

## **“THE NATION’S GUEST”**

By Richard A. Noegel

**“All that you are and all that I owe to you  
justifies my love.”**

He is the only person to dine alone with all of the first seven US presidents.<sup>1</sup>

Although not an American, he is commissioned a Major General in the Army of the United States with command of a full division—at the age of 19—earning for him the moniker “the boy general.”

Two hundred years ago (1824–25), he was making a farewell tour of the young American republic.

America gives him a phenomenal welcome. Wherever he goes, throngs of adoring people flock to see him—not in their hundreds or even in their thousands, but in their tens of thousands. At an appearance in Loudoun County, Virginia, 10,000 people turn out—50% of the total population—to greet and welcome “The Hero of Two Worlds” (the Old and the New). He intends to visit only the original thirteen states during a four-month journey, but his enormous popularity is such that the tour stretches to sixteen months and more than 6000 miles as he visits all twenty-four.

It is like that everywhere, without exception.

According to one historian, "It was a mystical experience they would relate to their heirs through generations to come. La Fayette had materialized from

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<sup>1</sup> Washington, Adams (father), Jefferson, Adams (son), Monroe, van Buren, & Jackson (before Jackson was president).

a distant age, the last leader and hero of the nation's defining moment. They knew that they and the world would never see his kind again."<sup>2</sup>

New York, Boston, and Philadelphia try with all their might and main to outdo one another in the celebrations honoring La Fayette. Needing a place to hold a reception for him, Philadelphia renovates the old State House (today's Independence Hall), which might otherwise have been torn down. Until that point, it had not been usual in the United States to build monuments, but La Fayette's visit sets off a wave of construction, usually with La Fayette, as a Freemason, personally laying the cornerstone. One such monument is the memorial to General Nathanael Greene in Savannah, Georgia, the cornerstone of which is laid by General La Fayette on 21 March 1825 (photo).



The arts benefit by his visit as well, as many cities commission portraits of La Fayette and of Washington

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<sup>2</sup> <https://minermuseum.blogspot.com/2017/07/everything-is-lafayette-last-generals.html>

for their civic buildings, and their likenesses are seen on innumerable souvenirs (photo).



The towns and cities that he visits give him enthusiastic, almost delirious, welcomes.<sup>3</sup> He visits Washington, capital city of the young republic, and he is surprised by the simple clothing worn by President Monroe, and by the lack of any guards around the White House. While in Washington, he also addresses a joint session of Congress—the first person not born in America ever to do so.<sup>4</sup> He hands out diplomas to the first graduating class of Columbia College (now George Washington University). There are three graduates.

In Virginia, he goes to Mount Vernon as he had done forty years before, this time for the sad duty of visiting Washington's grave.<sup>5</sup> On 19 October 1824, he is at

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<sup>3</sup> Including Fayetteville, North Carolina, the first place in America to be named in the general's honor.

<sup>4</sup> Only two portraits hang in the Chamber of the House of Representatives in the Capitol Building in Washington: those of George Washington and La Fayette.

<sup>5</sup> "The feelings, which on this awful [i.e. awe-full; filled with awe] moment oppress my heart, do not leave me the power of utterance. I can only thank you, my dear Custis, for your precious gift and pay a silent homage to the tomb of the greatest and best of men, my paternal friend." Thus did La Fayette thank George Washington's adopted son, George Washington Parke Custis (1781-1857), for giving him a sprig of cypress plucked

Yorktown, Virginia, for the anniversary of Lord Cornwallis's surrender, and then he journeys to Monticello to visit a very elderly Thomas Jefferson. When they meet on the lawn before a large crowd, they embrace and, to the utter astonishment of the witnesses, Jefferson weeps openly—something that has never happened before.

Today, he is second only to George Washington in the number of American place names<sup>6</sup> given in his honor. Seventy cities or counties in 28 states are named for him, and an unknown but very large number of parks, streets, schools, etc. And 13 cities or towns are named La Grange,<sup>7</sup> for a total of 83 American place names in his honor—more than double the number for Benjamin Franklin (35); or for Nathanael Greene (30); or for James Madison (24). Thomas Jefferson does not even make the top ten. For George Washington, there are 88 place names, only five more than for La Fayette.

It is absolutely accurate to say that, during his farewell tour of America in 1824 and 1825, he was everywhere greeted as a rock star. Thousands of Americans name their children for him, a custom that endures for many decades.

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from the tomb of George Washington. An 1829 account by Auguste Levasseur, La Fayette's personal secretary, describes La Fayette's 1824 visit to Washington's grave: "The tomb is scarcely perceived amid the somber cypresses ... La Fayette descended alone into the vault and, a few minutes thereafter, reappeared with his eyes overflowing with tears. He took his son and me by the hand, and led us into the tomb ... . We knelt reverentially near his coffin, which we respectfully saluted with our lips; rising, we mingled our tears with his." <https://rmc.library.cornell.edu/lafayette/exhibition/english/tour/>

<sup>6</sup> "Springfield" is the most common American place name. But I refer here to places named for persons—Annapolis, Augusta, Burke County, Charlotte, Charleston, Chatham County, Columbia, Columbus, Effingham County, Fulton County, Greenville, Jefferson County, New York, Richmond, Seattle, San Francisco, Virginia, etc.).

<sup>7</sup> La Grange ("the barn") was a small estate of La Fayette's outside of Paris. See photo.

## But who was he?

He was Major General Gilbert<sup>8</sup> du Motier, Marquis de La Fayette, Marquis de Vissac,<sup>9</sup> Seigneur de Champétières,<sup>10</sup> and he was born Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier<sup>11</sup> in 1757 at Château Chavaniac<sup>12</sup> in the Auvergne region of central France, a rural backwater. His father was Michel Louis Christophe Roch Gilbert Paulette du Motier, Marquis de La Fayette. His mother was Marie-Louise Jolie de La Rivière, daughter of Joseph Yves de La Rivière, Comte de Corlay (Count of Corlay) and Marquis de La Rivière,<sup>13</sup> who was the commander of the king's musketeers (yes, *those* musketeers), during the reign of King Louis XV. In 1771, our La Fayette, too, would be appointed to the company of *les Mousquetaires du roi*—the king's musketeers, the monarch's personal horse guard.

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<sup>8</sup> Pronounced “zheel-bear”

<sup>9</sup> Pronounced “vee-sack”

<sup>10</sup> Pron. “sane-yeur duh shan (through the nose; a nasal sound where the “n” is not pronounced; say the name “Sean” through the nose without the final n sound) pate-yair”: “Shan-pate-yair”; lit. “lord of Champétières.” It is a village in an apple-growing region near La Fayette.

<sup>11</sup> Here it seems expedient to explain that La Fayette was not the general's name; rather, it was part of his title, just as King Charles's name is not “king of England”; rather, that is his title, and his name is Charles. La Fayette's family name was du Motier (pronounced “dew mote-yay”), and the Christian name by which his family called him was Gilbert (pronounced “zheel-bear”). La Fayette is a place in the Auvergne region of France between the cities of Clermont-Ferrand and Lyon. The place-name La Fayette is derived from the Old French word “faye,” meaning “beech [tree]” and the diminutive suffix “-ette,” which taken together mean “little beech tree.” Beeches are common in the Auvergne region of France, where they were once prized for their sturdy wood and sweet sap.

<sup>12</sup> Chavaniac pronounced “sha-van-yak”

<sup>13</sup> Pronounced “reeve-yair”

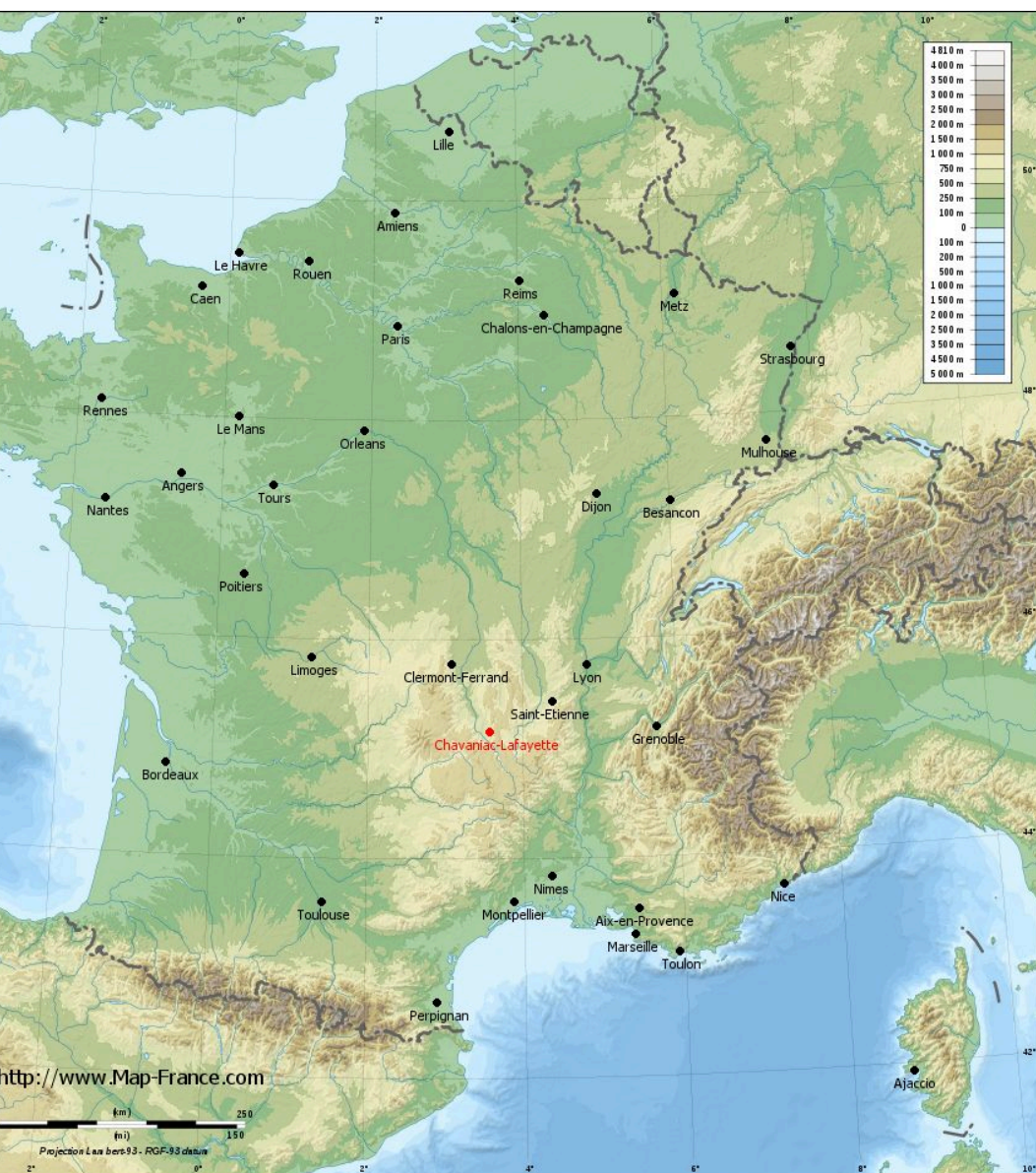




**Château Chavaniac, birthplace of Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de La Fayette. Built 14th–18th centuries.**



**Château de la Grange-Bléneau.  
La Fayette's small estate near Paris.**



**Location within France of La Fayette's birthplace (in red).**

In 1759, when our La Fayette is not yet two years old, his father is killed by British artillery fire at the Battle of Minden [Seven Years' War], the fatal shot having been fired by a British officer whom La Fayette would later encounter in America during the War for Independence.<sup>14</sup> His mother and aunt bring him up to

<sup>14</sup> Many weeks of research enabled me only to narrow the field to the following British artillery officers: Captains Phillips, MacBean, Drummond, Williams, and Foy. It is frustrating not to be able to name the man in question, as the death of La Fayette's father



revere his martial heritage, which include an ancestor who had fought in the Crusades<sup>15</sup> and another who had fought alongside Saint Joan of Arc at the 15th-century battle of Orléans.<sup>16</sup>

His mother takes her husband's death very hard, and she soon leaves Chavaniac for Paris and the glittering court of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. She sends for her son to join her when he is 11, and he attends the Collège du Plessis,<sup>17</sup> a part of the Sorbonne that had been founded in the 14th century for, oddly enough in La Fayette's case, the poor.<sup>18</sup> In his memoirs, he tells us that he left the Collège du Plessis "only to enter the military academy at Versailles."<sup>19</sup>

In April 1770, both his mother and her father die only a few weeks apart, making young Gilbert one of the richest men in the Kingdom of France and, indeed, in all of Europe. This was to have far-reaching implications, exerting, as it did, a powerful and direct influence on revolutions in both of his countries.

At 16 he enters into an arranged marriage (one source says that "[s]he was twelve and he fourteen when the marriage was arranged")<sup>20</sup> to Adrienne de Noailles,<sup>21</sup> the 15-year-old daughter of the Duke de Noailles. They do not meet until they are betrothed, but the marriage is a

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at the hands of that unidentifiable officer was a major factor in La Fayette's psychological makeup and his hatred of the British.

<sup>15</sup> By name: Pons du Motier de La Fayette, who fought in the Seventh Crusade (1248–1254), which was led by King Louis IX, who was canonized in 1297 and is known to us as "Saint Louis."

<sup>16</sup> Siege of Orléans: Oct 1428–May 1429, during the Hundred Years' War

<sup>17</sup> Pronounced "dew pleh-see" where "dew" rhymes with the English noun "use."

<sup>18</sup> [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coll%C3%A8ge\\_du\\_Plessis#Histoire](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coll%C3%A8ge_du_Plessis#Histoire)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.france-pittoresque.com/spip.php?article15272> "Je ne le quittai que pour passer à l'Académie militaire de Versailles." My translation.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.lovelafayette.org/why-lafayette/about-lafayette/who-was-lafayette>

<sup>21</sup> de Noailles pronounced "duh no-EYE-yuh"



great success—very loving and happy. In a book published in 1975,<sup>22</sup> eminent French historian, nobleman, and member of the French Academy,<sup>23</sup> the Duc de Castries<sup>24</sup> (1908–1986), writing of Adrienne, calls her “a veritable saint.”<sup>25</sup> He goes even further: “She had been brought up with the highest feelings of piety and virtue.”<sup>26</sup> Another historian has written thus of Adrienne: “Stoically enduring the lengthy absences of her young husband without complaint, Adrienne must truly have been a model of angelic patience.”<sup>27</sup>

Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de La Fayette, rises rapidly through the ranks of the king’s musketeers. As a committed warrior and the inheritor of an ancient martial tradition, he has the occasion as a very young man to participate in field exercises with the Armée de Terre,<sup>28</sup> the land forces of the French king. The field exercises take place at Metz, where he has the occasion to dine with the duke of Gloucester, brother of King George III of Great Britain. Here the young man “learns about the rebellious Colonists in America who are defying their king to protest a system of taxation. He also learns of several important events: the Battle of

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<sup>22</sup> de La Croix de Castries, René. *La France et l’indépendance américaine (France and American Independence)* publ. by Librairie académique Perrin, 1975)

<sup>23</sup> L’Académie française (The French Academy) is the principal French council for matters pertaining to the French language in particular and to French intellectual life in general. Its prestige is incalculably great. The Académie was officially established in 1635 by the notorious Cardinal Richelieu, prime minister to King Louis XIII. The historian cited here—the Duke de Castries—was a member of the Academy.

<sup>24</sup> Pronounced “duke duh ca-stree” where “duke” rhymes with “rebuke”

<sup>25</sup> “une véritable sainte”

<sup>26</sup> de La Croix de Castries, René. Op. cit., p. 159: “Elle a été élevée dans les plus hauts sentiments de piété et de vertu.” My translation.

<sup>27</sup> “Supportant stoïquement les longues absences de son jeune époux, sans une plainte, Adrienne devait être en effet un modèle d’angélique patience.” My translation from Kolbart, Jack: *Les quatre voyages américains de La Fayette, contés par ses lettres à Adrienne*. In: *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l’ouest*. Tome 84, numéro 3, 1977. “De l’Amérique à l’Amérique de l’indépendance américain 1796–1976, pp 265–274.”

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<sup>28</sup> Pronounced “armay duh tare.” (Lit. “land army”)

Lexington, the taking of Fort Ticonderoga, and the appointment of George Washington by the Continental Congress to commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. He decides to enlist as a volunteer in the American army and fight for the Americans. This date is a turning point in his life. He now has a mission with a command focus on political reform.”<sup>29</sup>

Soon afterwards, he goes to England, where he has an audience with George III, at which we know that he made “intemperate remarks” to His Majesty. Those “intemperate remarks” are not recorded, so we do not know exactly what was said, but we can guess that it might have had to do with his father’s death at the hands of the British at Minden, but that must remain only a guess. Another guess is that he might have spoken strongly in favor of the cause of American independence, but that, too, is only a guess. In November 1776, La Fayette meets Silas Deane, the American Commissioner in Paris, who recruits him for the war then underway in America, offering him a commission at the rank of major general.<sup>30</sup>

### **“Fire in the minds of men”**

La Fayette was born into a country in the grip of intellectual, spiritual, and societal ferment—the so-called “Enlightenment” with its host of attendant “-isms” that included “idealism, rationalism, empiricism, materialism, utilitarianism, positivism, socialism, anarchism, nihilism, and, underlying them all, atheism.”<sup>31</sup> These ideas would be put into ghastly

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<sup>29</sup> <https://friendsoflafayette.wildapricot.org/Timeline>

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Richard Pevear, translator of the oppressively tragic allegorical novel *Demons* by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881), known under other English-translation titles as *The Possessed* and *The Devils*. Published in Russian in serialized format in 1871–1872.

and bloody practice in France and would eventually force La Fayette to flee the land of his birth, only to be arrested and held in cruel captivity for five years, destroying the health of his beloved wife, whose mother and sister would be beheaded for the “crime” of merely being who they were. A new and dangerous world was being born, and there was everywhere what Dostoevsky called “fire in the minds of men.” It is remarkable that Enlightenment ideals did not produce in America the dreadful fruits that they bore in France and, later, elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> The leaders of the American Revolution, although inspired by Enlightenment ideas, died quietly in their beds. This is the world into which La Fayette is born.

But La Fayette’s natural temperament was clearly also inclined towards Enlightenment ideas. His mind, too, was on fire. He had long been in love with the *idea* of America and, oddly, with the name “America” itself. Here is one of the many places where his recently inherited and vast wealth comes into play: In 1777, he buys a ship and hires a crew to take him to America. He leaves France secretly—against the wishes of his father-in-law and against the express command of the king—without taking leave of his pregnant wife, although he writes to her from aboard ship to explain his actions and to beg her pardon.

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<sup>32</sup> France in 1792 and 1793; nearly the whole of Europe from 1803 to 1815; again the whole of Europe in 1848, during which year Karl Marx published *The Communist Manifesto* and Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*; France again in 1871, about which Marx remarked that the failure of the Paris Commune was due to the fact that the Communists “did not kill enough people”; Russia in 1917; Cambodia between 1975 and 1979.

During the voyage, La Fayette is seasick the entire time, but he gamely spends his time studying English!<sup>33</sup> After a voyage of six weeks on a course set for Charleston, the voyagers arrive at Georgetown, South Carolina, in June 1777, unfavorable winds having driven them northwards. They did, though, manage to evade the British blockade but as they approach the entrance to Winyah Bay, they see two vessels nearby, and they immediately become very alert. Fortunately the vessels turn out to be only fishing craft manned by slaves, who take them to the home of Benjamin Huger,<sup>34</sup> a local Georgetown planter who is a major in the South Carolina militia.<sup>35</sup> Maj. Huger, himself of French ancestry, takes in the 13 men for several days (some sources say one night) before taking them to Charleston to prepare for the march to Philadelphia, where La Fayette and company will present themselves to the Continental Congress in expectation of receiving their commissions, as agreed with Silas Deane in Paris in December 1776. One of the 12 other officers in La Fayette's mostly French party is the German-born Baron de Kalb, who, incidentally, not only lands in South Carolina but would also die there in 1780 during the Battle of Camden. He lies in the Presbyterian churchyard there.

During this initial period in South Carolina and along the way to Philadelphia, La Fayette's letters show that he fell in love with America at first sight. Not so the

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<sup>33</sup> We today find this admirable and even amusing and give it little thought, but in fact it speaks volumes about La Fayette's natural disposition, temperament, and character. When a super-rich, seasick 19-year-old spends his time studying English—or any other—grammar, it bespeaks a remarkable degree of self-discipline, French practicality, and a profound commitment to the cause that he was so eager to join.

<sup>34</sup> Huger is pronounced “you-jee.”

<sup>35</sup> Remember Major Huger; his son will enter this story later—and in a very dramatic and dashing escapade.



other officers, at least according to their letters: “stinking, nauseating food”; “barbarians”; “peasants”; “stifling climate,” etc.<sup>36</sup> La Fayette’s letters are the opposite: Americans are “friendly, self-confident, independent-spirited people”; “the food is astonishingly good”; “the countryside is beautiful”; and my personal favorite: “the climate could be worse” (this of the South Carolina lowcountry in June).<sup>37</sup> This love of America and her people would endure for the rest of his eventful life. Many years later, in his memoirs he would write of and to America: “All that you are and all that I owe to you justifies my love.”<sup>38</sup>

The story of La Fayette’s sojourn with Major Huger was passed down through generations of Hugers—remember this; it will be important later in this story.

From Charleston, La Fayette and company make their way to Philadelphia to join the Continental Army of General George Washington only a matter of weeks before the Battle of Brandywine Creek. And in due course, on 31 July 1777, Congress makes him a Major General.

That same night he meets General Washington. There is an immediate connection. “I’m here to learn,” La Fayette says by way of introducing himself to the much-older man. This favorably impresses Washington, especially as the numerous other European volunteer

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<sup>36</sup> “Mais pas de même pour les autres officiers, au moindre selon leurs lettres: la nourriture puante, nauséabonde [...] gens païens; barbares [...] climat étouffant [...]” My translation.

<sup>37</sup> “... gens aimables, sûres de soi”; [...] “avec l’esprit de l’indépendance”; [...] “la nourriture étonnement bonne”; [...] “les paysages belles”; [...] “le climat serait pire”; [...]. My translation.

<sup>38</sup> “Tout ce que tu es, et tout ce que je dois à toi justifie mon amour.” My translation.

officers are here to *teach* the “backward Americans.” A powerful and lifelong bond is formed between Washington and La Fayette. La Fayette is the son that Washington never had and never would have, and Washington is the father that La Fayette has never known.

During the Battle of Brandywine Creek (Sept. 1777), the young Frenchman convinces Washington to let him get into the action.

La Fayette sees combat in many places and distinguishes himself on the field of honor from the very first. He is cited for his important service in the battle for Rhode Island, for example, but let us very briefly consider only two of his battles: Brandywine Creek and Barren Hill, because they reveal important traits in La Fayette’s character, intellect, and temperament.

## **LA FAYETTE AS WARRIOR**

**The Battle of Brandywine Creek** [11 SEP 1777] is going very badly. By the time La Fayette gets to the field of battle, the Americans are in disorderly flight. La Fayette rides into the space between the lines—actually at the point of heaviest British fire—commanding the men to stand, regroup, form ranks, and fight. They are not able to do that, but they do listen to him and obey the orders he gives them, thus effecting an orderly retreat. This today seems like a loss, but in the context of that time, an orderly retreat from the field of battle was an honorable action. And it is at Brandywine Creek that the young major general is wounded in the leg, shedding his blood for the American cause. La Fayette has demonstrated almost unbelievable physical courage as well as the ability to command men effectively—to be

respected and obeyed by them. This from Anglo-Saxon Protestant men in a time when Catholics, with few exceptions, were not even allowed in British America. And La Fayette was not only Catholic but also a foreigner. This should not be forgotten or underestimated. Something about La Fayette immediately overcomes both ethnic and religious suspicions, and the men obey him; respect him; love him—as soon the entire country will do.

**Barren Hill** overlooks the Schuylkill River midway between Philadelphia and Valley Forge. The British want to take Philadelphia, thinking “Take the enemy capital; end the war.” To protect Philadelphia and the Congress, Washington offers La Fayette command of any force of his choice; La Fayette, to honor Washington, chooses to command a Virginia militia unit combined with Oneida Indian allies. He tells La Fayette to keep on the move, but La Fayette positions his men on a hill that overlooks the Schuylkill and a road below. When the British learn that La Fayette is within their grasp—or so they think—they are almost overjoyed: “Now we’ll get The Boy!” La Fayette has about 2200 men to hold the area. The British are so intent on capturing “The Boy,” as they routinely call him, that they send around 8000 men to take Barren Hill. They array themselves on three sides, trapping La Fayette with his back to the Schuylkill. According to the rules of warfare prevailing at the time, the situation is “textbook hopeless.” But having shown, at Brandywine, extraordinary physical courage and an ability to keep his head and to command even panic-stricken, demoralized men effectively, La Fayette would now, at Barren Hill, show extraordinary tactical genius and uncommon adaptability and flexibility of thought. He

sends out small squads of two and three men with orders to conceal themselves in the woods until ready to fire at the British troops. They then pop out of the woods, fire, and disappear back into the woods. By pursuing this tactic from many points and at a rapid pace, La Fayette convinces the British that the American force is quite large, so they withdraw to prepare for conventional battle on the field below Barren Hill. To give cover, the British commander sends small squads into the woods from which the Americans have been firing. But La Fayette has withdrawn them by that point, so while the British squads in the woods fire on one another, La Fayette evacuates his force successfully from Barren Hill and saves them all.

In addition to other things already noted, La Fayette at Barren Hill shows himself a flexible tactical thinker, as he realizes that then-customary European tactics are out of place in this theatre of war. His troops are simple farmers, militiamen, and Oneida Indians, not trained European soldiers. He uses his resources wisely and well.

### **LA FAYETTE AS AMERICAN AGENT IN PARIS**

About six months after the Battle of Monmouth Court House (New Jersey, June 1778), Washington asks La Fayette to return to France to lobby for the American cause, which he does in January 1779. But as already mentioned, his initial trip to America (June 1777) has been undertaken against the king's express command, so when the marquis debarks in France, he is immediately arrested and stripped of his rank in the French Army, since France is not yet ready to support the Americans openly, although she has been doing so



covertly for several years through the efforts of the king and his prime minister, the Comte de Vergennes<sup>39</sup> (Count of Vergennes).

But before his arrival in France, news of General La Fayette's stunning exploits in America comes to be well known throughout France. So in the end, La Fayette is held under house arrest for only two weeks and is then let out, and he instantly becomes the toast of Paris! The king commands a parade in his honor. Even his father-in-law, the duc de Noailles, is delighted with him, despite his having directly disobeyed the king by going to America in 1777, leaving, as we have seen, the duke's pregnant daughter without notice.

It is at this time that La Fayette gains the famous title "the Hero of Two Worlds" (i.e., the Old and the New), coined by the French Enlightenment *philosophe* known as "Voltaire."<sup>40</sup> La Fayette immediately goes to work on the mission Washington has given him: lobbying the French Court for more support. And he is successful: The king commits ships, marines, and more money to America, which proves decisive in the subsequent course of events.

On 29 February 1780, La Fayette, dressed in the full uniform of an American major general, appears before the king and queen at the Palace of Versailles to take formal leave of them. Then on 17 March, he sets sail for America aboard the now-renowned *Hermione*.

Meanwhile, Gilbert and Adrienne welcome the birth on Christmas Eve 1779 of their only son, who is baptized

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<sup>39</sup> Pronounced "vair-zhenne"

<sup>40</sup> Voltaire's real name was François-Marie Arouet, pronounced "ah-roo-way."

Georges<sup>41</sup> Washington du Motier. A daughter, born 17 September 1782, is named Virginie<sup>42</sup> (Virginia) in honor of his favorite state, the home of his adoptive father, George Washington, who has no children of his own.<sup>43</sup>

## **HIS RETURN TO AMERICA & TO VICTORY AT YORKTOWN**

Then La Fayette returns to America and is placed in command of light cavalry units in Virginia to harass British General Cornwallis's supply lines and to make British troop movements difficult. He commands with great success, and it is largely La Fayette's action that obliges Lord Cornwallis to hole up in Yorktown, setting the stage for the final military success of the War for American Independence. And La Fayette coordinates with the American forces and with French Admiral de Grasse, whose ships on the York River keep Cornwallis bottled up at Yorktown.

The plan had originally been to retake New York City, but with Cornwallis bottled up at Yorktown, General Washington decides to go there and try to destroy Cornwallis's army, which turns out, of course, to be the right decision. With the Franco-American victory at Yorktown in October 1781, hostilities cease in the war for American independence. It is interesting to note here that 75,000 Frenchmen fought alongside Americans during the war; that 15,000 gave their lives in the American cause; and that France is America's first and oldest ally. Americans have fought two wars against England; two against Germany; two against

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<sup>41</sup> Pronounced "zhorzh dew mote-yay"

<sup>42</sup> Pronounced "veer-zhee-nee"

<sup>43</sup> The couple have four children altogether: a son and three daughters, in order of birth Henriette (died at age 2); Anastasie; Georges; Virginie. One child was stillborn.

[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ch%C3%A2teau\\_de\\_Chavaniac](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ch%C3%A2teau_de_Chavaniac)

Austria; one against Spain; one against Italy; one against Bulgaria; and one against Romania; but never against France.

In December 1781, Congress grants permission for La Fayette to return to France. He sails from Boston aboard the *Alliance* on the 23rd.

Back now in France, “a formal reception is given [for La Fayette] at the Court of Versailles by King Louis XVI, with Queen Marie Antoinette joining the victory celebration. Lafayette has returned to France in triumph and becomes the most celebrated man in Europe.”<sup>44</sup>

The Treaty of Paris is signed in September 1783, by which Britain recognizes American independence.

## **HIS RETURN TO AMERICA AND A SORROWFUL PARTING**

In June 1784, he returns yet again to America, this time for a triumphal tour of the entire country (as it was configured at that time) and, during his visit, spends ten days at Mount Vernon with his adoptive father, George Washington. La Fayette is the son that Washington has never had, and Washington, 25 years his senior, is the father that La Fayette has never known, so their leave-taking is difficult for both of these great, larger-than-life men. When La Fayette leaves, Washington silently stands looking out the window down at the Potomac long after La Fayette’s launch has disappeared from view. They would never meet again.

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<sup>44</sup> <https://friendsoflafayette.wildapricot.org/Timeline>



**La Fayette visits Washington at Mount Vernon, Summer 1784. By Louis Rémy Mignot.**  
 (“lwee ray-me mean-yo”)

## BACK TO FRANCE—AND ANOTHER REVOLUTION

After the triumphal tour of America in 1784, he returns to France, where his popularity is as great as it is in America. In 1789, as a member of the National Assembly, which has by now replaced the ancient Estates-General,<sup>45</sup> he and and Thomas Jefferson help to write the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (*Déclaration des Droits de l’homme et du citoyen*), which is roughly the French equivalent of our Bill of Rights,<sup>46</sup> and which is presented to the National Assembly a week before the famous storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789. This event marks the beginning of the event that Americans know as “the French

<sup>45</sup> The Estates-General was an advisory body under the “Old Regime” (*Ancien Régime*) in the ancient Kingdom of France. It was convened at the pleasure of the kings. It represented the three estates, or classes, of the French people: the clergy (first estate), the nobility (second) and everybody else (third). The clergy and nobility had ancient and special privileges. The first Estates-General met in 1302. This means of advising the king was practical, successful, and stable, probably because the body did not have the power to make laws and because the members could not meddle in affairs that did not concern their estate *directly*. The Estates-General of 1789 is regarded by many scholars as the beginning of the French Revolution, which replaced the Estates-General with the National Assembly in the fateful summer of 1789.

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.worldhistory.org/trans/fr/2-2012/declaration-des-droits-de-lhomme-et-du-citoyen/>



Revolution.” In fact, there have been numerous revolutions in France, but this is the one Americans know simply as “the French Revolution.” Americans know also of the Revolution of 1830 because it is the one in *Les Misérables*, although most think that the revolution in that story is the 1789 revolution, but we shall return to that later, as it, too, will involve La Fayette directly, and he will play a key role in it.

After the storming of the Bastille, a royal prison built in 1370, La Fayette orders the demolition of the ancient edifice. He has a drawing made of the demolition in progress, which he sends to George Washington as a gift, along with the key to the main entrance to the Bastille. Both the drawing and the key are on display at Mount Vernon, Washington’s Virginia plantation home (see photos). The ink-and-wash drawing is attributed to Étienne-Louis-Denis Cathala.<sup>47</sup> La Fayette writes the following words in his letter of presentation:

“Give me leave, my dear General, to present you with a picture of the Bastille, just as it looked a few days after I ordered its demolition, and with the main key of the fortress of despotism. It is a tribute which I owe as a son to my adoptive father—as an aide-de-camp to my general—as a missionary of liberty to its patriarch.”

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<sup>47</sup> Pronounced “ay-tyenne lwee de-nee ca-ta-la”



**Key to the main entrance to the Bastille. Gift of La Fayette to Washington.**



**Ink-and-wash drawing of demolition of the Bastille.  
Commissioned by La Fayette and sent to George  
Washington as a gift. It hangs at Mount Vernon.**

After the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789, King Louis XVI places La Fayette in command of the 30,000-strong National Guard. La Fayette saves the king and queen from angry mobs on at least two occasions, and he also feeds the poor and hungry of Paris at his own expense on several occasions. He also devises a cockade—for supporters of a moderate revolution that would retain a constitutional monarchy—to be worn as a way to unify all factions in a chaotic revolutionary political scene (see photo). He chooses blue and red—the ancient colors of Paris—and white—the color of the monarchy. This cockade would soon inspire the design of the “blue, white, and red” French flag that we know today.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drapeau\\_de\\_la\\_France](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drapeau_de_la_France)



But La Fayette is a moderate republican who supports retaining a constitutional monarchy.<sup>49</sup> He holds a high hereditary noble rank, as does his wife both by marriage and by birth. To his fellow aristocrats, he is a revolutionary. To the Jacobins, he is an aristocrat. Having briefly examined his disciplined temperament, his clarity of thought, and his upright character earlier in this article, we can easily understand why he remains a sane and moderate man in a time and place of rapidly increasing polarization, radicalization, societal chaos, and, finally, of outright madness, leading to mass murder on a staggering scale during the period known simply as “the Terror.”

Indeed, things become so radical and therefore so dangerous for his wife’s family that her male relatives flee the country. Gilbert and Adrienne send their son to safety in America, where he lives at Mount Vernon with the Washingtons.

La Fayette’s name is placed on the Revolution’s death list. And his beloved wife, Adrienne, is placed under “house arrest” at the Château Chavaniac, her husband’s birthplace (see photo above).

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<sup>49</sup> The French monarchy dates from A.D. 481 with the coronation of Clovis I. He was baptized on Christmas Day in A.D. 508 according to the Roman Rite, the Trinitarian faith of his devout wife, Saint Queen Clotilde, in the Cathedral of Reims (not the one there today, but an earlier one) along with 3000 of his warriors and his two sisters.



It is now April 1792 and, in a desperate attempt to deal with these horrifying and worsening conditions, the king declares war on a foreign enemy—Austria—whose emperor is the nephew of his queen, Marie Antoinette, born an archduchess of the House of Habsburg, daughter of an earlier Austrian emperor. The king places La Fayette in command of his armies. After some fighting on the French frontier with the Austrian Netherlands (roughly present-day Belgium and Luxembourg), La Fayette and some other French officers realize that their position is untenable and that their time is running out.

On 10 August 1792, the ancient French monarchy is overthrown after having endured for more than 1300 years.<sup>50</sup>

On the 14th, Robespierre, the ruthless, fanatical madman known as “the incorruptible,”<sup>51</sup> demands the arrest of La Fayette, with the intention of putting him to death.

On the 19th, La Fayette flees unhappy France by crossing into the Austrian Netherlands, where the authorities immediately place him under arrest—ignoring his protestations that he is an American citizen<sup>52</sup>—for they regard his moderate support for the revolution as a threat to monarchy everywhere.

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<sup>50</sup> <http://early-med.archeurope.com/europe/the-franks/clovis-i/>

<sup>51</sup> <https://history.info/on-this-day/1791-robespierre-nicknamed-the-incorruptible/>

<sup>52</sup> By 1787, Virginia, Maryland, and Massachusetts had made La Fayette an honorary citizen.

On 23 January 1793, King Louis XVI is beheaded in the Place de la Révolution.<sup>53</sup> On 16 October following, the queen also goes to “the national razor.”<sup>54</sup>

## **LA FAYETTE AS PRISONER**

La Fayette is transferred to a prison somewhere in Prussia (late summer 1792). News of his arrest and imprisonment is met with dismay in the community of French exiles in London, and they undertake through diplomatic channels to have La Fayette released, but without success.

The aristocratic French exiles then approach a German physician—one Erich Bollmann—to act on their behalf, Dr. Bollmann—a sort of real-life Scarlet Pimpernel—having already managed to rescue from the guillotine former Minister of War the Comte (Count) de Narbonne and to smuggle him to safety in England.

In early 1794, we find Dr. Bollmann in Berlin, trying to gain La Fayette’s freedom when he learns that La Fayette was at that time a prisoner in Magdeburg, so he goes there only to find that La Fayette has already been moved to Neiße,<sup>55</sup> in present-day Poland.

In May 1794, Adrienne is transferred from Château Chavaniac to the cruel conditions of a Paris prison. Adrienne's mother, sister, and grandmother are beheaded, their bodies thrown into a mass grave with

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<sup>53</sup> Before the 1789 revolution, it was known as Place Louis XV, and a statue of that king stood in the square, but it was removed to make a place for the blood-crazed revolutionaries’ guillotine. Today, it is known as the Place de la Concorde, an iconic Paris landmark, largest of the public plazas of Paris, an area of about 16 acres.

<sup>54</sup> <https://chillchapters.com/national-razor-nickname-guillotine/>

<sup>55</sup> Pronounced “NICE-uh”

hundreds of others at Picpus Cemetery<sup>56</sup> in Paris, about which more later.

Also in May (1794), La Fayette is rather suddenly moved from Prussia to a prison in Austria because the Austrian emperor, nephew of murdered French Queen Marie Antoinette, holds La Fayette personally responsible for the abrupt and bloody end of the ancient French monarchy. He therefore adopts an intransigent position on the prisoner: His friends shall not be allowed to contact him or even to know his whereabouts.

There are no records of what happens next, all known surviving records having been written some years after the events in this unfolding drama. But there are two documents known to have survived from the period under consideration, the first of which is a message written by La Fayette to Dr. Bollmann, and the second of which needs some little introduction here—by means of a bit of time travel! We must go back 17 years and across the Atlantic to recall the arrival in South Carolina in June 1777 of La Fayette and his 12 companions who have crossed from France in defiance of the king's express command (see footnotes 32–36, esp. 33).

Their host in 1777, Major Benjamin Huger,<sup>57</sup> has been killed in 1779 during the siege of Charleston, and his widow later sends their son, Francis Kinloch Huger, to London, where he studies medicine. His studies in London completed, he decides to do a bit of travelling on the Continent and, in Vienna, he is introduced to Dr. Bollmann by a mutual friend. And now we can return to

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<sup>56</sup> Pronounced “peek-pus” where the second syllable rhymes with the English noun “use.”

<sup>57</sup> Pronounced “YOU-jee”

the “second document” mentioned in the paragraph above: It is the transcript of the military interrogation of young Mr. Francis Huger.

Stay with me here. I’ll try to simplify the details of the complicated intrigue that young Huger joins already in progress.

*Before* Bollmann and Huger meet in Vienna, Bollmann’s search for La Fayette takes him to the Fortress of Olmütz in Austria (present-day Czech Republic). Here, Bollmann hears rumors of the recent arrival of some prisoners who are so important that they are referred to only by number, never by name.

Ah! can it be ... ? Is it ... ? It must be! It’s *got* to be!

But Bollmann is no neophyte. He keeps his mouth shut and takes rooms at the Golden Swan, a local inn. And now his former luck seems to return, for whom does he encounter at the inn but a Dr. Haberlein,<sup>58</sup> who just happens to be the physician for the Olmütz Prison! Dr. Haberlein is an honest, guileless man from whom it requires but little effort to confirm Dr. Bollmann’s suspicions: It is La Fayette!

He has found the missing marquis!

Well, it’s almost too good to be true, so Bollmann enlists Haberlein’s aid in establishing contact with the Prisoner of Olmütz. Only thing is that ... well ... why upset such a simple, honest fellow? I ask you! After all, isn’t it much better that he not know?

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<sup>58</sup> Pronounced “HA-ber-line”

So, yes, Bollmann enlists Haberlein's aid; he just doesn't bother to tell Haberlein about it. Thus does Dr. Haberlein become Dr. Bollmann's unwitting accomplice in the developing escape plot.

Dr. Haberlein is given books and friendly notes to deliver to La Fayette. And, oh, yes, Dr. Haberlein, *do* by all means *read* the notes! They are perfectly innocent, I assure you!

So Haberlein carries on delivering a series of notes to The Prisoner. And Dr. Haberlein doesn't see anything wrong with that: It's for his patient's good, after all, and he does read each and every note and finds all of them quite innocent.

Well ... after all, Dr. Haberlein really doesn't *need* to know about the secret messages written in that earliest form of disappearing ink: lemon juice.

And after a short time—to avoid attracting suspicion—Dr. Bollmann takes leave of Dr. Haberlein, promising to return to Olmütz, and he takes himself off to Vienna. And there he meets Francis Kinloch Huger of South Carolina.

Now at that time, talk of the missing marquis was widespread in Europe. And Huger mentions to Bollmann that La Fayette had been his father's houseguest in South Carolina 17 years earlier. In fact, as Huger explains to his new acquaintance, he is planning to return to South Carolina by way of London, and would Herr Doktor Bollmann care to journey with him that far?

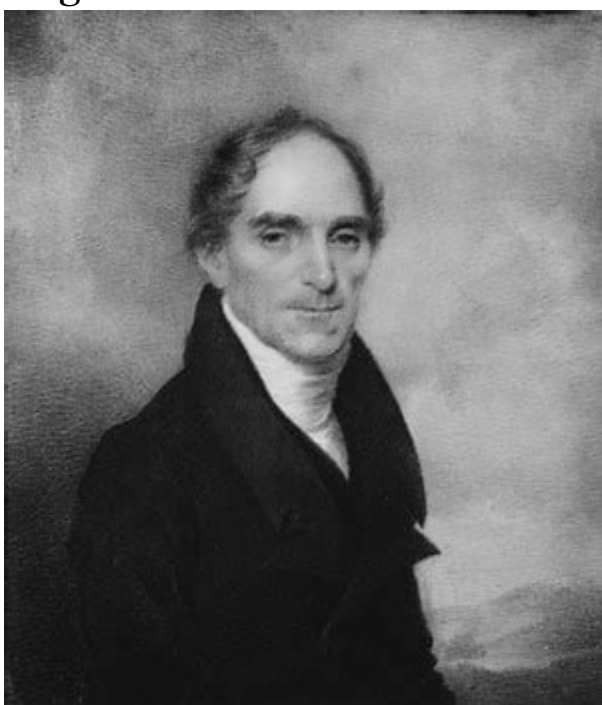
Why, yes! Dr. Bollmann would like nothing better than to have his new friend as a travelling companion, and he would love to accompany him to London!

But first he has to go to Hungary.

But he will write to Huger within the week to let him know for sure about London.

And Bollmann leaves Vienna.

Then, after hearing nothing from Dr. Bollmann for eight days, Mr. Huger abandons the idea of Bollmann as a traveling companion and arranges for a coach to begin his journey towards London. And Huger is on the point of leaving Vienna when Bollmann suddenly shows up at Huger's door!



**Francis Kinloch Huger. By Charleston, SC, lawyer and painter Charles Fraser.**



Bollmann proceeds to tell Huger that he will travel to London with him *if* Huger will first swear never to breathe a word of what Bollmann is about to tell him. Huger gives his word.

Bollmann reveals that he has not been in Hungary at all—no! I’ve been in Olmütz. And La Fayette and I together have devised an escape plan!

Huger must have been electrified!

La Fayette is being held in an unheated, unlighted, unsanitary cell. But he is allowed a carriage-ride every other day into the countryside. He is always kept under close guard on these occasions, but he suggests to Dr. Bollmann in one of their secret messages that if Dr. Bollmann—astride a swift mount—should overtake the carriage, it would not be too difficult to effect an escape.

“We are in a phaeton,” he writes to Bollman in the margins of a book, using their invisible lemon-juice method; “nobody with me but the corporal—who, by the by, is afflicted with a rupture—and a clumsy driver ... Have a trusty man with you. Stop the driver. I engage to ... frighten the little cowardly corporal with his own sword ... .”

And he suggests that Bollmann bring a third horse, adding: “I will not have the least difficulty to jump on a horse led by your man ... .”<sup>59</sup>

What could be easier?

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<sup>59</sup> Baker, James Wesley. “The Imprisonment of Lafayette.” *American Heritage* magazine; June 1977; vol. 28, issue 4. Although there are numerous online sources for this story, I have relied heavily on this source.

So La Fayette leaves the details—where the devil is—to Bollmann. Neither man mentions a specific meeting-place. Neither man mentions a “Plan B” in case anything should go wrong.

What could be easier?

What is specified, though, is that when everything is ready, Dr. Bollmann will wait beside the road and, as the marquis’s carriage passes, Bollmann will wave his handkerchief—no doubt in a heroic manner—as a signal that the escape will take place two days hence.

What could be easier?

Bollmann explains things to Huger and then puts to him the 64-dollar question: Will Francis Huger join the plot? “It was almost,” as Baker tells us, “a matter of family pride for Huger.”<sup>60</sup>

Years later, Huger writes of that moment of decision: “I saw an opportunity to restore liberty to a man who at my own age had risked everything for me.”<sup>61</sup>

It’s settled: Huger is in.

Nineteenth-century accounts tend to dramatize this story that does not need dramatizing, so it is not entirely clear in all details what happens next. What we know for certain is that Dr. Bollmann and Mr. Huger once again take rooms at The Golden Swan in Olmütz on 5 November 1794.

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<sup>60</sup> Baker, James Wesley. *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Baker, James Wesley. *ibid.*

Next day, 6 November 1794, the two conspirators sit on their horses by the side of the road, waiting for General La Fayette's carriage to pass. As it does, they duly give the handkerchief signal, putting the General on notice that the escape will take place on the 8th.

Accordingly, on the morning of Saturday, 8 November 1794, Bollmann and Huger settle their bill at the Golden Swan and send a servant ahead to Hoff, a village about 25 miles distant, towards the border with Prussian Silesia and relative, albeit temporary, safety there, beyond the reach of the Austrians. The servant is to arrange for a carriage and horses to make good the escape from Austrian territory.

We continue with Baker's account: "After going a few miles down the road without seeing the carriage, the conspirators decided they must have missed it and [they] headed back to town. On the way they met the coach. The corporal sat beside Lafayette. The driver sat in front, and another soldier rode behind the carriage. Bollman and Huger continued down the road a short distance, then turned and trotted after the carriage. When it halted by the roadside, they also stopped and watched as Lafayette and the corporal got out, began walking through a field, and then paused, engaged in conversation."<sup>62</sup>

It's show time!

Bollmann and Huger spur their mounts forward as La Fayette, playing his part, draws the cowardly little corporal's sword from its sheath. But the cowardly little

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<sup>62</sup> Baker, James Wesley. *ibid.*

corporal, *not* playing *his* part, turns out to be a *scrappy* little corporal!

He grabs the sword by the blade, cutting his hands badly, but refuses to let go, instead calling out loudly for help!

As Baker puts it: “Peasants working in nearby fields looked up, but merely watched the struggle; the [carriage] driver also failed to answer the call. Only the other soldier [the one riding behind the carriage] took action, heading back toward the fortress, shouting and waving his hat to attract the attention of the sentries on the walls of the fortress, which was some distance off but still visible across the flat plain.”<sup>63</sup>

Oops.

As the general struggles with the corporal for possession of the now-bloody sword, Bollmann gallops forward to help La Fayette, dismounts, and throws the reins to Huger. Spooked by the clamor, the horse bolts, and Huger must watch helplessly as it gallops away.

Bollmann pulls the corporal away from La Fayette, but the scrappy little fellow gives up the sword only to take hold of La Fayette by the cravat. The General manages to croak out “*Il m’étrangle!*”<sup>64</sup>

At this point, Huger wades into the fray, first, however, taking care to pass his arm through the bridle of the spare horse, and then brandishes his pistol at the little corporal—to absolutely no effect! So Huger stuffs it into

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<sup>63</sup> Baker, James Wesley. *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> “He’s strangling me!”

his waistband and manages to pull the corporal's bloody hands from the general's throat; La Fayette slumps to the ground.

It takes both Bollmann *and* Huger to subdue the corporal as La Fayette struggles back to his feet. Huger then shouts to La Fayette to take the horse and "Get to Hoff!" the village to which the conspirators had dispatched a servant earlier that day.

The marquis mounts and starts to ride away, but turns and hesitates, apparently unwilling to abandon his would-be rescuers to an uncertain but surely unpleasant fate.

"GET TO HOFF!" Huger shouts again, and the general gallops away.

Bollmann and Huger confer for a moment and then release the corporal, who instantly runs off on foot in pursuit of his escaped prisoner.

A peasant boy, who has managed to get hold of Bollmann's frightened mount, is returning with his trophy—no doubt enormously pleased with himself—and Huger spots him. Calling out to Bollmann, Huger runs to the horse and mounts it just as Bollmann is helped to mount behind Huger by the very obliging peasant boy!

Baker again: "Unfortunately Bollman's horse, unlike Lafayette's, was unused to the double load. When urged faster than a trot, he gave a buck that dumped Bollman, who was then unable to climb back up. Huger dismounted and helped his companion into the saddle.

Their progress had been so slow that when Huger mounted behind Bollman, he was helped by the same peasant boy who had been following them on foot. Bollman pushed the horse into a gallop and it again bucked, throwing both of them. This time Huger told Bollman to take the horse and follow Lafayette. He would follow on foot.”<sup>65</sup>

After Bollmann rides off, Huger runs along a road leading to the mountains. Thinking himself on the way to safety, Huger hears shouting behind him and turns to see three men running after him! He continues running towards the mountains in the hope of reaching the relative safety of the border with Prussian Silesia. But his luck runs out as he is overtaken by a peasant on horseback. Huger surrenders himself to the mounted man and, joined by the three other men on foot, he finds himself being escorted back to Olmütz Fortress, where he is handed over to the soldiers.

He is taken at once to General d’Arco, commandant of the fortress, whose reputation is at risk owing to the escape of so important a prisoner; he is therefore intent upon uncovering the escape plot in all its aspects.

He puts numerous very pointed questions to Mr. Huger, who answers them all fully and truthfully, telling d’Arco that he felt himself justified because “I did not think of harming any one; and I was assured that it was the purpose of Monsieur Lafayette to cross immediately to America and not to mix himself any more in the affairs of the Empire.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Baker, James Wesley. *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Baker, James Wesley. *ibid.*



Huger's honesty does not help his situation. D'Arco notes on the interrogation transcript: "The culprit was turned over by the military authorities to the ordinary Olmütz court, put in irons, as a criminal, and held in the strictest custody."<sup>67</sup>

Huger is stripped of all his possessions; is clapped in irons, ankle and wrist; and is chained to a wall above the wooden slab that will be his bed.

Meanwhile, La Fayette is lost, having never been more than three miles from the fortress during his occasional carriage rides, so he is in utterly unfamiliar terrain. Hoff is 25 miles away, and Bollmann has never told La Fayette what escape route they would follow. And although we can only guess at this, it is likely that La Fayette had simply misunderstood Huger's frantically shouted instructions to "Get to Hoff!" as "Get off!" which is exactly what the General did. But when he comes to a fork in the road, he takes the wrong one and with every step goes farther away from Hoff, where there is another carriage awaiting the General to aid his escape. But the General will never come.

Covered with blood and mud, he rides into a village and publicly offers the attention-grabbing sum of 2000 crowns for a fresh horse, an action that surely seals his fate. He is taken before the Bürgermeister (mayor), to whom he gives a plausible explanation for the unlikely sight that he presents, and the mayor is about to let him go when somebody in the crowd recognizes General La Fayette! The General at first denies the identification, but when the mayor decides to have La Fayette taken to the fortress to make sure, La Fayette admits that he is

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<sup>67</sup> Baker, James Wesley. *ibid.*

indeed the escaped prisoner, and he is accordingly returned to his cell.

The daring escape plot has failed.

Meanwhile, Bollmann has made it to Hoff but, not finding the General, surmises that La Fayette has gotten lost. So he crosses the border into Prussian Silesia, hoping to find that La Fayette has made it to the temporary safety of that place.<sup>68</sup> But Bollmann is arrested by Prussian authorities a week later and is transferred two weeks after that to the Olmütz Fortress.

Meanwhile, the civil authorities have taken up the interrogation of Mr. Huger where the military authorities have left off. Huger speaks no German, so an interpreter is found to aid in the proceedings.

Bollmann and Huger are kept in solitary confinement for three months as they are brought out on occasion to be interrogated separately. After the initial investigation reveals that the conspirators have acted without any local confederates, the charges against them are reduced to “forcing a military post.”<sup>69</sup> After that lucky break, the prisoners get better food, but the interrogation and investigation are renewed, based on the new, although reduced, charge.

There are numerous efforts to help the two unfortunate but stalwart young conspirators. Astonishingly, Huger manages somehow to smuggle a letter out of the prison, which is delivered to Thomas Pinckney, a former governor of South Carolina who is now the American

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<sup>68</sup> Temporary because the Prussians also want La Fayette out of the way.

<sup>69</sup> Baker, James Wesley. *ibid.*

Minister in London, closing his letter with the plea  
“Don’t forget us.”

In South Carolina, Huger’s family write to President Washington for help. They get a reply from Secretary of State Timothy Pickering, explaining that the President is sympathetic but that “the cause of Mr. Huger’s confinement would render an application delicate and difficult, the United States having no public functionary in the Austrian dominions.”<sup>70</sup>

But now a new character enters the drama in the person of a Russian nobleman, Count Mitrowski,<sup>71</sup> resident in Austria—the employer, it turns out—of the German-English interpreter who has been assisting in Mr. Huger’s interrogations. The interpreter hints that the Count is sympathetic to the prisoners and, shortly, hands over money to bribe the judges and, although both of the defendants are found guilty, they are sentenced only to “one month’s labor in irons, followed by banishment from Austria. With a little more encouragement from Count Mitrowski, the judges saw fit to reduce the sentence to fourteen days’ further confinement and [then] banishment.”<sup>72</sup>

In June 1795, eight months after the attempted rescue, Huger and Bollmann are released.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Baker, James Wesley. *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Pronounced “mi-TROF-ski”

<sup>72</sup> Baker, James Wesley. *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Dr. Bollmann will have further adventures of high drama, becoming directly involved with Aaron Burr’s alleged attempt to erect an independent country within the old federal Northwest Territory and portions of the Louisiana Purchase. He is imprisoned again, this time in the United States, but he refuses President Jefferson’s offer of a pardon on the grounds that such an action would be an admission of guilt. But he is freed after the case against Aaron Burr fails to stand up in court. Bollmann dies in Jamaica in 1821.

Meanwhile, in May 1794, the General's dear wife, Adrienne, is released from prison owing to pressure exerted by American Minister Plenipotentiary in Paris, James Monroe, later to be US president; by his wife, Elizabeth Kortright Monroe; and by other Americans.<sup>74</sup>

On 28 July 1794, the merciless Maximilien Robespierre is guillotined, bringing to an end the darkest period in French history, known simply as "The Terror."

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<sup>74</sup> <https://friendsoflafayette.wildapricot.org/Timeline>



**Adrienne de La Fayette, devoted and beloved wife.**

In September 1795, Adrienne asks permission of the Austrian monarchy to join her husband in prison. On 15 October 1795, Adrienne, with their two surviving daughters<sup>75</sup>—Anastasie and Virginie—joins the General in prison. “Conditions in adjoining cells are abominable

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<sup>75</sup> See footnote 43.

and unsanitary. The General is overwhelmed by their sacrifice.”<sup>76</sup>

In October 1795, a young artillery officer by the name of Napoléon Bonaparte puts down a royalist uprising in the streets of Paris by means of his notorious “whiff of grapeshot.” In November 1795, the *Directoire*<sup>77</sup> is established as the government of the (first) French Republic.

In March 1796, Bonaparte assumes command of French armies in Italy and begins his campaign against Austria,<sup>78</sup> winning victories at Lodi and Arcole, and on 14 January 1797, a victory at Rivoli.

These French victories over Austria help to pave the way for La Fayette and family to be released from their long, cruel imprisonment on 19 September 1797, a little more than five years after his initial arrest by Austrian authorities when he fled France in August 1792, and just over two years after the General’s wife and their two surviving daughters join him in prison. Adrienne’s health is ruined by the ordeal, and she dies on Christmas Day 1807 at the comparatively young age of 48. The General would live until 1834, a few months before his 77th birthday.<sup>79</sup>

On 5 December 1797, Bonaparte returns in triumph to a hero’s welcome in Paris.

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<sup>76</sup> <https://friendsoflafayette.wildapricot.org/Timeline>

<sup>77</sup> Pronounced “dee-rec-twahre.” The Directory is a sort of government by committee. It doesn’t last long.

<sup>78</sup> In those days, much of what today is Italy were dependencies of the Imperial Austrian Crown; the Duchy of Parma, for example. In many parts of northern Italy to this day, road signs and restaurant menus are written in both Italian and German. Bolzano (Ger. “Bozen” pron. “boat-sen”) is a good example.

<sup>79</sup> <https://friendsoflafayette.wildapricot.org/Timeline>



In November 1799, the Directoire government ends in failure. And on Christmas Day 1799, Bonaparte is made First Consul of the French Republic, an absolute monarch in all but name.

### **La Fayette as “the nation’s guest”**

“Meanwhile, back at the ranch,” Francis Huger is graduated from the University of Pennsylvania’s school of medicine. Returning to South Carolina, he marries Harriet Lucas Pinckney, one of Thomas Pinckney’s daughters, and settles into life as a rice farmer, dividing his time between his plantation on the Santee River and his summer home in Sumter County. The couple have five children, one of whom, Benjamin, will become, “in the course of human events,” a general in the Confederate Army. Dr. Huger will later serve two terms in the General Assembly of South Carolina.<sup>80</sup>

On a date that I have been unable to pin down, a piece of decorative masonry falls from the Daniel Huger house on Meeting Street in Charleston (see photo), hitting Dr. Huger in the head and fracturing his skull. Fortunately he recovers before La Fayette visits America for the last time.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Baker, James Wesley. “The Imprisonment of Lafayette.” *American Heritage* magazine; June 1977; vol. 28, issue 4. Although there are numerous online sources for this story, I have relied heavily on this source.

<sup>81</sup><https://lowcountrywalkingtours.com/charleston-stories/the-strange-true-story-of-dr-francis-kinloch-huger-and-the-marquis-de-lafayette/>



**Daniel Huger House. 34 Meeting Street  
Charleston, South Carolina.**

On 15 August 1824, La Fayette arrives in New York City at the invitation of President James Monroe. “The nation’s guest” is received with wild adulation. When asked how he wishes to be introduced to his audiences, he replies: "As an American General.”<sup>82</sup> He will pass his 67th birthday in America on 6 September.

Now General La Fayette has been corresponding with Dr. Huger and, when he arrives in New York City for his farewell tour of the United States, he writes immediately to Dr. Huger and, addressing him as “my dear deliverer,”<sup>83</sup> invites his cherished friend to join him in New York City. Dr. Huger goes to New York and joins the General’s party, accompanying them to Yorktown for the ceremonies there on 19 October 1824.

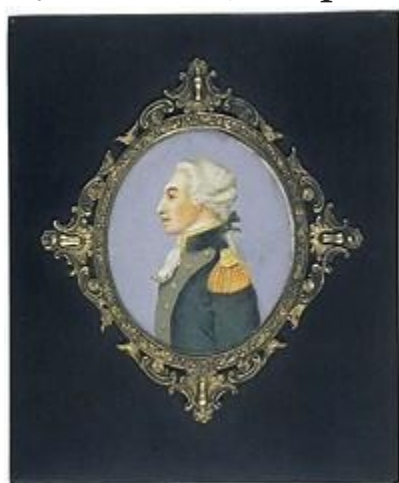
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<sup>82</sup> <https://friendsoflafayette.wildapricot.org/Timeline>

<sup>83</sup> Baker, James Wesley. *ibid.*

In 1825 Huger again joins La Fayette during his visit to South Carolina. Meeting in Columbia, they travel to Charleston, where Huger's friends and neighbors consider him a tie between their city and "the guest of the nation" and make a point of including him in the celebrations. Auguste Levasseur, a member of La Fayette's official party, writes: "At the dinner, at the theatre, and the ball, in short everywhere, the name of Huger was inscribed with that of Lafayette."<sup>84</sup>

While in Charleston, the General sits for Charleston-born lawyer and painter, Charles Fraser (1782–1860; see photo).



**Fraser's miniature of Gen. La Fayette.**

Huger remains a retiring, modest man until his death in 1855. Although he was willing to tell the story of his youthful adventure to those who asked, he said of himself: "I simply considered myself the representative of the young men of America and acted accordingly."<sup>85</sup> Before leaving his beloved America for the last time (September 1825), he directs his son to collect a

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<sup>84</sup> Baker, James Wesley. *ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Baker, James Wesley. *ibid.*

quantity of soil from Bunker Hill at Boston so that he can be buried in both American and French soil. We shall return to this subject.

## **BACK TO FRANCE—AND HIS THIRD REVOLUTION**

As we have seen, Napoléon Bonaparte becomes absolute ruler of France under the title of First Consul on Christmas Day 1799.

The French constitutional referendum of May 1804 overwhelmingly approves Napoléon Bonaparte as “Emperor of the French.”

On Sunday, 2 December of that year (1804) at a splendid ceremony at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris rather than at the Cathedral of Reims, where the kings of France have been crowned and anointed since the 5th century, Pope Pius VII anoints him and his Empress Consort, the former Joséphine de Beauharnais,<sup>86</sup> “Emperor” and “Empress of the French.”<sup>87</sup> But before the pope can crown the anointed and now-imperial pair, Bonaparte takes the crown into his own hands and crowns first himself and then Joséphine.<sup>88</sup>

After his literally legendary military career,<sup>89</sup> he is forced to abdicate his throne in 1814, when Paris is taken by the European armies that have aligned against him. The historic French monarchy is restored in the

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<sup>86</sup> Pronounced “zhoh-s-feen duh bo-ahr-nay”

<sup>87</sup> [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napol%C3%A9on\\_Ier](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napol%C3%A9on_Ier)

<sup>88</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coronation\\_of\\_Napoleon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coronation_of_Napoleon)

<sup>89</sup> Among his victories during that period are Ulm, Trafalgar, Austerlitz, Jena, Auerstadt, Friedland, Borodino, etc.

person of King Louis XVIII. Bonaparte is exiled to the Mediterranean island of Elba.

But he escapes his captivity on Elba and lands on the Mediterranean coast of France on 26 February 1815. The ancient monarchy is again overthrown, and Bonaparte begins his famous “100 Days,” a period that ends at Waterloo in 1815. This time, Bonaparte is exiled to the South Atlantic island of St. Helena, from which escape is impossible. He dies there in 1821.

After Waterloo, the ancient French monarchy is again restored; Louis XVIII reigns until his death in 1824, when Charles X comes to the throne. Charles, however, true to his blood and heritage, is showing strong tendencies towards divine-right absolutism. But those days are over.

In July 1830, there is a revolution—it’s the one in *Les Misérables*. A council votes to offer La Fayette dictatorial power as supreme ruler of France, but he refuses for he is true to his deeply held republican ideals and to the fundamental honesty and integrity of his character.

La Fayette having refused absolute power, a council votes to depose Charles X, and they elect Charles’s cousin Louis-Philippe de Bourbon-Orléans, called “the citizen king,” who has spent nearly four years traveling in America as part of his long exile from France, owing to the 1789 Revolution. The July 1830 revolution ends after only three days, known in French history as “*les trois glorieuses*” (“the three glorious days”), a nearly bloodless revolution.

BUT—Louis-Philippe is accepted by the people as their rightful king only after La Fayette lays his hands on him on the steps of the National Assembly before a crowd of people. This laying-on-of-hands is oddly reminiscent of a Christian coronation ceremony, but such is the people's continued affection and respect for La Fayette that they will not accept Louis-Philippe without La Fayette's public benediction.

A few years later (1834), La Fayette attends a funeral in the rain, falls ill, and dies on 20 May of pneumonia just as George Washington had done 35 years earlier. He is buried beside his beloved and devoted wife, Adrienne, in Picpus Cemetery<sup>90</sup> in Paris, where Adrienne's grandmother, mother, and sister lie close by in an unmarked mass grave, victims of the Terror.

At the General's funeral on 23 May 1834, his son, in accordance with the General's wishes, adds to his final resting place the American soil collected before they sailed from Boston in 1825, so that La Fayette is buried in both American and French soil. An American flag flies over his grave.<sup>91</sup> Even during the German occupation from May 1940 until the liberation of Paris on 25 August 1944, the Stars and Stripes flies unmolested over La Fayette's grave. It flies there still, and it is replaced in a moving ceremony every July 4th. Upon La Fayette's death, both the House of Representatives and the Senate drape their chambers in black as a demonstration of respect and gratitude for

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<sup>90</sup> See footnote 56.

<sup>91</sup> One source says that the US flag has flown over the grave since 1890: <https://friendsoflafayette.wildapricot.org/Timeline> while others say since the end of the Great War: <https://francerevisited.com/2009/07/lafayette-and-the-american-flag-the-fourth-of-july-ceremony/> while the Congress of the United States, in the resolution granting US citizenship to La Fayette, says that the US flag has flown over the grave "since his death" : <https://www.congress.gov/107/plaws/publ209/PLAW-107publ209.pdf>



his contribution to the independence of the United States [...].<sup>92</sup>

President Andrew Jackson orders the same forms of mourning as those shown for presidents George Washington and John Adams. Therefore, 24-gun salutes are fired from military posts and ships, each shot representing a US state. Flags fly at half staff or half mast for thirty-five days, and military officers wear black crêpe for six months.<sup>93</sup> These forms are generally reserved for heads of state.

**“La Fayette, we are here.”**

The first American troops land in France in June 1917 to play their pivotal role in the Great War (1914–1918).

“Having already endured three years of brutal combat on her own soil, in those difficult times, France turned to an old friend, the United States, who answered her call. With 14,000 American soldiers arriving [in France] during the summer of 1917, Colonel Charles Stanton, General Pershing’s aide-de-camp, presented himself before La Fayette’s tomb to declare, ‘La Fayette, we are here.’ With these words, he signaled to France and to the world that the United States was engaged in [the struggle for] democracy and liberty and that [Americans were] ready to pay their debt to their closest ally.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Public Law 107–209 107th Congress:

<https://www.congress.gov/107/plaws/publ209/PLAW-107publ209.pdf>

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honors\\_and\\_memorials\\_to\\_the\\_Marquis\\_de\\_Lafayette](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honors_and_memorials_to_the_Marquis_de_Lafayette)

<sup>94</sup> “Ayant déjà subi trois années de combats brutaux sur son propre sol, en ces temps difficiles la France s’était tournée vers un vieil ami, les États-Unis, qui avaient répondu à l’appel. Avec 14000 soldats américains arrivant à Saint-Nazaire et sur d’autres sites au cours de l’été 1917, le colonel Charles Stanton, aide de camp du général Pershing, s’était rendu ici sur la tombe de La Fayette pour déclarer « La Fayette nous voilà ! ». Avec ces mots il a signalé à la France et au monde que les États-Unis s’engageaient pour la démocratie et la liberté et étaient prêts à rembourser leurs dettes à leur plus proche allié.”

Here are the closing words of Colonel Stanton's brief address at La Fayette's grave to the desperate people of France on 4 July 1917:

"America has joined forces with the Allied Powers, and what we have of blood and treasure are yours. Therefore it is with loving pride that we drape the colors in tribute of respect to this citizen of your great republic. And here and now, in the presence of the illustrious dead, we pledge our hearts and our honor in carrying this war to a successful issue. La Fayette, we are here."<sup>95</sup>



**La Fayette's grave. Picpus Cemetery, Paris.**

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Newsletter of the Society in France of the Sons of the American Revolution. Double issue, covering all of 2019. Early 2020. My translation.

<sup>95</sup> Here is a very moving account of that great day, 4 July 1917:  
<https://sites.lafayette.edu/lafayettewwi/pershing-at-picpus/gilmer/>



**“The nation’s guest”  
“The hero of two worlds”**