Voltaire had been dead only seven years, but in France his pen had heralded the oncoming storm of the revolution. In America, the first Constitutional Congress was meeting and Light Horse Harry Lee was preparing his campaign for election as a delegate from Virginia to the first Continental Congress when William Beaumont, third child of Samuel, descendant of the Earl of Warwick, was born in Lebanon, Connecticut. The year was 1785. It was this child who was destined to a career of eminence in American medicine and to him was to be given the privilege of discovering the foundations of our modern knowledge of peptic digestion.

There was not much excitement surrounding the life of a son of a New England farmer. In his early boyhood young Beaumont assisted in the many duties of farming. Attired in his home-spun clothes, he ate meals of pork and beans, salt fish and Indian puddings, while his evenings were spent in reading by candle light in front of the great fireplace which "sent half the smoke into the cabin and half the heat up the chimney."

When Beaumont had witnessed fifteen hard New England winters, Napoleon had made himself first consul of France and Thomas Jefferson was elected to the presidency of the embryonic republic on this side of the Atlantic. During the seven years which followed the spirit of adventure surged through his being and he began to realize that the Lebanon farm was a far too circumscribed portion of a rapidly growing nation. In 1807, fired by a restless ambition that motivated his entire life, young Beaumont started out for the northern woods of New York and Vermont. His outfit consisted of a horse and cutter, a barrel of cider and one hundred dollars of hard-earned money. He obtained successful employment working in a store in Champlain and in 1810 settled in St. Albans, Vermont, where he became the student and apprentice of Dr. Benjamin Chandler. His interest in medicine had been stimulated by reading works
in the library of Dr. Pomeroy, a prominent physician of Burlington. But here we leave young Beaumont rapidly increasing his interest in medicine in the Vermont woods to look in on the family of Light Horse Harry Lee comfortably housed on the Virginia plantation at Stratford.

On January 19, 1807, in the same year that Longfellow and Poe were to see the light of day for the first time, the fourth child of Ann Carter Lee was born at Stratford and named Robert Edward Lee. The new babe was born into a house of manifold tribulation. Mrs. Lee was very ill and General Lee's credit had long since been exhausted and his creditors were applying a rigid anaconda policy to him. Stratford Hall had to be abandoned and the impecunious family was forced to journey to Alexandria where they took up their abode in a small house on Cameron Street. Alexandria became the boyhood town of young Lee. He was but a lad of seven when the second war with England took place and he was in that quiet Virginia town when on August 28, 1814, Admiral Cockburn's British fleet forced it to surrender. It is possible that he saw the red coats fire the Capitol and undoubtedly the sight of the ominous smoke in his youth must have provoked conflicting memories in the mind of the Confederate General during the cavalry raids of Jeb Stuart and Jubie Early in 1862 and 63.

The Alexandria Academy was Lee's first Alma Mater. Here he was introduced to the classics. The roar of cannon had sunk into the ever lengthening past and the town of Alexandria vibrated with enthusiasm in October 1824. It was "Welcome Lafayette! A Nation's Gratitude Thy Due." General Lafayette—the dashing young general of the Revolution was now an old man. The marquis had not failed to remember the dashing cavalryman of General Washington's army, Light Horse Harry, and he called upon his widow. In the home of Mrs. Lee, Lafayette, the son of two rebellions, undoubtedly conversed with young Robert, who was destined to lead the rebellion that was to shake the foundations of the nation. For Lee was preparing to become a soldier, he was going to West Point.

The pageant of life had moved fast during these years for young Beaumont. He had been granted a license to practice medicine by the Third Medical Society of the State of Vermont in 1812 and
entered the army as a surgeon's mate in September of the same year. He saw the war as a man in service with a brilliant and variegated record on land and sea. After leaving the military service at the close of the war he reentered the army again in 1820 and was ordered to report to General Macomb at Mackinac. Mackinac for centuries had lived in Indian tradition; as a frontier stronghold in the war of 1812 it had been captured by the British, and now housed four companies of the United States Troops. Here in among the blockhouses Dr. Beaumont was appointed surgeon to supply the medical needs of the troops and also to keep an official diary of the weather.

The report of the discharge of a gun was not an occasion for alarm at Mackinac—hunting bears and often Indians was a recognized occupation. But on June 6, 1822, inadvertently a shot was fired; the report of which reverberated around the world and its echo was to be heard through more than a century of oncoming time. Alexis St. Martin, a youth of nineteen years, was shot while standing adjacent to the barrel of a shotgun. The whole discharge, wadding and all, entered his body in the upper abdominal region. He fell, his shirt was burning—the diagnosis of the bystanders was death. But destiny had carved a different course for St. Martin. Beaumont was called—in 20 minutes, he was at the side of the moribund youth. His surgery was effective—his tonic of muriatic acid and wine was alleged to contribute strength and St. Martin recovered and after cicatrization of his wound was left with a gastric fistula—a human guinea pig.

It was this unique test object which enabled Beaumont to study the fundamentals of the peptic digestion process. Beaumont, away from any laboratory of physiology, an army surgeon on the frontier of civilization, adequately described the very basis of the process of protein digestion in the stomach. St. Martin's gastric juice produced at Mackinac had visited Franklin Bache, grandson of Benjamin Franklin, at Philadelphia, it had crossed the Atlantic and reached the great Swedish chemist, Berzelius, at Stockholm, and Professor Dunglison of the University of Virginia determined in it the presence of hydrochloric acid.

Beaumont after heroic efforts to continue his investigations, frustrated on one hand by military orders and on the other by the evasiveness and lackadaisical character of St. Martin, was ordered...
to St. Louis in 1835. Here he was permitted to engage also in private practice. His experiments had brought him much fame, an honorary degree from Columbia Medical College in Washington, honorary membership in the medical society of his home state and the offer of the chair of surgery at St. Louis University. But further, in St. Louis, Beaumont was guided by destiny to meet one in whose hands the fate of the nation was to fall. Lt. Robert E. Lee was ordered to St. Louis.

Lee had found plenty of room at the top at West Point and graduated second man in his class. As lieutenant in the engineer corps he showed his ability in various projects, particularly at Fortress Monroe in 1831-34. After duty in Washington in the engineer corps, Lee was assigned to duty on the Mississippi in 1837. As Freeman states, "A new and stimulating period of his life was about to open and he sensed it."

An order from the United States Engineer Corps dated April 6, 1837 assigned First Lieutenant Robert E. Lee to work on the channel of the Mississippi River at St. Louis. The river, which was, in less than three decades to be called the "Father of Waters," by Lincoln, was washing out a new channel on the Illinois shore. The cutting of this channel was throwing up a bar opposite the town of St. Louis. The outcome of this river prank was all too serious to the populace of this town; its commerce was in danger of complete destruction. This was the problem to which the enterprising engineer, Lt. Lee, was assigned.

Lee arrived at St. Louis, August 5, 1837 and began immediately to study the problem and develop plans for work on the channel. He spent most of his time on the harbor boats, surveying the river and the adjoining terrain. On December 6th a plan for operation was submitted and awaiting approval and action from Washington. Lee was able to return to Arlington for Christmas, 1837. Besides duties in the Engineer's office in Washington made it imperative for him to return east.

From Arlington on March 9, 1838, Lee wrote to his civilian assistant, Henry Kaiser, in St. Louis as follows:

"If you find that the present Landlady, or some one else will keep a boarding house in the building of General Clarke the ensuing year, engage two rooms of Mr. L. Clarke for me."
If there will be no boarding house in the building, then I will thank you to look me out rooms in some good and genteel private boarding house somewhere else. Does Dr. Beaumont intend to board or keep house in the rooms of General Clarke? If you determine to engage for me the rooms of Mr. L. Clarke, I should like very much to have the office in the same building if you could get a suitable room or rooms. I take it for granted that the rooms of Mr. L. Clarke are unfurnished. Please write to me at Louisville as I may find that I can get cheaper and better furniture there than in St. Louis."

On March 25, 1838, Lee with Mrs. Lee and their three children (George Washington Custis Lee called "Boo," Mary Custis and William H. F. Lee called "Rooney") set out for Pittsburgh en route for St. Louis. By boat Lee and his family went down the Ohio to Louisville, thence to Cincinnati and finally arrived in St. Louis, May 1st, after six weeks of travel. Having his family with him, Lee sought quarters in the Clarke mansion: thus, the families of the already famous physician and the future master strategist, were brought together.

On the southeast corner of Vine and Main Streets, stood the house where Lee and Beaumont were to live together for one year. This was the dwelling of Governor William Clarke of the Meriwether Lewis and William Clarke Expedition to the Great Northwest, built 1819-20, where Governor Clarke lived until June 1st, 1838 when he left to live with his son, Meriwether Lewis Clarke, at the latter’s recently purchased residence at the southeast corner of Broadway and Olive Street. Here he died in this same year, September 1, 1838. It is of special interest that Lafayette visited Governor William Clarke in 1825 in the Vine-Main Street residence. Lafayette was entertained for a day at the home of Pierre Chouteau, whose home was diagonally across the street from the Clarke mansion.

The very day that the Lees arrived from Virginia, Dr. William Beaumont took possession of the greater portion of the Clarke premises and remained there for a period of eighteen months until October 31, 1839. It is likely that Lee and Beaumont met here for the first time; for Beaumont had refused to live in Jefferson Bar-
racks at St. Louis, Lee's abode during the previous year. For the month of May 1838 the families of Clarke, Lee and Beaumont found themselves together in the Clarke mansion—they were somewhat crowded to say the least. In June the Clarkes moved away and the Lees occupied the two rooms and portico that had been the home of Meriwether Clarke and his wife, Abbie Churchill Clarke.

Here the Lees and the Beaumonts lived together for one year in complete harmony. The children playing together imagined themselves steamboats puffing along the Mississippi and as Lt. Lee commented, "They played so hard I was fearful of the bursting of their boilers." Frequently after a day of arduous toil on the Mississippi the two families joined their thoughts in music. Beaumont's daughter, Sarah, played the piano, "Major Hitchcock, a frequent visitor joined in on the flute and Lee, not dreaming of secession, turned the pages." Lee became very fond of the congenial Mrs. Beaumont and later in his letters to his friends in St. Louis always wanted to be remembered to the wife of the doctor as well as his staunch friend, the doctor himself. The young engineer in these pleasing surroundings pushed forward his work on the harbor which acquired for him an enviable reputation in the form of a Captain's commission, August 7, 1838.

It is of more than passing importance to observe that the year that Lee spent with Beaumont marked the period of descendency from fame and fortune in the life of the physician and for the soldier the rising of the sun whose setting would drop into the infinite azure at Appomattox Court House. What influence could the mingling of these two lives have for each other? Let us pause to inquire and perhaps speculate for a moment.

Beaumont was a courageous man, he had seen service in the War of 1812 and perhaps told many an interesting tale of adventure to the young captain of the engineer corps who had yet to wait 10 years to receive his baptism of fire at Vera Cruz, Mexico. But there seems to be a difference between the bravery and courage of Beaumont and that of Lee. Lee's bravery was marked always by deliberation and when in battle, if he exposed himself unnecessarily, as thought by many of his subordinates, it was only after a full realization of the necessity of his presence in the place of danger. In his early days, Beaumont's military career was marked more by
dashing and daring exploits; he was quicker to anger than Lee and often given to impetuosity. At one time when his honor was offended in 1815 by Captain Richards of the artillery corps, Beaumont challenged him to a duel, which however, was never fought. Perhaps some of the calmness and serenity which were outstanding in Lee's life impressed Beaumont in a lasting manner, but we are sure, however, that the impulsiveness of Beaumont was certainly not acquired by Lee.

Both the soldier and the physician were religious men but their religious attitudes were markedly different. Beaumont respected sincere religious belief although his ardor for dogmatic religious doctrine seemed never to reach a high level for he did not affiliate himself with any church. Nevertheless, he was a devoted and loving father, possessed with a firm sense of duty and responsibility and was for the most part kind-hearted and generous. On the other hand Lee was a churchman. He was dogmatic in his doctrine and his firm adherence to Pauline theocracy marked him as an ardent "predestinationalist." It was this sense of the Divine will working through the hearts of men that enabled him to rationalize in his own mind the rebellion and made him feel that he was falling into part of the Divine program when he drew his sword to defend the Old Dominion. It was Lee, the engineer, Lee, the mathematician, Lee, the comrade of the scientist, William Beaumont, who in the beginning of the war constantly harbored the logical opinion that nine million people could not ultimately defeat twenty-three million people. It was Lee, the churchman and professional soldier, who later believed that by some divine miracle plus the strength of the army of northern Virginia the North could be subdued; it was this same side of Lee that prompted the remark to Pete Longstreet at Fredericksburg as the Boys in Gray gained a portion of the field, "I could like this game if it were not so horrible." He believed implicitly that these Boys in Gray were transformed from the mud and gore of the death of battle to a glorious eternity. Perhaps he could have profited by taking note of the religion of Beaumont, which was less dogmatic and likely dealt more with the material things of this earth and less with the celestial affairs of the world to come.

Lee was a West Pointer through and through—Beaumont, though
a gallant soldier, lacked in his military life the self-discipline so characteristic of the professional soldier. Lee was always docile under command, Beaumont chaffed when orders from headquarters were contrary to his best judgment. Lee had an abundant supply of diplomacy, on the other hand, Beaumont was impatient, lacking in tact and frequently used forceful language where better judgment would have dictated a milder tone. It is interesting to see how these diametrically opposite characteristics militated against each in later life, where perhaps, a long period of close contact might have amalgamated these attributes. As Lee was patient and complacent under orders so he tolerated far too much insubordination on the part of his generals. This proved injurious to the Confederate cause at Malvern Hill and only the tolerance of Lee with the patience of Job would have permitted Longstreet to sulk in his tent at Gettysburg, like Achilles of Old, to the detriment of the cause of the Stars and Bars. A Beaumont would have demanded action. As Lee was patient awaiting military advancement, Beaumont was cantankerous and irascible because the recognition that he thought he deserved was not immediately forthcoming. After the death of Beaumont's friend, Surgeon-General Lovell, Beaumont was ordered by Surgeon-General Lawson to Florida. The physician resented this—he condemned the politicians in the military service and believed that he could force the revoking of the order. In fact, against the advice of the disciplinarian, Lee, he went over the head of the Surgeon-General to President Van Buren; his request was refused and his military career ended somewhat ingloriously. Had he imbibed just a draught of the patience of Lee this unfortunate event would not have happened.

Lee's work on the Mississippi now finished he returned to Washington in 1840 leaving behind him an indelible impression among his friends in St. Louis. In his despair Beaumont wrote to Lee and the guarded soldier and sincere friend replied to Beaumont's letter as follows:

"I am afraid that you will think that I have neglected your letter in relation to your application to the President to be restored to your rank and place in the Army. A hundred times I have determined to write to you, but as often, when on the
point of executing, have I delayed from day to day in the
hope of learning something satisfactory. If Mr. Wright has
ever presented your Memorial to the President, it has never
reached, as far as I can learn, the War Dept. Should it be so
referred, it would naturally be sent to the Surgeon General for
a report, and as well as I can ascertain his sentiments by indi­
rect approaches, he will not recommend your reinstatement,
and I think I may say will oppose it. He appears to have some
feeling on the subject, the cause of which I do not know.
Supposing your application should come before the Adjt. Gen.,
I had taken occasion to impress him with your usefulness, skill,
attention etc., and the loss that the service would sustain par­
ticularly in the West by your withdrawal. I spoke to Cooper
in the same manner, without telling him your present views,
as they might have thought my object was to influence their
action, and they both coincided with me in regretting your loss
as did Dr. King, but I am almost certain that the subject has
not been broached to them, unless it has been within a few
days. I do not know Mr. Wright, and I have disliked to call
on him purposely on the subject, as he might have thought I
was interfering in what did not concern me. I have, however,
thrown myself in his way, without success, in the hope of
learning what he considered the prospect of a favorable deci­
sion. He is so engrossed in politics and the affairs of Congress
that I suppose he cannot find time to withdraw himself from
them. At any rate, I have never been able to meet him. I
showed your letter to Col. Totten, who showed every desire
to aid you, and promised to let me know what he could dis­
cover, but he has not been more successful than myself. When
Major Hitchcock passed through we had a long consultation
on the subject, and he made a special visit to the office of the
Surgeon General, which he said convinced him that nothing
could be done in that quarter. Now, has Mr. Wright presented
your Memorial to the President and what does he say of the
probabilities of its success? For your reinstatement in the
Army I should personally take great pleasure, and I believe it
would conduce to the interest of the service generally. I should
be particularly glad to be instrumental in it, but in the present
circumstances I am at a loss how to proceed without showing any obtrusive interference, which I have always seen produce injury in similar cases. You must let me know how matters have progressed and whether there is anything so small a man as myself can do to shove them along."

In October 1839 Beaumont moved to Gamble Place, a forty-acre estate in the vicinity of what is now Jefferson and Olive Streets. Here Beaumont lived until 1849 when he purchased and moved to the residence of George Rogers Hancock Clarke (son of Governor William Clarke) at 24 S. Fourth Street (now numbered 23 S. Fourth Street). Here Beaumont lived until the time of his death from an infection on April 25, 1853.

The fatal day of the passing of the physician left behind these immortal words which have echoed down through the decades, "Truth like beauty when unadorned is most adorned and in prosecuting these experiments and inquiries, I believe I have been guided by its light."

Thus death ended a friendship of fourteen years but for Lee a rapidly pyramiding series of events were bringing him with meteoric rapidity into national prominence. He had built Fort Carroll in the Patapsco River near Baltimore, Franklin Pierce was President and Jefferson Davis, Secretary of War, and Robert E. Lee, Superintendent of West Point. Thus, the life of Beaumont ended when the career of his soldier friend was seething skyward, the storm clouds of the rebellion had thickened in the southern sky and their ominous shadows portended the sharp crackling of musketry of first Bull Run and General Robert E. Lee, the man of the hour of the Confederacy.

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