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R. Lockwood Tower, ed. *Lee's Adjutant: The Wartime Letters of Colonel Walter Herron Taylor, 1862-1865.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995. xv + 343 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-021-5.

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Walter Herron Taylor (1838-1916) of Norfolk, Virginia, served under Confederate General Robert E. Lee, first as aide-de-camp and then as assistant adjutant general of the Army of Northern Virginia, throughout the Civil War. From his vantage point among the inner circle of Lee's confidants, Taylor handled most, if not all, of the general's official correspondence, a powerful position for a twenty-two-year-old man. That Taylor coped admirably and with minor complaints attests to his ability. Even so, he often worried about his competence. "After three weeks constant fighting, marching and watching," he admitted on one occasion, "I am happy to say however I am still able to keep up & perform my allotted task. The anxiety lest I should overlook something or commit some serious blunder, tells upon me more than fatigue or loss of rest. The responsibility resting upon me frightens me at times, and each day I am so thankful if I can exhibit a clear and correct record of my acts" (p. 164).

This documentary edition of 110 of Taylor's letters offers an insight into the mind and character of this remarkable young man. An intensely private man, Taylor refused to allow access to these letters. He transcribed a portion of them, profusely editing, deleting, and softening the contents, but he never published them. Douglas Southall Freeman, one of the first historians to see the wartime letters, believed that Taylor included excerpts from only about half of the extant letters in his 1878 book, *Four Years With General Lee.* Editor Tower estimates that Taylor quoted from one letter in five. However, Tower does not indicate exactly how many wartime letters actually exist, and we do not know what percentage these 110 letters represent of the collection Taylor's granddaughter donated to the Norfolk (Va.) Public Library in 1964.

Taylor wrote first to his sister and other family members in 1862 and to Bettie Saunders beginning in the summer of 1863. Bettie eventually consented to marry Taylor at the end of the war, warming very slowly to his pursuit and correspondence. She insisted that he burn all of her letters, which he did. Without this dialogue between them, some references in his letters to her appear out of context. Because Taylor encamped near Richmond several times during the war, and because Bettie Saunders worked in the Treasury Department and then the Surgeon General's Office in Richmond, he managed to see her on leave and while in town on business. With Bettie in a government position in the Confederate capital, and through her relatives in high places, she knew much more about war activities than a woman who relied on letters from the front to follow the fighting. Taylor therefore did not provide as much war news as one would expect from Lee's right-hand man. Tower laments, for instance, that Taylor did not write about Cold Harbor in his 9 June 1864 letter, but the adjutant probably told Bettie about the 3 June battle when he saw her in person on 7 June.

Taylor's letters, besides containing news of battles, betray a tremendously positive outlook that borders on naivete. Tower attributes this trait to Taylor's "unswerving faith in eventual Southern victory and the unquenchable optimism of a young man in love" (p. xii). In addition, Taylor tentatively professed his love for Bettie and expressed his religious beliefs. Tower edited these passages severely by omitting 141 instances of "social gossip and repetitious expressions of affection and religious sentiment that would add nothing of historical or human interest" (p. xii).

Other editorial techniques include the use of modern punctuation to replace dashes and the division of lengthy passages into paragraphs. Tower's explanatory notes are mainly biographical rather than contextual, so he misses opportunities to comment on episodes that warrant elaboration, as when Bettie and other women working in Richmond offices relieved men of their jobs so that the men could go to war. Was this happening in other cities and towns? How common or rare was it? How many women worked as replacements? When Tower cannot identify people, he often states that they did not appear in the 1860 Norfolk census. He seems to assume that ev-

eryone Taylor mentions was from Norfolk, and he does not appear to have checked the Richmond census. Some of Tower's topical notes fail to provide adequate information. For example, Chimborazo Hospital (note 42, p. 293) deserves a fuller reference, and mention of a ring tournament (pp. 212 and 214) receives no explanatory note. Tower's notes also evoke a decided Confederate bias. He repeats an allegation about Union General Judson Kilpatrick's sexual conduct but does not mention similar rumors about Confederate officers. One outright error states that Richmond, an independent city, is in adjacent Henrico County (note 27, p. 270).

Tower uses transitional paragraphs between letters to indicate where Taylor was and what he and the Army of Northern Virginia were doing at any given time, and he provides a brief narrative chronology of the army's movements in his biographical sketch of Taylor. Perhaps because of Taylor's closeness to Lee, his wartime letters sometimes reflect a less positive reaction to the general than we are accustomed to seeing. Taylor is especially critical of the workload given him by Lee, Lee's inconsideration and temper, and the general's indecisiveness.

Despite these few flaws, *Lee's Adjutant* provides a welcome addition to the documentary literature on the war from a previously unavailable and long-neglected source.

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