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REMINISCENCES

OF THE

Last Days, Death and Burial

OF

GENERAL HENRY LEE.

BY

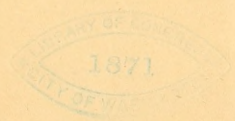
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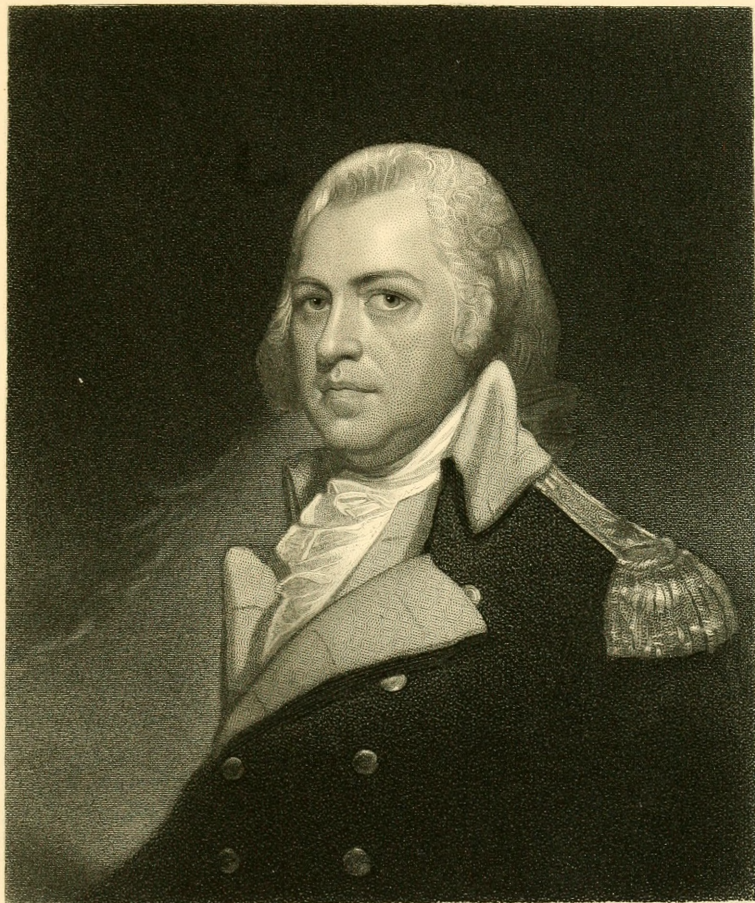


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W. M. N. S.

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TO

GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE,

This Closing Chapter in the Life of his Father

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.

NOTE.

To Mr. P. M. Nightingale of Georgia,—a grandson of General Nathaniel Greene,—who was an eye-witness of the final scenes in the life of General Henry Lee and present at his death, I am largely indebted for the facts contained in the following narrative.

NEW YORK CITY,

May 10th, 1870.



REMINISCENCES
OF
GENERAL HENRY LEE.

BY the "treaty of amity, settlement and limits" concluded in 1819, Spain ceded Florida to the United States. An exchange of flags under this treaty did not take place, however, until the 17th of June, 1821, when General Jackson was appointed governor of Florida, with ample legislative, judicial and executive powers. The disputes which had for some time existed with regard to Florida, and the repeated violations of the revenue

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laws rendered a concentration of forces in the neighborhood of Fernandina a matter of military necessity on the part of the United States. Accordingly, at the period of General Henry Lee's visit to Dungeness, an American fleet was lying in Cumberland sound whose instructions were to preserve the rights of commerce in that vicinity, cooperate with the land forces, whenever practicable, in checking the lawlessness and preventing the depredations of the Seminoles, and, when pending negotiations were consummated, to assist in taking formal possession of Florida in the name of the United States. That fleet consisted of

the frigate John Adams,—Commodore
Henley ;

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the brig Saranac,—Captain Elton ;
the brig Enterprise,—Captain Kearny ;
the hermaphrodite brig Prometheus,—
 Captain Finch ;
the schooner Lynx,—Captain¹ Madison ;
and a gun-boat, [sloop]—Captain Mc-
 Call.

¹ Captain Madison, when a poor orphan boy, was adopted and educated by Commodore Preble. He married Miss Houston, a niece of John Houston McIntosh, Esq., of Camden county, Georgia. Subsequently, in command of the "Lynx," he sailed from Cumberland sound with orders to attack and disperse pirates who, from the West Indies, were making frequent descents along the Florida coast and in the Gulf of Mexico, to the great annoyance of American commerce. While thus engaged, his ship foundered at sea and every man on board was lost. Captain Daniel

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A considerable land-force, under the command of Colonel Bankhead, was stationed at Fernandina, on Amelia island. Major Irvin and Captain Payne were among the officers then on duty at that point.

In 1813 Gen. Lee sailed for the West Indies, trusting that a change of climate would restore his failing health, which was

Turner and Captain Madison had entered into a private, friendly agreement, by which they promised to divide with each other the prize moneys which they might severally earn while employed in this special service. Some time after the loss of the "Lynx,"—generously responding to this compact which he had made with his dead comrade,—Captain Turner transmitted several thousand dollars to Mrs. Madison as her husband's share of prize money. Apt illustration of the affirmation of the Lacedæmonian king, that the truly brave man is always just.

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then, and had been for some time sadly impaired. Such were his infirmities, that during the war of 1812 he was physically incapacitated from entering the lists of the defenders of his country, whose independence he had so valiantly and successfully vindicated in the primal struggle of the republic. In his retirement he purposed a thorough revision of his "Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department," and the preparation of biographies of his "two beloved commanders, Greene and Washington." It will ever remain a matter of sincere regret that he did not compass the execution of this plan. To his "Memoirs" he doubtless would have imparted additional value and interest; but in their present form,

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and as he gave them to history, they possess the highest merit and constitute the best military record we possess, of the incidents, campaigns, characters and heroic memories embraced within their scope. Lives of Washington and Greene have been carefully studied and well written; but, for one, I freely confess to the firm conviction that biographies of these heroes by their gifted, accomplished, eloquent compatriot and friend, "Light Horse Harry Lee," would far have surpassed all others.

The mild atmosphere of the West Indies and the entire repose there enjoyed appear, for a time, to have buoyed up his spirits with the hope of a return to at least comparative health. While at Turks island,

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on a voyage to New Providence, on the 8th of August, 1816, he writes to his son, "My miserable state of health improves by the occasional voyaging in this fine climate, with the sage guidance of a superior physician to whom I am now returning." Six months afterwards, he says, "My Spanish doctor has done me good, and sometimes inspires hopes of partial restoration." During these years, his letters,—or at least such of them as have been made public,—are replete with the tenderest expressions of love for and interest in his sons. They afford the surest evidence that his days were occupied by studies of the highest order. The results of his extensive reading and reflection are charmingly imparted for the benefit of those

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in whose education and improvement his sympathies were most deeply enlisted.

In 1817 entertaining serious apprehensions of an absolute failure of health and strength, he expresses his disappointment in not being able to secure a passage to Alexandria, Virginia, whither he had removed with his family in 1811 for the purpose of educating his children. Several plans were formed for reaching the United States, but on each occasion some untoward circumstance occurred to interrupt his contemplated voyage.

Convinced that he was deriving no benefit from his sojourn in the West Indies, and seemingly appreciating the fact that his days were well-nigh numbered, his strength al-

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most gone, he determined to avail himself of the first opportunity which would enable him to place himself under the kind care of the daughter of his old commander General Nathaniel Greene. Late in January, 1818, he took passage in a New England schooner bound from Nassau, New Providence, to Boston;—the captain (who was also the owner of the vessel), promising to run in and land him at the south end of Cumberland island. This engagement was faithfully kept, and for the passage he charged General Lee not a farthing. Even when pressed by Mr. James Shaw and by some of the officers of the fleet, then present at the mouth of the St. Mary's river, to accept the liberal compensation which

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they there tendered him, the captain persistently declined all pecuniary remuneration, alleging that he esteemed it a special pleasure and privilege to minister to the comfort and respond to the wishes of so distinguished a hero of the revolution.

Dungeness,—long known as perhaps the most beautiful and attractive residence on the Georgia coast,—is located near the southern end of Cumberland island. The plantation was purchased by General Nathaniel Greene soon after the close of the Revolutionary war. Although the mansion and grounds were planned and laid out by him, he did not live to consummate his intention of making it his summer residence. The improvements suggested by

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him were carried out after his death. The location of Dungeness,—commanding as it does an extensive view of the Atlantic ocean, of Cumberland sound, the St. Mary's river and the low-lying, verdant shores of Georgia and Florida,—is very beautiful. So completely and harmoniously had nature and art combined their varied attractions, that in this charming home there was nothing further to be coveted, whether in the quiet beauty of the landscape, the expanse of water, the salubrity of climate, the refined hospitality which dwelt within the walls of the grand tabby mansion, the delights of the drive, the chase, the garden and the orchard, or the mingled grandeur and beauty of live-oaks,

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magnolias, cedars, oranges, myrtles and olives.

At the time of General Lee's visit, Mrs. Shaw,— the daughter of General Greene,— was the mistress of this delightful and hospitable abode, whose charms elicited the warmest praises from numerous friends and guests who constantly sought the enjoyments of her generous roof.

Early in February, 1818, about four o'clock in the afternoon, a grandson of General Greene,— a lad some fifteen years old, who was amusing himself with boyish sports about the ample grounds,— observed a schooner nearing the Dungeness landing. Just before reaching the wharf the schooner came to anchor and a boat

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was lowered. A feeble old man was assisted into the boat by the captain and mate, who took their seats beside him, and the three were rowed ashore by two sailors. The youth had ^{immediately} intermediately gone to the landing where he waited to ascertain the object of the visit and to welcome the guest. General Lee was lifted from the boat by the sailors, who, making a chair with their hands and arms, bore him to the shore. He was pale, emaciated, very weak and evidently suffering much pain. There was that about his appearance which assured the observer not only of his illness but also of his poverty. He was plainly, almost scantily attired. The sailors placed upon the wharf an old hair-trunk in a dilapidated

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condition, and a cask of Madeira wine. General Lee brought no other baggage with him. Beckoning the youth to him, he inquired who he was. Learning that Mrs. Shaw was at home, and that he was the grandson of General Greene, he threw his arms around him, embracing him with marked emotion. Then, leaning upon him, he walked a short distance from the landing place, and sat upon a log. He then bade him go to the house and say to his aunt, Mrs. Shaw, that General Lee was at the wharf and wished the carriage to be sent for him. "Tell her," he added, "I am come purposely to die in the house and in the arms of the daughter of my old friend and compatriot."

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There is something deeply affecting in this picture of the loneliness and pain, weakness and poverty, of this gallant soldier of the revolution. It is hard to recognize in the person of this weary, decrepit old man, the brilliant colonel commandant of the Partisan Legion,—the beloved of Washington and the right arm of his immediate commander Greene,—the best military writer of his army,—the honored of Congress,—the trusted delegate,—the successor of Beverly Randolph as governor of Virginia,—the accomplished orator from whose lips, when pronouncing the funeral oration, at Washington, on the occasion of the death of our first president, fell that memorable tribute which has ever since

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found emphatic response in every patriotic breast, "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." Shifting fortunes, wounds, age and disease have wrought sad changes, and he is but the wreck of former greatness;—alone, destitute, away from home and family, and yet soon to be the recipient of the kindest attentions from those who know and honor him for the deeds he has wrought, and for the signal services he has rendered the cause of truth and country and liberty in the darkest hour of danger and oppression.

Leaving him seated upon the log, young Nightingale (for such was the name of the lad), hastened to the mansion, communicated the fact of the General's arrival,

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and delivered his messages to his aunt. The carriage was immediately sent, and in it General Lee and his little friend rode leisurely up together; — the captain and mate of the vessel walking by the side of the vehicle.

When they arrived at the house, General Lee was so weak that he had to be assisted both in getting out of the carriage and in ascending the steps. Having received a most cordial welcome from Mr. and Mrs. Shaw, he excused himself at once and retired to his room. Such was his feebleness that he kept his room, generally leaving it but once a day, and then only for a little while that he might take a short walk in the garden. Upon these occasions he al-

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ways sent for young Nightingale to accompany him. Leaning upon the grandson of his honored commander,— usually with his arm around his neck,— he would slowly and with difficulty descend the steps and then, turning into the garden, walk in an avenue which ran through a grove of orange trees. Soon fatigued, he would return to the house and again seek repose in his room. Even in these short walks he was able to indulge only for a week or ten days after his arrival. On but a few occasions was he strong enough to dine with the family,— his meals, at his own request, being served in his room. His feebleness becoming daily more apparent and oppressive, he was soon entirely unable to leave his room and spent

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most of his time in a recumbent posture. Shortly after his arrival all the prominent officers of the army and navy stationed in that vicinity, called in a body and paid their respects to the distinguished guest. When it became too great an effort for him to leave his room, and he realized the fact that his life was fast ebbing away, he became at times very depressed and irritable. The wound which he had received in Baltimore caused him almost incessant suffering. It seriously affected his bladder. When the paroxysms of extreme agony were upon him, and they recurred at short intervals, his exhibitions of commingled rage and anguish were often terrible. It was the strong man wrestling with the

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frailties of the falling tabernacle; — the brave heart chafing under the decadence of physical powers; — the heroic memories of a proud and vigorous past contending against the feebleness and oppression of a painful present; — a lofty spirit revolting at the encroachments of bodily suffering and the near approach of utter prostration; — the caged and wounded eagle beating against its prison bars, and longing for the sunlight and free air, the lordly plumage and sturdy pinions of former days; — the dying warrior whose strength never before had failed him in the hour of peril, sternly calling to mind his former victories and refusing to admit that the outworks had been carried, that the citadel itself must

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soon yield to the terrible assaults of the last enemy.

At such times his groans would fill the house and wring the hearts of those who watched by his side, anxious, but unable to render him that alleviation which his vast sufferings loudly demanded. Many important remedies which modern ingenuity and professional skill have contrived were then unknown to the surgeon; and the patient languished amid physical tortures which later medical aid could have materially mitigated.¹

¹ A surgical operation was proposed as offering some hope of prolonging his life; but he replied that the eminent physician to whose skill and care during his sojourn in the West Indies he was so much indebted,

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During moments of comparative freedom from pain he would converse eloquently upon the political questions which had agitated the public mind and were still engaging the attention of the country. He was a decided Federalist, and avowed his utter detestation of all Democrats. Often did he allude in glowing terms to the glorious memories of the revolution; and of no one, Washington apart — did he speak more enthusiastically than of General Greene. He

had disapproved a resort to the proposed operation. The surgeon in attendance still urging it, his patient put an end to the discussion by saying: "My dear sir, were the great Washington alive, and here, and joining you in advocating it, I would resist." — See life of *General Henry Lee*, by General Robert E. Lee, pp. 78, 79.

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was also a sincere lover of nature, and indulged in many and beautiful tributes to the wide-spreading sea, the charming groves, the flowers and the song-birds which filled his chamber with their early spring notes of joy and gladness.

During his illness he was constantly attended by two surgeons from the fleet; one of whom was Dr. Osborne of the Saranac. The other was the surgeon of the John Adams — a superior physician whose name escapes present memory. The officers of the army and navy, usually two at a time, sat up with him every night, ministering most tenderly to all his wants. Chief among them in his devotion around the bedside of the dying hero, was Lieutenant Fitzhugh.

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He was a Virginian, and, if we are correctly informed, a distant relative or connection of General Lee. Mr. and Mrs. Shaw contributed everything in their power which could conduce to his comfort and happiness and serve to keep alive the flame which was already trembling so uncertainly in the socket. In his enfeebled condition and irritable state it was no easy matter to supply him with competent servants who would prove acceptable to him, or who could long endure the continued demands made upon them. In moments of supreme agony, losing his self-control, he would sometimes drive them from his presence and never afterwards permit them to enter his room. At length an old woman,— who had been Mrs.

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Greene's favorite maid and who was then the esteemed and privileged family servant,—was selected to wait upon him. The first thing General Lee did, as she entered his room, was to hurl his boot at her head and order her out. Entirely unused to such treatment, without saying a word she deliberately picked up the boot and threw it back. The effect produced by this strange and unexpected retort was marked and instantaneous. The features of the stern warrior relaxed. In the midst of his pain and anger a smile passed over his countenance, and from that moment until the day of his death he would permit no one except "Mom Sarah" to do him special service.

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General Lee's sojourn at Dungeness continued nearly two months. His feebleness and emaciation increasing every day, and his paroxysms of agony growing more frequent and longer in their duration, he became utterly exhausted, and gradually yielded to the sure and steady approach of the last enemy. For several days previous to his death it was with the greatest difficulty, even with the aid of constant stimulants, that he could be kept alive. His countenance and voice gave fearful token of the most intense agony. His words were few, and were rather the expressions of terrible pain than the indications of a desire to converse with those who watched around his dying

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couch. He ceased to breath on the 25th of March, 1818.

So soon as the fact of his demise was known, all the naval vessels in Cumberland sound showed their colors at half mast. A similar token of respect was manifested at military head quarters on Amelia island. Arrangements were formed to testify, by the most public funeral honors, the highest regard for the memory of the gallant dead and a just appreciation of the national bereavement. Every preparation was made on the part of Mr. and Mrs. Shaw which the tenderest forethought could suggest. The prominent officers of the army and navy came over to Dungeness, with crape upon their side arms, to

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participate in the obsequies. Citizens from Cumberland and Amelia islands and from St. Mary's united in paying their respect. A company of infantry from the force stationed on Amelia island and a large detachment of marines from the fleet formed the military escort. Commodore Henley was present, and superintended the last sad details. The full army band was in attendance. Captains Elton,¹ Finch and Madison, and Lieutenants Fitzhugh and Ritchie of the navy and Mr. Lyman of the army acted as pall bearers. The sheathed swords of Captains Elton and Finch were crossed upon the coffin. The officers of the

¹ See White's *Historical Collections of Georgia*, p. 287, quoting from the *Savannah Republican*.

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navy and Captain Payne of the army followed. Mr. Taylor performed the funeral services.

The procession moved from the house to the private burial ground — distant a little less than half a mile from the family mansion and located near the beach. While it was moving, and until the body was committed to the earth, from the John Adams,— the flag-ship of the fleet,— minute guns were fired. The solemn dead march was played by the band. At the grave the concluding portions of the burial service were read, and over it the customary salutes were fired by the infantry and marines. Thus was nothing omitted which, under the circumstances, could con-

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tribute to the solemnity of the occasion or aid in compassing the most distinguished funeral honors for this gifted soldier of the revolution, who, by his bright blade, had won such success and honor for his country, and, by his intellect and attainments, had given to history some of the most prominent memories of his age and people.

In 1832 or 1833 a head and foot stone were sent by Major Lee, the eldest son of General Lee, through General Hamilton of South Carolina, and they were placed by Mr. Nightingale in position over the grave of the distinguished chief. The inscription which they bore was written, it is believed, by Major Lee.

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Sacred
to the memory of
GEN. HENRY LEE.
of Virginia.
Obiit — 25 March, 1818,
Ætat 63.

Some nine years ago the question of the removal of General Lee's remains and their interment in Virginia soil was agitated in the Virginia Legislature. If our information be correct, commissioners were actually named to superintend the execution of this honorable trust. The late war ensuing, their mission was interrupted, and "Light Horse Harry Lee" still slumbers in the family burying ground at Dungeness.

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The devastations of the last war fearfully invaded this beautiful home. Its pleasant springs are dry, its hospitable halls deserted, its attractive gardens and groves of oranges and olives frequented only by the birds of heaven commingling their morning and evening songs with the sweet odors which perfume the passing winds. Attired in their drapery of pendent moss swaying solemnly in the ambient air, the grand live-oaks,—ancient guardians of the spot,—bemoan the sad changes which have marred the peace and happiness of this charming abode. Silent though it be, there are memories here still vocal amid the mutations of fortune and the desolations of war; — memories of distinguished hospitality, refine-

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ment, culture, elegance and enjoyment ;— memories which carry the heart back to happy days and peculiar excellencies which come not again. Not the least among the marked recollections of Dungeness are those which recall the fact that in the days of his supreme weakness, its generous roof sheltered and its kindest influences alleviated the agonies and ministered to the comforts of one of the greatest heroes of our Revolutionary period ; and, when the flowers of Spring could no longer charm by their beauty and fragrance, or the soft south wind bring health and surcease of pain to the suffering and the dying, it received into its hospitable bosom and folded in one long affectionate embrace all that

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was mortal of the gallant, the gifted, the honored dead.

Closely identified in life, the names of Greene and Lee are in death inseparable.¹ Shoulder to shoulder they led the armies

¹ General Greene died at his plantation on the Savannah river, "Mulberry Grove"—fourteen miles above Savannah and on the south side of the river, on the 19th of June, 1785.

The following account of his funeral obsequies is borrowed from a Savannah journal.

"On Monday last, the 19th day of June, died at his seat near Savannah, NATHANIEL GREENE, Esq., late Major General in the army of the United States; and on Tuesday morning his remains were brought to town to be interred. The melancholy account of his death was made known by the discharge of minute guns from Fort Wayne; the shipping in the harbor had their colors half masted; the shops and stores in the town were shut; and every class of citizens, suspending

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of the Confederation, and upon the soil of the youngest of the "Original Thirteen," hav-

their ordinary occupations, united in giving testimonies of the deepest sorrow.

The several military corps of the town and a great part of the militia of Chatham county attended the funeral, and moved in the following procession :

The Corps of Artillery,
The Light Infantry,
The militia of Chatham county,
Clergyman and Physicians,
Band of Music ;
THE CORPSE AND PALL BEARERS,
Escorted on each side by a company of Dragoons ;
The principal Mourners,
The members of the CINCINNATI as Mourners,
The speaker of the Assembly,
And other civil officers of the State,
CITIZENS and STRANGERS.

About five o'clock the whole proceeded, the music playing the Dead March in Saul, and the Artillery

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ing fought their last battle, laid their armor
by and sank to rest in kindred graves.

firing minute guns as it advanced. When the Military reached the vault in which the body was to be entombed, they opened to the right and left, and resting on reversed arms, let it pass through. The funeral service being performed, and the corpse deposited, thirteen discharges from the artillery and three from the musquetry closed the scene. The whole was conducted with a solemnity suitable to the occasion."

The *identical* vault in the old cemetery in Savannah, in which General Greene rests is, at this day, a matter of uncertainty. A partial search was made for the coffin in 1820, but it proved unsuccessful. Although the precise tomb which encloses his honored dust may have escaped the memory of succeeding generations, his name and brave deeds live in the cherished remembrance of his countrymen: and grateful fellow citizens have erected in one of the high places of Savannah an enduring tribute to his valor and worth.

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They sleep where the recollections of their
brave deeds and the grateful songs of the
true lovers of liberty are caught up by the
billows of a common ocean and joyfully re-
peated in wider circles, in more heroic strains.
The soil thus honored, is hallowed indeed.

How sleep the brave who sink to rest,
By all their country's wishes blessed !
When Spring, with dewy fingers cold,
Returns to deck their hallowed mould,
She there shall dress a sweeter sod
Than Fancy's feet have ever trod.

By fairy hands their knell is rung ;
By forms unseen their dirge is sung ;
There Honor comes, a pilgrim gray,
To bless the turf that wraps their clay ;
And freedom shall awhile repair,
To dwell a weeping hermit there !

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