

About ten years after his arrival in America

he married the widow of Samuel Provoost, who was engaged in the mercantile business of her first husband, and which she continued on her own account after her second marriage. James Alexander died in 1756, leaving a considerable fortune to his widow, and a large landed estate to be divided between one son and four daughters. While Surveyor-General of the province of New Jersey he had been one of four purchasers of a tract of three thousand acres of land in the vicinity of and embracing the present village of Basking Ridge. The tract was sold by John Harrison, acting agent of the East Jersey proprietors, who had purchased it of the Indians in 1717 for fifty dollars. James Alexander's share was a tract of about seven hundred acres to the northeast of the village, bordering the Passaic River.

While the details of his life are somewhat meagre, he seems to have been prominent in his day as lawyer, statesman, politician, and

scientist. He was, along with Dr. Franklin and others, one of the founders of the American Philosophical Society.

William Alexander, his son, was born in New York in 1726. He was educated in the best schools of the day, and his father instructed him in mathematics and surveying. He first entered business as a clerk, then as a co-partner in his mother's establishment. In the course of their trade they took contracts to supply the King's troops with clothing and provisions. This led to his joining the Commissariat of the army. In this capacity he attracted the attention of the Commander-in-Chief, Governor Shirley, and was soon invited to join his staff as aide-de-camp, and became his Private Secretary. He served in this position throughout the greater part of the War against the French, and when Governor Shirley was summoned to England, in 1756, for trial on charge of neglect of duty, young Alexander accompanied him. His testimony in the

case contributed materially to the vindication of the character of Governor Shirley.

William Alexander remained in England some five years, during which time he presented and prosecuted his claim, first to the title, and then to a portion of the estate of Henry, last Earl of Stirling, who, as before stated, died in 1739. When his father, James Alexander, left Scotland, in 1716, he was known to be presumptive heir to the title of the Earl of Stirling. On the death of the latter he did not present his claim. Probably the circumstances under which he left the country prevented him from doing so, for Jacobitism was not yet a dead letter. Probably, too, the expense such a prosecution involved may have been an item. Possibly, also, the sturdy Scotchman may have imbibed some of the freedom of the soil, and grown indifferent to "a marquis, duke, and a' that." Be this as it may, his son was under no necessity of hesitating under any of these probabilities, and the

vigor with which he prosecuted his claim makes an indifference to the title improbable.

Acting on the advice of the best counsel of the day, he proved his descent from an uncle of the first Earl of Stirling; and a jury, convened in Edinburgh in 1759, according to forms of law, declared him nearest male heir of the last deceased Earl of Stirling, according to Scotch law. According to the laws of Scotland, a patent of nobility, not expressly confined to male heirs in direct descent, went to collateral heirs. This was not the case in England, and the question involved was whether the laws of England in regard to the descent of a peer could affect a Scotch peerage after the union. It would seem not, and that therefore the matter was legally settled.

He thenceforth assumed the title of Earl of Stirling, and was so addressed to the day of his death. But some of his friends urged him to present his claim to the House of Lords also, not

as a necessary measure, but one "more respectful" to that body. This he at first refused to do, arguing that the only possible jurisdiction the House might have in the matter was in the event of his election to that body as a representative of the Scotch House of Peers. But he yielded his own and his attorney's judgment in the case, and his claim was presented to the House of Lords. He waited in England two years for their lordships to decide, and finally, on the death of his mother, in 1761, he left England before the decision was reached. The following year the House took action on his and similar applications. Meanwhile they had issued an order prohibiting claimants from using titles until their claims had been acted upon and allowed.

The decision on Lord Stirling's case was that his claim could not be allowed because he had failed to show that heirs in direct line were extinct. He never prosecuted his claim further,

nor did he comply with the order of the House of Lords in the matter of using the title; for "there was no other claimant of the title; and he had been acknowledged and treated, both in public and private, for more than two years in England and after his return to America, as lawful possessor of the Earldom."

The instrument appointing him Member of Council in June, 1760, refers to him as "William Alexander, Esq., claiming to be Earl of Stirling." Subsequently, in all formal documents, he was so referred to.

Soon after his return to this country he disposed of his mother's mercantile interests, and began the erection of a summer residence on the estate at Basking Ridge, N. J. The building of this residence, the improvement of the estate, the prosecution of his public duties as Surveyor-General of New Jersey and Member of the Provincial Council, occupied his energies until the outbreak of the Revolution.

There is abundant evidence that he was a man of large and enlightened views on all subjects involving the mutual interests of England and her Colonies. While in England he had formed an intimate acquaintance with the Earl of Bute, the Earl of Shelburne, and others, with whom he corresponded after his return to America. When the Earl of Shelburne was appointed a member of the Board of Control of the Colonies, in 1763, Lord Stirling wrote him a friendly letter of congratulation. The following extracts from the letter will show both the soundness of his views on great economic questions, and also a certain graceful, formal elegance in writing which belongs to past generations. After speaking of the undeveloped resources of America, he says:

“The making of pig-iron and the cultivation of hemp are two articles that want encouragement greatly. We are capable of supplying Great Britain with both to a large extent.”

He was one of the three original owners of the Hibernia (Morris County) iron mines, and in referring to iron-works already erected there and in New York he continues :

“The making of wine also is worth the attention of the Government. I have lately imported about twenty different sorts (of vine) and planted two vineyards,—one in this province (New York), and one in New Jersey; but I find the cultivation tedious, expensive, and uncertain.”

He then concludes the letter as follows:

“It is in these vineyards, my Lord, and the clearing of a large body of rich swamp lands in New Jersey, and fitting it for the cultivation of hemp; settling a good farm in the wilderness, and bringing to it some of the productions and improvements of Europe, that are my present employments. They have taken place of the pleasures of London, and I sometimes persuade myself that this is the happier life of the two.

Yet there are some hours I could wish to have repeated,—those in which I was honoured by your Lordship's conversations, which I shall ever recollect with the greatest pleasure."

He was one of the governors of King's College, and when, in 1762, the Board of Governors decided to send Dr. James Jay to England to solicit funds for that institution, he furnished him with letters to several influential friends and acquaintances there, among whom were Lord Ranney and the Earl of Bute. The latter responded with a generous contribution for the college. The petition to the King, however, seems to have met with no response save the barren honor of knighthood which his Majesty conferred on the bearer of the petition.

In 1768 he gave up his city residence, and retired with his family to the Basking Ridge estate. He had married, before his trip to England, Sarah Livingston, eldest daughter of Philip Livingston, and sister of Governor Livingston

of New Jersey, who succeeded Governor Franklin, the last royal governor. His two daughters, Lady Mary and Lady Kitty, were the admiration of the surrounding country.

The estate was chiefly meadow land, but a gently sloping knoll near the centre of the tract furnished a beautiful site for the stately residence he erected there. It was known as "The Buildings." Only a fragment of the original residence remains, and is a part of the substantial farmhouse now on the same site. But it is said of "The Buildings" that "this large dwelling, together with its connecting offices, stables, and coach-houses, were ornamented with cupolas and gilded vanes, and surrounded a paved court or quadrangle. There was a grand hall, and an imposing drawing-room, with richly decorated walls and stuccoed ceilings."

A Tory historian, who, of course, bore Lord Stirling no love, states that while living here "he cut a splendid figure, having brought with

him from England horses, carriages, a coachman, valet, butler, cook, steward, and a hair-dresser. Here this American nobleman lived the life of a gentleman of fortune; he rode a great coach with gilded panels, emblazoned with coronets and medallions, and altogether affected a style and splendor probably unequalled in the Colonies. He was a member of the King's Council, a Colonel in the militia, and was naturally the most conspicuous figure in the country."

When, in February, 1777, General Greene's division of the Continental Army moved to Basking Ridge, the General's headquarters were at "The Buildings," where he was the guest of Lady Stirling and her daughter, Lady Kitty. The latter was married here to Colonel William Duer in July, 1779, which occasion was long remembered as a brilliant social event in central New Jersey.

There was a cultivated society in the neigh-

borhood at this time. Dr. Kennedy, the pastor of the Presbyterian Church, was a cultivated gentleman. Many exiles from New York and other places had retreated here with their families for safety, and "The Buildings" was naturally the social centre of the surrounding country.

The native atmosphere was, however, colored by New Jersey Puritanism. In a letter to Lord Stirling from Robert Hunter Morris, December, 1763, he thus concluded:

"My compliments to Lady Stirling and Lady Kitty, who, I doubt not, enjoy the town and its amusements the better from having sung Psalms at Baskenridge last summer."

In the course of the War, Governor Livingston moved his family from Elizabethtown to Basking Ridge for safety. Here they were the guests of his sister, Lady Stirling. We have a glimpse of the domestic refinement of "The Buildings" in a private letter written by General Greene to Mrs.

Greene, during the winter when the army was encamped near by. He and the members of his staff must have found frequent relief from the hardships of army life in the cultivated society of the Livingstons and Stirlings. "They are three young ladies," he writes, referring to the Misses Livingston and Lady Kitty Stirling, "of distinguished merit, sensible, polite, and easy. Their manners are soft and engaging; they wish to see you here, and I wish it too; but I expect long before that happy moment to be on the march to Philadelphia."

IV.

BIOGRAPHY.

(1765-1783.)

WHILE occupied with his various agricultural and mining experiments, Lord Stirling, as member of the Provincial Council, was summoned to consider the measures to be taken relative to the Stamp Act. Like many other men of the day, he failed to comprehend the stupidity of a government in enacting such a measure, and considered it a blunder that would soon be rectified, not a deliberate measure.

In a council called by Governor Franklin, November 6th, 1765, at Burlington, Lord Stirling was detained by illness at Basking Ridge. In a letter he sent to Governor Franklin he says: "I am conscious that there never was a meeting of the Council at a more critical conjuncture, nor one

that required more prudence in deliberating and determining." So he sends his "sentiments" on the subject, advises deferring all business requiring stamped paper as long as possible, and adds: "'Tis not unlikely the Stamp Act may be repealed."

Governor Franklin, it will be remembered, was the last royal governor of New Jersey, a Tory, and a natural son of Benjamin Franklin. His appointment was unpopular. John Penn, son of the founder of Pennsylvania, in a letter to Lord Stirling refers to the appointment as an insult to the people of New Jersey, which he trusted they would resent. But notwithstanding the stigma on his birth he remained governor until the outbreak of the war. With him and his family Lord Stirling was on terms of intimacy and friendship, which was rudely interrupted when Stirling was appointed by the Provincial Congress to command the First New Jersey Battalion. This appointment led to an

angry correspondence, which was laid before the Provincial Congress by Lord Stirling in October, 1775.

In September, 1775, the clerk of the New Jersey Council notified Lord Stirling of a meeting of the Council to be held on the 15th of the month, and added :

“I have it further in command from his Excellency in Council to acquaint your Lordship that it is a matter of public report that you have accepted a commission from the Provincial Congress of New Jersey, appointing you Colonel of a regiment of militia in the county of Somerset, and his Excellency requires an answer from your Lordship whether you have or have not accepted such a commission.”

Lord Stirling was unable to attend the council referred to, but wrote a confirmation of the report, in which he said :

“This mark of confidence the people among whom I reside repose in me is one of the most

satisfactory, and, I think, honorable events that I have ever experienced. At a time when their dearest rights are invaded, to call me forth to take so important a part in their defence cannot but rouse the most grateful feelings of a man who ever has been a friend to the liberties of mankind."

In a letter dated Perth Amboy, October 3d, 1775, from Governor Franklin to the Earl of Dartmouth, relative to the condition of affairs in the Colonies, he makes the following reference to Lord Stirling's action:

"The enclosed Minutes of Council will give your Lordship an idea of the present state of affairs in this Province. By them you will likewise see that there is reason to believe that Lord Stirling, though one of his Majesty's Council for this Province, has accepted a Colonel's commission from the Provincial Congress of New Jersey. I have received a strange letter from him on the subject; but if he does not give

a satisfactory answer at or before the next meeting of the Council to the question put to him by the Board, he will certainly be suspended from his seat until his Majesty's pleasure shall be known."

His suspension soon followed; but when the Provincial Congress deposed the Governor, Lord Stirling arrested him, and he remained a prisoner on parole until the close of the war, when he retired to England, where he died in 1813.

Stirling was meanwhile organizing the first two battalions raised in New Jersey, and those who were unable to do otherwise he equipped at his own expense. Congress commissioned him as colonel, and appointed him to command the First New Jersey Battalion. In January, 1776, he boldly attacked a British man-of-war in New York Bay, laden with stores and provisions for the royal troops at Boston, and carried it into the port at Perth Amboy. For this bold feat he received one of the earliest votes of thanks from

the Continental Congress, and an appointment as brigadier-general.

From this period the life of Lord Stirling is more familiar. After Congress appointed him brigadier-general, he was ordered to New York. Here he succeeded General Lee in command, and immediately began to prepare the island for defence. He fortified the harbor, and built Forts Washington and Lee, on opposite sides of the North River, above the city. At the battle of Long Island he had command of a detachment of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware troops, and in attempting to cover their retreat he was taken prisoner.

Washington and some of his officers watched the battle from a hill near by. He supposed Lord Stirling, seeing resistance would be useless, would surrender at once. But, with a small detachment, he boldly attacked Cornwallis to engage his attention, and so cover the retreat of the rest of the troops. "Good God!" cried

Washington; "what brave fellows I must this day lose!" when he recognized Lord Stirling's deliberate sacrifice of himself to save the army. "We were on the point of driving Cornwallis from his station," wrote Lord Stirling after the battle; "but large reinforcements arriving rendered it impossible to provide for more than safety."

When the retreat of the main body of the army was secured, he surrendered himself to General de Heister. He was conducted on board the flagship of Lord Howe, where he remained until exchanged a few weeks later for Gov. Montford Brown, of Florida.

He then rejoined the army in New Jersey, and when the army went into quarters in Morristown, he had command of the line between the camp and the enemy. He was ordered to watch the British while Washington attacked the Hessians at Trenton. About this time he was promoted to a major-generalship. He en-

gaged Cornwallis at Scotch Plains, and defeated his proposed attack on Middlebrook.

He was next ordered to the Highlands, but called south on the appearance of the British fleet in the Delaware. He did good service in the battles of Brandywine Creek and Germantown, and in a council of war soon after strongly advised attacking the British in Philadelphia. But this was deemed unwise, and the army went into winter quarters at Valley Forge.

It was during the winter of 1777-1778 that the effort to supplant the Commander-in-Chief by a small faction known as the "Conway Cabal" became exposed. The immediate instrument of this exposure was Lord Stirling. The chief conspirators were Major-General Conway, an Irish-French adventurer in the Continental service, and Generals Gates and Mifflin.

Colonel James Wilkinson, aide-de-camp to General Gates, was sent to Congress (then sitting at Annapolis) to announce the success at

Saratoga. On his way he stopped at Lord Stirling's headquarters at Reading, Pa., and at dinner quoted General Conway's severe criticism of General Washington's conduct of the war in a letter to General Gates. Major Williams, aide-de-camp to Lord Stirling, to whom he imparted this, communicated it to Lord Stirling, who, in turn, forwarded a memorandum of it to General Washington. In the note accompanying the memorandum he wrote: "Such wicked duplicity I shall always consider it my duty to detect." The subsequent history of the Conway Cabal, and the interesting correspondence involved, are well known. Colonel Wilkinson, stung by his unenviable notoriety, swore that Lord Stirling "should bleed for his conduct," and resolved to send him a challenge. He was dissuaded from this course, and instead, addressed the following letter to him:

My Lord:

The propriety or impropriety of your com-

municating to his Excellency any circumstance which passed at your Lordship's board at Reading, I leave to be determined by your own feelings and the judgment of the public; but as the affair has eventually induced reflections on my integrity, the sacred duty I owe my honour obliges me to request from your lordship's hand that the conversation which you have published passed in a private company during a convivial hour."

Lord Stirling accordingly sent him the statement requested, but stated that his information had been given under no injunction of secrecy. He was severely criticised for using information obtained through the "convivial indiscretion" of his guest; but the stakes were too high for ordinary rules, and the result justified his action.

The importance of his services to the cause of the struggling Colonies at this juncture can scarcely be overestimated. It is not an easy matter to deliberately violate well-established

rules of conduct, even for the public good; but that is just what Lord Stirling unhesitatingly did in exposing the Conway Cabal by using information privately given. In our apotheosis of Washington we have sometimes forgotten that his contemporaries had not the enchantment of distance in their judgment of him. We marvel at factions opposed to him in the army, and elsewhere. We have invested him with more than human attributes. As in pagan sacrifices it was customary to offer a snow-white ox, and if a spotless one could not be found the spots were chalked over to make it appear spotless, so our hero-worship has led us to do in the case of Washington. But the spots have been revealed, and it may have been something of a shock to learn that he, too, was on occasion the slave of passion; but on second thought there is an added pleasure in a new feeling of kinship to a man so truly great in civil and military life.

“Woe to you when all men shall speak well of you.” It is related that Governor John Jay remarked to his son in his old age that the full history of the Revolution was unknown save only to himself and John Adams. That among other things, there had been a most bitter party in Congress opposed to General Washington throughout the war. But as the old Congress sat with closed doors, only what they deemed safe and expedient in their proceedings reached the public.

With secret factions opposed to him in the army and in Congress, the fortunes of the Colonies might have been transferred to far less able hands but for the timely services of Lord Stirling.

At the battle of Monmouth, in June, 1778, Lord Stirling's division repulsed the British, and had a large share in retrieving the blunders of General Lee. In a letter written by Dr. James McHenry, private secretary to General Washington, a few days after the battle, he says:

“General Greene and Lord Stirling gave the most evident and unequivocal marks of great military worth; their dispositions were judicious, their judgment good and clear, and their bravery always pointed and efficacious.”

After the battle, General Lee, stung by General Washington's criticism, demanded a court-martial. The President of the court-martial was Lord Stirling. It sat for three weeks while the army was on the way to the Hudson, and finally declared Lee guilty of all the charges of

- (1) Disobedience of orders.
- (2) Misbehavior before the enemy.
- (3) Disrespect toward Commander-in-Chief.

The sentence of the court, which was sustained by Congress, suspended him from his command for a twelvemonth.

Though the court-martial was demanded by Lee, he never forgave Washington, and the short remainder of his life was embittered. He retired to his estate in Virginia “to learn to hoe

tobacco, which is the best school to form a consummate general." This was his parting fling at the Commander-in-Chief.

When the term of his suspension expired, having heard that Congress purposed taking away his commission, he addressed an insolent letter to that body, which promptly brought about his dismissal from the service. Wearying of his life on his country estate, he retired to Philadelphia, where he died. Passionate and resentful to the last, even his will bore the impress of his nature. "I desire most earnestly," one clause reads, "that I may not be buried in any church or churchyard, or within a mile of any Presbyterian or Anabaptist meeting-house; for, since I have resided in this country, I have kept so much bad company while living, that I do not choose to continue it when dead."

Lord Stirling was also a member of the Court of Inquiry convened at Tappan, in 1778, to consider the case of Major André.

In the autumn of 1778, Lord Stirling was ordered to take command of the troops stationed in New Jersey, and watch the movements of the British in New York. While so occupied he directed an attack on the British at Powles Hook, for which he received the thanks of Congress.

Fearing another invasion of New York from Canada, Lord Stirling was sent to Albany to take command of the Northern Department. Hearing that the British were advancing by way of Lake George, he repaired to Saratoga to meet them; but on the 2d of November, 1781, he heard of the surrender of Yorktown, which deterred the British from any further advance. He therefore dismissed the militia and retired to Albany. Ordered to the command of the army in New Jersey in January (1782), he repaired to Philadelphia, where he established his headquarters for the winter. In the following spring he was sent to Fishkill to preside at a Board of Officers, appointed by the Commander-in-Chief,

to settle the rank of subalterns of the Connecticut line. He was then again ordered to take command of the Northern Department at Albany. Here he was taken sick near the end of 1782, and died, January 15th, 1783, in the 57th year of his age. He was buried in the vault of his wife's ancestors in the old Dutch church in Albany, and when that was demolished his remains were removed to the "cemetery belonging to the Episcopal church of which he was a member. His funeral was solemnized with military observances appropriate to his rank, and the religious rites of his communion."

In a letter from General Washington to Lady Stirling, dated Newburg, 20th January, 1783, he writes:

My Lady:

Having been informed by letter from Captain Sill of the unspeakable loss which your Ladyship has experienced, I feel the sincerest sympathy those sorrows which I am sensible

cannot be removed or effaced. For this purpose I would also have suggested every rational topic of consolation, were I not fully persuaded that the principles of Philosophy and Religion of which you are possessed had anticipated everything I could say on the subject.

“It only remains, then, as a small but just tribute to the memory of Lord Stirling, to express how deeply I share the common affliction, on being deprived of the public and professional assistance, as well as the private friendship, of an officer of so high rank with whom I have lived in the strictest habits of amity; and how much those military merits of his Lordship which rendered him respected in his lifetime, and now regretted by the whole army. It will doubtless be a soothing consideration, in the poignancy of your grief, to find that the general officers are going into mourning for him.”

V.

PERSONALITY.

THE impression of Lord Stirling, gathered from various sources relating directly or indirectly to the subject, is that of a man possessing a personality both marked and unique. The dominant note in his character was a passionate love of justice. His political views were definite and distinct; his principles lofty and unswerving; his character generous, impulsive, and fearless. Having prosecuted and proven the claim to his title with much difficulty and expense, he evidently valued it for its own sake. Moreover, he was accustomed to the dignity and prestige of the rank by a three years' residence in England. It is not strange, therefore, that he clung to his honors somewhat tenaciously.

While it is easy to conclude that his determination to hold his title was due to personal

vanity, it is more in accord with the tenor of his life to attribute it to that clear sense of justice which led him to expose the Conway Cabal at the sacrifice of merely conventional rules of propriety and honor. It was his well-known sense of justice that led to his appointment as President of the court-martial that tried General Lee, and which gave him a voice in the court of inquiry to consider the case of the lamented Major André. The courage, dash, resolution of the true soldier were all his in full measure. These characteristics were in evidence throughout his public career from the passage of the Stamp Act to the day of his death, when the war was practically over, with the dawn of peace already breaking.

The following story is told of his Lordship, and has a significance aside from its humor:

“The laugh occasionally went round at his expense,” writes Mrs. Lamb in a “History of the City of New York,” “on account of his sup-

posed ambition to the title of Lordship. The story was told how, at the execution of a soldier for desertion, the poor criminal called out, 'Lord, have mercy on me!' And Lord Stirling replied with warmth, 'I won't, you rascal! I won't have mercy on you.'"

How his claim to the title would have adjusted itself under the new Constitution in 1789, had he lived so long, is a matter of curious speculation. Under a Constitution which recognized no privileged class, and forbade any person holding office under the government accepting "any present, emolument, office, or title of any kind whatever" just what would be the status of "the Earl of Stirling"? Officially, he would presumably be Major-General William Alexander; but in social life would he continue to enjoy the distinction incident to the title under the Old Régime? It is said that the claim of the Rev. Bryan Fairfax, of Virginia, eighth baron of the name, was recognized by the House of

Lords as late as 1800, though he never asserted it. But dearly as Lord Stirling clung to the "husk of a title," no man with his record could hesitate in a choice of allegiance between his Majesty, the King of England, and their Majesty, the People of the United States.

In personal appearance he was distinctly impressive. The author above quoted says further, he was "of fine presence, and (of) the most martial appearance of any general in the army save Washington himself; was quick-witted, intelligent, far-seeing, and vociferous among his troops; . . . (his) example was a perpetual source of strength and inspiration; the troops were proud of his martial appearance, and boastfully compared his courtly dignity with the brusque mannerism of many foreign generals. . . . He had, moreover, considerable military schooling, but his special forte, so far as developed, lay rather in engineering and planning of fortifications than in the conduct of great battles."

“A man can live in the world’s memory only by what he has done for the world,” wrote Chateaubriand. The claim of the last Earl of Stirling to the world’s memory is not based solely on the picturesque paradox of a nobleman with a passionate fondness for a title second only to a passionate love of Liberty; nor yet to his distinguished ancestry; nor yet to the interesting subject of the American estates granted to the first Earl of Stirling, and the question of claims and titles thereto. These claims seem rather to have obscured than enhanced his fame.

“We, of the Western world, are told to scorn
The hereditary reign and rule of kings;
Thrones, we have learned, are mediæval
things,
And Princes like ourselves are darkly born
To fate less often halcyon than forlorn.”

Whatever vanity Lord Stirling may have felt for his rank and title as a peer of the realms of

his Majesty, George III., it was unhesitatingly sacrificed on the higher altar of Civil Liberty. This alone, when accompanied by his substantial influence in the struggle which gave birth to the dominant nation of the New World, entitles him to "a decent respect (in) the opinions of mankind."

VI.

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