

sand men,* many of them without shoes, and all of them clamorous for pay. Of ammunition, there were not ten rounds per man, and no lead. There was not one piece of heavy ordnance in the whole line, and there were no artillerists to man the few light pieces which we possessed. Add to this, that the troops could not take or keep the field, for want of tents and covering ; that the medical department, if one could be said to exist at all, was utterly destitute of every thing necessary for the comfort of the sick or the disabled ; and that there was among the men that entire want of subordination, to say nothing of discipline, which always characterizes raw militia ; and some idea may be formed of the condition of our army.

The condition of the forces on the opposite bank of the river, was in contrast with ours in every particular. There was a well appointed, and well found army, under the most exact discipline, and commanded by skilful and experienced officers. Every important post, from Fort Erie to Fort George, was in a defensible state, and the enemy had possessed himself of a very commanding position on the heights of Queenstown, which he was rendering every day more secure and formidable. He had, moreover, the mastery of the Lakes, and was at that moment industriously employed in using that advantage to increase his numbers, and add to his supplies at Niagara.

In this state of things, the armistice which had been concluded between Gen. Dearborn and the Governor General of Canada, was announced to Gen. Van Rensselaer, and it became necessary to settle with the commander of the British forces opposite to us, terms of an arrangement for the government of the armies on the

On the first of September, he had only 691 men fit for duty,

Niagara, during the continuance of the armistice. The performance of this duty was assigned to me, and a suggestion having been made by me to that effect, I had the authority of General Van Rensselaer to attempt such an arrangement, as, besides securing the objects contemplated by Gen. Dearborn, might enable us, pending the armistice, to use the waters of the Ontario, as a common and undisturbed highway for the purposes of transportation. My interview with Gen. Sheaffe, on this mission, was one full of interest. As was anticipated, the terms proposed by me were met not only with objections, but at first by an unequivocal refusal to accede to them. The following clause, proposed and insisted on, on the part of the British General, will serve to show how wide of each other were our respective views and interests. " It is moreover to be distinctly understood, that there is not any thing in the foregoing articles, to be construed into granting facilities for the forwarding of troops, stores, &c., which did not exist before the declaration of the armistice, farther than they are to pass unmolested as therein provided, in the mode and by the routes assigned to them prior to the cessation of hostilities." The result of a protracted discussion, however, was an agreement which confined the restrictions to the movements of troops, stores: &c., to the country above Fort Erie, and left such movements elsewhere, entirely unshackled and free.

The importance of this arrangement has never been sufficiently appreciated. The immediate and pressing necessity for it on our part, was, that without it, the ordnance and supplies intended for our army, having been collected at Oswego, were not likely ever to reach us ; the roads were impassable, especially for heavy cannon, and the highway of the Lake was beset by a triumphant ene-

my. As soon as the negotiation was successfully completed, an express was despatched to Col. Fenwick at Oswego, to move on with his supplies with all possible expedition. But General Van Rensselaer was enabled to use this advantage for another purpose, of great importance to the service. No sooner was the way open, than an express was sent to Ogdensburgh with an order for the removal of nine vessels from that place to Sackett's Harbour. To this movement was Commodore Chauncey indebted for the ascendancy which he for a time was enabled to maintain on the lake, and without which the subsequent descent at Little York could not have been attempted.

Col. Fenwick had not arrived, when orders were received from Gen. Dearborn, to put an end to the armistice. He was, however, as it turned out, then approaching his place of destination, at which he shortly afterwards arrived. He was directed, out of abundant caution, to land at the Four Mile Creek, instead of attempting to reach Fort Niagara. As soon as this was effected, and in the same morning, having been charged with the delivery of the notice terminating the armistice, to the British Commandant, I crossed over from the Fort to discharge the duties of this mission, which I did in a personal interview with Gen. Sheaffe.

It will be seen by a reference to the documents collected in the appendix to this Narrative, that from the first, Gen. Van Rensselaer acted on the certain knowledge, that it was expected of him to make a descent upon Canada at the earliest possible period. He knew that neither the government nor the country was prepared to be satisfied with defensive measures only. Notwithstanding this, the first glance he had of his position, after he reached the frontier showed him at *ice, that

nothing could be attempted, at least for a considerable period. Indeed his own condition was critical in the extreme, and even his ability to defend himself in case of attack, was more than doubtful. Gen. Dearborn, the commander of this entire district, had been ordered by the Secretary of War, in his instructions of the 1st of August, to make a diversion in favour of Gen. Hull, at Niagara. There was no preparation to do anything effectual under this order. Before Gen. Van Rensselaer reached the frontier, Gen. Brock was on his way, with a competent force withdrawn from his posts on the Niagara, to meet Gen. Hull, leaving behind him however, a force abundantly sufficient, with the reinforcements they were then receiving, for the protection of the posts he had left, against any attempt which could have been made on them on our part ; sufficient even to have made it quite possible to carry the war to the American side of the river, with every prospect of advantage and success.

The first relief which Gen. Van Rensselaer experienced, was in the arrival of Col. Fenwick, with ordnance and stores, on the 4th day of September, as already related. Before this, however, and while as yet not a man had appeared to reinforce his numbers, the disgraceful fall of Detroit and surrender of Gen. Hull, had been announced, and Gen. Brock had been actually seen returning to this frontier, and conducting along the heights of Queenstown, an American army as prisoners of war. It was not much to be wondered at, that this event "spread great alarm among the inhabitants, and produced strong symptoms of distrust among the troops."

Durik the month which succeeded the announcement of this event, the condition and prospects of the army were, on the whole, but little improved. There was, in nearly all this time, every reason to expect an attack.

Every thing indicated great activity on the British side, and preparation for some signal blow. In the condition of Fort Niagara, it was natural to suppose that that would be the first object. It is believed that an attack was only prevented by the *show* of defence which was set up. The Mess House was unroofed and mounted with cannon, and a Battery was planted on the bank of the river above the Fort, while, in case of a hostile attempt, the safety of the troops was attempted to be provided for, by a new road cut through the woods at a distance from the river, in the rear.

Early in September, Gen. Van Rensselaer was advised by Gen. Dearborn, that the enemy was preparing to make an effort to reduce this army to the mortifying situation of Gen. Hull's, and that he must be ready "to make good a sure retreat." The abandonment of the Fort was also expressly recommended, and the fear expressed, that, if retained, it would prove "a trap for the garrison," for examinations had shown that it was utterly untenable and indefensible against a serious attack. The importance, however, of maintaining all his positions, led the General to the determination to put forth every effort and energy, to this effect, and to adopt the 'unalterable resolution to dispute every inch of ground with his adversary, in case of an attempt to dislodge him. The following letters, the one addressed to Gen. Dearborn, and the other to Governor Tompkins, will show in some measure, the condition of things at their date, as well as the opinions and resolution of the Commanding General. His whole force at this time, was about sixteen hundred men.

Extract of a letter From Major Gen. Van Rensselaer to Major Gen. Dearborn.

Head-Quarters, Lewiston, 17th September, 1812.

The situation of my little army is becoming every day more and more interesting, and I believe existing circumstances would fully warrant me in saying critical. As soon as our operations at and near Fort Niagara indicated a disposition to maintain the garrison, the enemy became exceedingly active. New works were thrown up, and old ones modified to meet us at every point. Their works appear now to be all completed, and they are daily receiving very considerable reinforcements of men. Last evening, the Royal George arrived at Fort George, with about two hundred artillerists. About one hundred boats, loaded with stores for the British army in Upper Canada, have lately passed up the St. Lawrence. Two regiments of troops are also on their way up, and I am induced to believe that those lately arrived at Fort George, are detachments from those regiments. The information which you had received on the subject of the enemy's reinforcements and destination, was undoubtedly correct. Troops are also coming down from Fort Malden to Fort Erie. Indeed there can be no possible doubt, that the enemy are very actively engaged in concentrating their forces to act in this vicinity. When the scene of action will open, I know not ; it probably cannot be far distant. Such movements of the enemy have been observed for three or four days past, as have induced many to believe, that the hour of attack was at hand. On the 13th instant, boats were engaged in putting a considerable detachment of troops on board a ship, which, at evening, got under way from Fort George and stood out into lake Ontario. It was apprehended that those troops were, that night, to be landed on the south

side of the lake, in the rear of our guards. The night before last, the enemy moved some boats from the landing at Queenstown, down the river. This excited alarm, and late last night a rumour ran through the camp, that the garrison was actually summoned to surrender. I only mention these things to show you what apprehensions prevail. Should the enemy attack, I have every reason to believe we shall be very severely pressed ; but so serious will be the consequences of any retrograde movement, or a total abandonment of Fort Niagara, that, upon mature consideration of all circumstances, I have determined to hold, if possible, my present position, and dispute every inch of ground. My force bears no proportion to the duties required ; besides, the discipline of the troops is not such as to warrant perfect reliance, and many of our arms are not fit for action. These are considerations which you, sir, and my fellow-citizens will do me the justice to bear in mind, whatever result may happen. For the application of the means entrusted to me, I hope I shall be able to justify myself to my country. My greatest fear is, that the troops destined to reinforce me, will not join me in season. In every calculation heretofore made upon my reinforcements, both as to time and strength, I have been disappointed. Col. Bloom's regiment, which was reported to me before its arrival, for seven hundred, is but little more than four hundred.

I am erecting a store-house and magazine upon the high grounds, in the rear of my camp ; but for want of teams, tools, and nails, the work proceeds but slowly ; we build with logs, and rive our shingles from bolts of oak. It is with extreme difficulty we can procure teams upon any emergency. The horses of the cavalry and flying artillery are badly supplied with hay, and as for *grain*

they are almost entirely destitute. I have completed the road through the woods, from my camp to the garrison.

Major General Van Rensselaer to his Excellency Governor Tompkins.

Head-Quarters, Lewiston, 17th September, 1812.

Sir,—

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your packet by Major Noon, who arrived in camp last evening. The duties of the day are too pressing to allow me the leisure I could wish, to answer your letter particularly. I must, therefore, beg leave to refer your Excellency to my despatch of this date to Major General Dearborn. I cannot, however, but express the satisfaction I feel at the approbation, which my conduct thus far in the campaign has received. To perform my duty, arduous as it is, is comparatively easy, but to determine what my duty is, in a wide field for action, where every thing is unshaped and uncertain, is often a task of no small difficulty ; I am conscious to myself that I have studied it faithfully, and performed to the best of my ability. My situation is growing every hour more interesting, perhaps critical. The particulars you will find in my letter to Gen. Dearborn ; but with my little force I shall certainly attempt to hold my position, with full reliance upon your Excellency's assurances, that every effort will be made to support me. *A retrograde movement of this army upon the back of that disaster which has befallen the one at Detroit, would stamp a stigma upon the national character which time could never wipe away.* I shall therefore try to hold out against superior force and every disadvantage, until I shall be reinforced. I am happy to learn that the money to pay off the troops is at hand. The information cheers our camp. I announced it in orders this morning ;

hope they will soon realize their expectations, for in truth, their wants are many.

I have the honour, &c.

His Excellency Governor Tompkins.

It will be observed, by reference to other official letters in the appendix, that as late as the 26th of September, the General was informed from Head-Quarters at Greenbush, that a strange fatality had pervaded the whole arrangements for reinforcing his post, and apprehensions were expressed that the reinforcements would still arrive too late to enable him to maintain his position. The same despatch, however, conveyed the expression of a confident hope, that he would not only be able to meet the enemy, but *to carry the war into Canada*. It was added that "at all events we must calculate on possessing U. Canada before the winter sets in." In truth, the time was now at hand, when, if at all, the long contemplated blow must be struck, and as the enemy had not brought the war into our camp, it was soon determined to carry it into his own.

With the arrival of the reinforcements, which were now constantly coming in, the confidence of the army increased to such a degree, that the desire for an opportunity to wipe out the disgrace of Hull's surrender could no longer be restrained. The clamour for active operations became general, and Gen. Van Rensselaer resolved to gratify his own inclinations and those of his army, by commencing offensive operations; with this view he arranged a plan to be submitted, and then summoned his principal officers to a council of war. For farther detail as to his situation and views, *see* his letter to Gen. Dearborn of Oct. 8th, published in Appendix, No. I.

From the correspondence with Gen. Smyth, in rela-

tion to the subject of his naming an early day when he, in connection with other general officers, and commandants of regiments, would meet Gen. V. R. in council, it is plain that his second in command had no cordial disposition to act in concert with him. And in farther confirmation of the fact, is his letter reporting his arrival from Buffalo, dated 29th Sept.; in this, although an entire stranger to the country, he goes out of the way to obtrude his advice upon his commanding officer, touching movements and localities of which he knew nothing.* These will bear out the prevalent opinions of the day, as to his presumptuous conduct; the cause of that, as well as of his subsequent evasive conduct, is merely a matter of conjecture. It might have proceeded from disappointment in not obtaining full command on this frontier, or it might have been because his fastidiousness could not be reconciled to the idea of being under the control of a militia general. Be it as it may, he was highly censured by all who were aware of his conduct, and many, among whom I was one, were of opinion that coercive measures should be resorted to, to bring him to a sense of his duty; and perhaps if Gen. V. R. is censurable for any sin of omission while on the frontier, it is for not pursuing this course. But as the season was rapidly drawing to a close, and as he was urged by his instructions to effect something decisive before he went into winter quarters, his situation was one of extreme delicacy. He did not wish to be drawn from the object he had in view, by a controversy with Gen. Smyth—particularly so, as he knew that the forces which by this time had collected in his own immediate vicinity, were amply sufficient for his purpose.

* Appendix, No.

The plan which Gen. V. R. intended to have submitted to the council in question, and the objects he expected to gain by it, if carried out, are indicated in the following extract of a letter from him to Gen. Dearborn. " That we immediately concentrate the regular force in the neighbourhood of Niagara, and the militia here make the best possible disposition, and at the same time the regulars shall pass from the Four Mile Creek, to a point in the rear of the works of Fort George, and take it by storm. I will pass up the river here and carry the heights of Queenstown. Should we succeed, we should effect a great discomfiture of the enemy, *by breaking their line of communication, driving their shipping from the mouth of this river ; leaving them no rallying point in this part of the country—appalling the minds of the Canadians, and opening a wide and safe communication for our supplies. We shall save our own land, wipe away a part of the score of our past disgrace, get excellent barracks and winter quarters, and at least be prepared for an early campaign another year.* As soon as the result of the council shall be known, I shall advise you of it."

His want of accommodations against the inclement weather became greater, in the same ratio as his strength increased, until the discontent in consequence, reduced his camp to a state bordering on mutiny. The calls to be led to battle, became more and more urgent and imperious, and the general found himself at last obliged either to dismiss the troops, or to gratify their wishes. Several days elapsed without having a time specified by General Smyth for holding the council, and the prospect of doing it being as remote as ever, Gen. Van Rensselaer could no longer withhold his orders for offensive measures. The different posts of the enemy having been previously

examined by various officers of our army, while on official business there,* our knowledge of his localities, of course, was accurate, and having obtained satisfactory information as to the force stationed at his defences, particularly at those about Queenstown, the general felt himself warranted in making an immediate attack on that place. Accordingly on the 10th October, 1812, thirteen boats, capable of transporting three hundred and forty men with their equipments, were brought down under cover of the night, upon wagons, from Gill Creek, two miles above the falls, and launched in the river at the only practicable spot at the time, at the present, Lewiston ferry. Lieut. Col. Fenwick's flying artillery were ordered to be up in season from Fort Niagara. Gen. Smyth was also directed to send down so much of his command as could be spared from Buffalo, and the attack was to have been made at 3 o'clock, on the morning of the next day. " Experienced boatmen were procured to take the boats from the landing below, to the place of embarka-

* On my last visit there, the very day before the action, while returning to my boat, accompanied by Col. Mc Donald and some other officers, attracted by the appearance of a body of Indians a short distance to our left, I expressed a desire to obtain a nearer view, as I might know some of them. This gallant and accomplished officer immediately led the way. On our route we passed two beautiful brass howitzers of a small size, calculated to be carried on pack-horses, the wheels about as large as those of a wheel-barrow. I remarked, " these, at all events, are old acquaintances of mine." They had formerly belonged to Wayne's army, and had been left at Detroit, where, as Col. Mc D. stated, they were taken by Gen. Brock and brought down, with a view of being sent to England, as a curiosity. I observed in a jocular manner that I felt partial to those pieces, and we must try to take them back. He replied in the same pleasant humour, that they must try to defend them. Little did he suspect that every thing was arranged to make that trial, or that the next day he and his chivalrous chief were doomed to fall and I to be grievously wounded,

tion. Lieut. Sims was considered the man of the greatest skill for this service ; he went ahead and in the extreme darkness passed the intended place, far up the river, and then in a most extraordinary manner, fastened his boat to the shore, and abandoned the detachment. In this front boat he had carried nearly all the oars, which were prepared for the boats. In this agonizing dilemma stood officers and men, whose ardour had not been cooled by exposure through the night to a most tremendous north-east storm, which continued unabated for twenty-eight hours, and deluged the whole camp. Col. Van Rensselaer was to have commanded the detachment.

" After this result, I had hoped that the patience of the troops would have continued until I could submit the plan suggested in my letter of the 8th, that I might act under, and in conformity to, the opinion which might be then expressed. But my hope was idle ; the previously excited ardour seemed to have gained new heat from the late miscarriage. The brave were too mortified to stop short of their object, and the timid thought laurels half won by the attempt.' On the morning of the 12th, such was the pressure upon me from all quarters, that I became satisfied that my refusal to act, might involve me in suspicion, and the service in disgrace."•

Except in some minor details, the arrangements for another attempt were the same as on the last. The boats were brought back after daylight, and left on the shore opposite Queenstown, where they remained the two subsequent days in full sight, and within musket

* See despatch from G. V. R. of Oct. 14th, to Gen. Dearborn, in Appendix No.

shot of the enemy.* The appearance was regarded as a feint, and they became impressed with a belief, that they were intended to carry an armament down the river against Fort George. Our operations at and near Fort Niagara, before alluded to, which they had lately seen effected opposite that post, confirmed the belief to such a degree, that their principal force was stationed there ; and when Gen. Brock was afterwards first informed of the firing at Queenstown, he declared that it could not possibly be an attack. " It was nothing more than the war between sentinels."† To all this, in connection with their faith in the impregnable nature of the place, we may ascribe the reason why they were so weakly garrisoned here ; and that they were so, was divulged to us through such sources as unequivocally to justify an attack, and it was decided that it should be made under my direction on the morning of the 13th.

During the two intervening days, although yet suffering under the effects of a fever, by which I had been confined to my bed until near the moment of being called out to lead the first intended expedition, I was constantly employed in personally attending to complete the arrangements for battle, and in instructing the different participators in the particular duties to be assigned them.

Mr. Cook, a highly respectable citizen of Lewiston, (father of the Hon. Bates Cook, lately a member of congress, who, if I mistake not, with one or more bro-

* The Niagara river being but about three hundred and fifty yards wide at this place, a British sentinel was killed at his post by a shot from our side. See Correspondence on this subject in Appendix, No.

† See Correspondence with Col. Fenwick, Appendix, No. II. See Appendix, No. II.

thers volunteered his services for the occasion), was this time entrusted with the duty of procuring trustworthy boatmen, at whatever expense •, and they with the boats were put under his direction. To Mr. Lovett was committed the management of the fire from the eighteen-gun battery on the heights of Lewiston. This was an important duty. The balls from this battery were to pass over the heads of the assaulting party, in order to reach the enemy in the village of Queenstown. The duty in the result was satisfactorily performed, though at the expense of Mr. L.'s hearing. He never recovered from the astounding effects of his own fire.

Lt. Col. Christie, who had lately arrived with a reinforcement of near four hundred regulars, having begged the honour of a command in the expedition,* was accordingly ordered up to Lewiston with three hundred of his men. The remainder were left to guard the boats and stores which he had brought with him, to the mouth of Four-Mile Creek. Three hundred militia-men, who had been in camp several months, and were much superior to the newly recruited regulars in point of discipline, together with forty picked men from Capt. Leonard's old company of artillery from Fort Niagara, under Lieuts. Gansevoort and Rathbone, with all the equipments belonging to their proper line of service, composed the detachment under my own immediate command. An equal number from each of these two detachments, together with the forty artillerists, were to proceed from the encampment, and effect the first *descent* upon the enemy's shore. Lieut. Col. Fenwick, and Major Mullany, were to follow with about five hundred and fifty regulars, and some pieces of flying artil-

* See Col. Fenwick's correspondence, No. II.

lery, and then the militia in order, as fast as the boats could carry them.

The arrangement, however, was partially deranged, when we reached the bank of the river. Here the troops were halted •, and while accompanied by my two acting aids, Lush and Gansevoort, I was inspecting the condition of the boats, which, by the way, appeared to be in perfect order, the regulars got possession of the narrow dug way leading down to the water's edge. In this emergency it became necessary either to counter-march part of this force, a movement which we apprehended might arouse the attention of the enemy, or to fill the boats with regular troops in the first place, to the partial exclusion of the militia. The latter alternative was adopted, and Major Morrison was ordered to follow with the remainder of the detachment, in the return boats.

When the troops had embarked, to the number of twenty-five in each boat, I first walked along the line to see that all were ready, and finding they were so, leaped into the one containing the picked artillerists, and gave the word to push off. The order was promptly obeyed. Counterbalancing, in the favouring eddies on either side, the lee-way made in crossing the main current, within ten minutes all the boats, excepting three, struck the enemy's shore without difficulty, at the identical spot aimed at. Having landed, the boats were immediately sent back. The troops were formed, and charged up the bank, where they met the enemy. A short, but severe engagement took place, with heavy loss on both sides ; but we were victorious, and the enemy gave way, and fled towards Queenstown, on our right. The position we occupied cut off their retreat to their main battery on the heights. Finding myself very

much crippled now, by a number of wounds, and with the loss of blood, unable to proceed any farther, I inquired for Lieut. Col. Christie, but not hearing of him, I directed the troops to fall back a few steps, under cover of a bank, where they were secure from the desultory shots still occasionally pointed at them. In This situation, a pause of some time occurred, while my staff were out in a vain search for my missing second in command. Had he been on the spot, the affair would have proceeded without a moment's delay. But although the business yet to be done was all-important to the success of our enterprise, as long as there were any hopes of Lieut. Col. Christie's arrival, I was unwilling to entrust its execution to such very young men, the highest of whom in rank were only captains, not six months in service. But he was not to be found ; and as it was now broad daylight, any farther delay was highly hazardous ; and I therefore, in an agony of feeling which belonged to the occasion, directed the troops to incline a little to the left, and ascend the heights by the point of the rock, and storm the battery, which by this time had opened its fire upon our place of embarkation. Lieut. Gansevoort, being well acquainted with the ground, was ordered to lead the way, at the head of the picked artillerymen, assisted by Lieut. Randolph. Lieut. Rathbone having fallen mortally wounded at my side ; other troops followed, Major Lush, my other acting aid, bringing up the rear, with orders to shoot down the first man who offered to give way. The noble* young men obeyed my directions, and, in due time, the report of a well-told volley, and the cheering shouts of victory, reached my ear, assuring me of their complete success.

* For the names of these gallant young men, see Appendix, No. I.

Having thus accomplished the work with two hundred and twenty-five men, for which six hundred and forty had been detailed, nothing farther was necessary for the full attainment of the objects of the enterprise, than to secure the advantages gained. Nothing was easier ; but an unfortunate occurrence of adverse circumstances, turned the fortunes of the day against our arms. I could not participate, personally, in the subsequent events ; and I must refer to Wilkinson's Memoirs, with Capt. Wool's report,* and to General Van Rensselaer's report,t for a statement of them. I may add, as a conclusion of my own observations, however, that it had been anticipated that the enemy might open the fire of a piece of flying artillery, from the village of Queenstown, upon our place of embarkation, as soon as they were aroused to action by our attack. Mr. Lovett's attention had, therefore, been particularly directed to this contingency the day before ; and, in compliance with the instructions then received, as soon as there was light enough, he turned the long eighteens of the battery on Lewiston heights upon this spot, in such a masterly manner as to drive the enemy out before their battery was carried. The ferry was unannoyed after this, except by the fire of one gun ; but the distance was too great, and the formation of the banks rendered this fire almost ineffectual. I was afterwards told that none of our boats were injured by cannon shot. The artillerymen, who were purposely attached to the storming party, and provided with matches, were to have turned the fire of the battery on Queenstown heights upon the village, and particularly upon the lower one-gun battery above alluded to, which was about a mile below,

* See Appendix I,

t See Appendix

and could not be reached from any other quarter. But some one of the number, in a fit of over-zealous patriotism, frustrated the design, by spiking the cannon as soon as captured.

Priding myself as I do, on the habits acquired under the tuition of Generals Wayne, Wilkinson, and Posey, I am not conscious of ever having neglected the performance of the most minute detail appertaining to my duties as a military man. Nor do I recollect of a neglect on this occasion. Selected to lead an expedition on which the result of a whole campaign depended, my reputation was at stake, and my anxiety to give my country a glorious offset to the disaster of Hull. rendered me, if possible, doubly vigilant. Every preparation deemed essential was made under my own inspection, and every contingency was provided for a successful issue ; and if the result was unfortunate, it certainly was not on account of any defect, either in the plan of the expedition, or in the arrangements made to carry it into execution. Had Lieut. Colonel Christie, for instance, effected his landing in conjunction with myself, no delay need have been occasioned at the important crisis when I became disabled. The batteries would have been secured before the enemy were prepared to annoy us, and our primary object, an unmolested passage to the reinforcements, would have been secured in season. To his failure may mainly be attributed all our disasters. Yet the apology which he makes for it, in his report to Gen. Armstrong, (the loss of a rowlock and an unskilful pilot,) would, in a spirit of charity be deemed sufficient, were it not known that other boats besides his own, were ordered by him to fall back at the same time,* His re-

* Capt. Lawrence, in one of the three unsuccessful boats, has repeatedly declared that he fell back by Christie's orders.

turn damped the hitherto irrepressible ardour of the militia; Major Morrison, instead of leading his detachment across the river, suddenly found himself taken too unwell for the duty ; and though the dreaded fire on the ferry was now silenced by Mr. Lovett's battery, and the heights were captured, yet the panic had become so general, that but a small portion of our army could be prevailed on to cross. The remainder, to their eternal shame be it said, instead of lending their aid to sustain their gallant brethren in their victorious career, stood passively, and saw them cut up, and captured in the end, by a force amounting to about one-third of their united number.

Having finished the brief personal narrative of the affair of Queenstown, which it had been my purpose to offer, the object of this work now requires, that I should proceed to an equally brief review of those extraordinary "Remarks" applicable to this affair, which, with others of a similar kind to be found in Gen. Armstrong's book, form the distinguishing features of the work, make it characteristic, and mark it for his own.

No. I. " The false and improbable report of a spy was made the ground-work of the expedition." The report of this spy was neither false nor improbable ; it was true, and was corroborated and confirmed by other information already had, in relation to the British force at Queenstown. That he was not mistaken about their numbers, and that the detachment which landed with me was more than enough to overpower them, was manifest in the result. Their whole force at Queenstown proved to be comprised of two flank companies of the 49th, a few militia, and Indians. After the foot-hold was obtained, if General V. R.'s army had crossed the river

C*

its capacity for contending with the whole of the force of the enemy, is a matter about which no doubt can be entertained.

II. " Every military enterprize should have some useful and important object." " Yet," says our historian, "according to the General's official report, his views were limited, on this occasion, to the expulsion of a small British detachment from Queenstown, and the occupation of that village as winter quarters for his troops."— Now observe the fairness of this bold assertion. General Armstrong knew that the views of General Van Rensselaer were not thus limited, and no such inference whatever was authorized to be drawn from any official report of his. It was, indeed, casually mentioned in his letter to the Secretary of War, the day after the battle, that the possession of the village of Queenstown, if taken, would, as an incidental advantage, have afforded to the troops a shelter from the inclemency of the season. And this expression is seized on as indicating and comprehending the whole objects of the expedition, to the exclusion of a despatch, known to General Armstrong, in which these objects were particularly detailed. The following single quotation should cover the historian with shame :— " Should we succeed, we shall effect a great discomfiture of the enemy; by breaking their line of communication, driving their shipping from the mouth of this river, leaving them no rallying point in this part of the country, appalling the minds of the Canadians, and opening a wide and safe communication for our supplies ; we , shall save our own land, wipe away part of the score of our past disgrace, get excellent barracks and winter quarters, and, at least, be prepared for an early campaign another year.

III. " The troops employed, or intended to be employed on this service, were principally militia, and therefore not better chosen than the object itself. Why this was so, is a problem not yet satisfactorily explained. If it originated in an *esprit du corps*, or belief of militia efficiency, there may be some colour of excuse for the error ; but if, as reported, the arrangement was made to *gratify the ambition of an individual*, the act was not merely injudicious but criminal." There was no choice in the matter. The intention was, to have employed all the disposable force : militia constituted the greatest proportion. The deduction, then, at the commencement of this note, may be ascribed to the wilful misrepresentation of the writer, for he had the official returns before him ; but if it is only to be considered applicable to the first detachment, it is false : for, as already stated, that division contained forty regular artillerists and three hundred militia ; the other, three hundred regulars. As to the selection of a leader, Gen. V. R. made it, after due reflection and consultation, and it behoves me not to discuss its propriety : but it may not be amiss to state, that it seems to have met the approval even of the author of the report from which the historian draws so largely for his embellishments. He, it appears from this document, though not disposed to waive his rank, yet, in fact, was not disinclined, and did consent to serve under an officer of established reputation. The truth is, there was no other officer on the ground who had seen service •, and a glimpse at the incidents of an earlier period of my life, might perhaps be sufficient to show, that General V. R. believed he had some good reasons for making the selection he did.*

* When about eighteen years of age I joined the army, under the command of General Wayne, as a Cornet of cavalry, and before twen-

IV. " If it be necessary to pass an army over a large and rapid river, demonstrations should never be omitted,

ty was promoted to the command of a troop. In the action of the 20th August, 1794, I received a wound through my lungs, which was at first considered, by the surgeons, to be mortal, but which my youth and strong constitution surmounted. How I acquitted myself, the despatches from Genert0 Wayne to the war-department bear ample testimony. Suffering yet from the effects of my wound, and there being no prospect of active service, in March, 1797, I went to Philadelphia, with the intention of resigning my commission. At the war-office I found General Wilkinson. Both himself and Mr. Secretary M'Henry expressed great satisfaction at seeing me. The latter observed, that he intended that day to have written to me : and when informed that I was there with a view to resign, and engage in some other business, he was kind enough to interpose a strenuous opposition, in which lie was strongly seconded by the Secretary, on the ground that my services were required for a delicate, perhaps dangerous duty. I was at once informed, that if I would undertake the enterprise offered me, I should have a blank furlough in my pocket, with the power to fill it up at my own discretion. Such a mark of confidence induced me to consent. I returned, made my arrangements, and, without delay, followed General Wilkinson to Fort Washington, (now Cincinnati.) Here I found the men of my old troop dismounted. I had not seen the fine fellows since the great battle in which they bore a distinguished part. The meeting was as unexpected as gratifying. I immediately passed over to Lexington, Ky., to facilitate and superintend the purchase of horses to mount my men, and in a few days reported myself and troop ready for duty : when, in compliance with my orders, (see App. order 14.) then received, I proceeded to Knoxville, and remained there until the object for which I had been sent was accomplished. When the conduct of France towards this country rendered it necessary for the general government to augment the army, and when Washington was again called upon to place himself at its head, he sent for me ; and in the presence of Generals Hamilton and Pinckney, questioned me about the state of my wound, and soon after I was appointed a Major of cavalry. By the law subsequently enacted for reducing this army, two troops of cavalry were retained without a field officer. I, of course, was among the disbanded, but not until after every effort in my favour had been made by Governor Jay, the gallant but ill-used Gen. Schuyler, General Hamilton, and others.—(See Letters, Appendix, 5.) Soon after, I received the appointment of Adjutant General of the militia of

provided the extent of your own force will justify detaching."

On the occasion of the first intended attack, on the 11th October, an exception to this rule occurred. The object was, to surprise the enemy in the night ; and it would have succeeded, beyond all question, if the descent had been effected. For the 13th, sufficient demonstrations were made for the purposes required in the rule. The appearance of our boats at the ferry two full days before the action, was regarded as a feint, intended to mask some other movement, and so it was supposed it would be regarded ; and as already stated, in connection with this, the extension of our works at Fort Niagara, together with the presence of forty additional boats near it, at the mouth of Four-mile Creek, induced the British commander to believe, as it was designed he should, that Fort George was our object ; and there, as the result proved, he was fully prepared, but not at Queenstown. The departure of General Smyth and Colonel Scott from their respective posts, at Black Rock and the Falls, was not observed by the enemy until after we had secured a foot-hold on his shore, as they marched in the night. If the remainder of the troops had crossed over, and sustained us then, the concentrated forces of all the British garrisons could have made no impression upon us.

this state, under that great and good man, Gov. Jay. This appointment I held during the respective administrations of his successors Governors George Clinton and Lewis ; for nine years during Governor Tompkins's administration, and, though subsequent to the events on which the mention of these facts is intended to bear, for nearly the whole period of Governor Dewitt Clinton's. Now, knowing all this, as he did, and that I had obtained these marks of consideration and of confidence from such high sources, the question is, Was General V. R. justifiable in selecting me to take the lead in the expedition ? And if so, although I do not deny that my ambition was highly gratified by tht, selection, wherein consisted its *criminality* ?

V. "Every officer charged with the direction of a military enterprise, should, before commencing it, assure himself, that the means necessary for that purpose are provided and ready for use."

Having been confined to my bed previous to the first attempt, General Wadsworth, a brave and meritorious officer, was requested to superintend the movements of the boats. We had forty lying in Gill Creek, the whole number of which could not be brought down without alarming the enemy with apprehensions of an attack at the real point. However, he procured as many as were required : and, after the failure of the first attempt, (the causes of which have heretofore been stated,) other efficient means were taken to regulate the employment of them ; and notwithstanding the allegations of certain individuals, who sought an excuse for their own misconduct, it is due to Mr. Cook to say here, that his department was well regulated ; and as long as the troops showed a disposition to cross, it was well conducted. If there was any irregularity afterward, the fault was not so much in his boatmen as in his passengers.

VI. "An army crossing a river in small detachments, and consecutively, exposes itself to be beaten in detail by an enemy much inferior to itself ; another important maxim, which on this occasion was forgotten or disregarded." The enemy were unprepared for an attack, as already fully shewn ; our first detachment proved itself able to master their garrison ; and after the mastery was gained, our boats were abundantly sufficient to have carried over our whole army, (with the exception of such parts as were necessary for the defence of certain posts,) before ten o'clock in the morning. Now the British force,

under General Sheaffe, did not arrive on the spot '*until four o'clock in the afternoon.*

VII. " The place selected for crossing the river was ill-judged." That this stream is " a sheet of eddies," as quoted by Gen. A., is true, no doubt ; and this is the very fact which accounts for the pains taken to secure the services of *experienced boatmen* : yet any person may realize the ease with which a passage, under the guidance of skilful pilots, may be effected by crossing over the spot in the ferry-boat of the present day. And what if it was commanded by the enemy's batteries ? The bearing of his guns had been examined beforehand, and the whole case provided for. Beginning the embarkation under the cover of the night, we had a chance of escaping observation : and even if we had been observed, we were soon out of the range of their batteries ; and at the place selected for our landing, nothing but small arms could be used against us.

VIII. " The omission to ascertain, previously to the adoption of the project, the political sentiments of the militia on the question of invasion, and that of not promptly recalling the advanced corps after having ascertained that point, were errors of great magnitude.— Both measures were entirely within the General's power, and had they been adopted, would either have prevented the enterprise, or have terminated it at a moment when, by the death of Brock and the flight of the enemy, we should have had the credit of a victory, instead of the discredit of a defeat. And lastly, nothing could be more ill-judged than the attempt made to withdraw the corps, after it had lost its ascendancy in the field, and when the

means necessary for the passing the river, or of covering the retreat, no longer existed."

In his despatch of Oct. 14, General V. R. writes—" The partial success of Lieut. Elliot at Black Rock, (of which I have, however, received no official information,) began to excite in the troops a strong disposition to act. This was expressed to me through various channels, in the shape of an *alternative*, that they must have orders to act, or, at all hazards, they would go home." The alternative which Gen. V. R. thought his own reputation and the good of the service required him to adopt, under all the circumstances of the case, was to take the troops at their word, and lead them into action. The attempt on the 11th was the consequence. It resulted in a failure. So far from being damped by this, the General adds, " The previously excited ardour seems to have gained new heat from the late miscarriage : the brave were mortified to stop short of their object, and the timid thought laurels half won by the attempt. On the morning of the 12th, such was the pressure upon me from all quarters, that I became satisfied that my refusal to act might involve me in suspicion, and the service in disgrace." Now it was known to every officer on the ground, that such a state of things existed ; and as the troops were aware that they could not act against the enemy without invading them, in the name of common sense, what stronger evidence of the political sentiments on the question of invasion could be required ?

At the period of Gen. Brock's fall, and the flight of the enemy, the troops were still crossing, we had a prospect of a victorious termination of the enterprize, and no one then supposed the militia would change their minds; of course, the idea of a retreat could not be entertained.

Gen. V. R. crossed over about this time, leaving directions for the militia to follow : but learning subsequently that he was not obeyed, he returned, with a view of ascertaining the cause, and to expedite their movements. It was then, for the first time, he found them recreant to the promises which their late clamour for action implied. After trying all the means that human ingenuity could devise, to arouse them to a sense of their duty, he was obliged to give up the effort in despair.— He then despatched a note to General Wadsworth, informing him of the predicament, and leaving the course to be pursued much to his own judgment ; assured him, if he thought best to retreat, every thing in his power would be done to render the measure as easy and as safe as possible.

The note, however, reached its destination too late. Reinforcements of the enemy, under Gen. Sheaffe, were by this time near at hand, and very soon our little band of heroes were attacked, and after another obstinate fight, overpowered. The General closes his narrative of the events of this eventful day, thus :—" I can only add, that *the victory was really won*, but lost for want of a small reinforcement ; *one-third part of the idle men would have saved all.*" If this presumption is a just one, and it never has been doubted, it furnishes a striking commentary on the masterly judgment displayed in arranging the plan of operations ; for with the facts before us, all will admit that the General had indications enough, to justify him in his dependence upon the support of these "*idle men.*"

It has been shown, that we were successful in every important measure, up to the time of Gen. Sheaffe's arrival. Now, as we had possession of the main road leading from Queenstown heights through the village to Fort

George, over a cleared and flat country, he, (Gen. Sheaffe,) was obliged to file off when he came near Queenstown, to his right, to the small village of St Davids, which was four and a half miles west in the rear of Queenstown. From thence, ascending the heights, he had four and a half miles more to march east, in order to give battle to our troops, and recover his battery. Our force would have outnumbered his, three to one, and if the militia had done their duty, his defeat would have been certain. In that case, his retreat would have been cut off ; the distance for him being fifteen miles, for us only six by the direct road, to Fort George.* This post would have fallen without striking a blow, for there were not more than twenty men left in it, under Major Evans, to keep up the cannonade between it and Fort Niagara, and all the objects aimed at, would have been acquired.t

General V. R. has always been ready to meet an inquiry into his official conduct throughout this campaign, and has boldly sought it, but none has ever been accorded him. Let then the appeal now he made to any practical military man, with the circumstances all before him, as to the correctness of his conduct generally in this affair, and particularly on the occasion when he suggests a retreat to a corps, which he rightly supposed would otherwise be crushed, "Nothing could be more ill-judged than the attempt," in the opinion of General Armstrong ; but the weight which should be attached to any opinion of his, in which the conduct of either General V. R. or myself is implicated, will stand a better chance of being justly estimated, when these notes shall have been read. The estimable private as well

* See Map.

t Our winter quarters would not have been confined to Queenstown, but to that place and to Newark, if expedient.

as public character of Major General Van Rensselaer, is known and established throughout the United States. Devoting as he does the remnant of a useful and honourable life, to promote objects of Christian benevolence and charity, it might have been expected that even General Armstrong's malevolence would have found no gratification in intruding upon his retirement and interrupting him, in his benevolent pursuits.

After the battle of Queenstown, General Dearborn, professing to be satisfied and pleased with my conduct, told my friends Generals Lewis and V. R. at Greenbush, that a separate corps would be organized for me, of which they informed me by letter while confined with my wounds at Buffalo ; * but owing to the public defence, which as a man of honour, I found myself obliged to set up against the political attacks on the conduct and character of General V. R., who then was a candidate for the governorship against Governor Tompkins, I became obnoxious to the dominant party of the day, and the intention was never carried into effect.

Dr. Eustis, before he resigned as secretary at war, entered my name upon the list for the appointment of Brigadier General. He afterward told me, when in Congress together, that he was astonished that his successor General Armstrong had not appointed me.

The present venerable Mayor of Baltimore, General Samuel Smith and the Hon. D. R. Williams, chairman of Committee on Military Affairs in Congress, called together of their own accord, upon the Secretary of War, to urge my appointment in the army.

* I was taken to this place by a company of Major Mosoly's Militia Riflemen—they volunteered to carry me on their shoulders all the way to Albany.

When the much persecuted and unfortunate General Wilkinson was ordered by General Armstrong from New Orleans to take command of the Northern army, he too urged my appointment, but was refused. On his arrival at this place, however, he sent for me and wished me to accompany him to the frontiers. I replied that I would willingly do so, if I thought he had the least chance to effect any thing of consequence ; but knowing that the deficiency of almost every necessary article, and the want of a proper organization in any department of the army, would prevent his descent upon Montreal that season, I declined.*

Gen. Harrison, with whom I had served in General Wayne's army, also solicited my appointment, as his second in command in the northwestern army.

' It will be recollected that I never resigned my commission in the regular service, but lost it when the army was curtailed ; my claim to promotion, therefore, was valid still, whenever any augmentation took place. Besides this, the validity of such claims was admitted in the case of other officers of Wayne's army, and they, were promoted accordingly. **Harrison, who was a lieutenant when I commanded a troop, was commissioned a major-general; Covington, a subaltern in our corps, a brigadier general ; Ball, my cornet, a lieutenant colonel, &c. &c. Yet, the above applications in my behalf—and they were certainly entitled to some consideration, on the score of the character of the applicants—were all superciliously denied, on the ground**

* When informed by me of the state of his command, he could hardly credit, it for Armstrong, in reply to written queries put to him on the subject, had stated every thing to be in complete order. (See W's Memoirs) ; after he had visited his line of posts, however, he wrote me that things were not only as bad as I had represented, but much *worse*.

as alleged to Wilkinson and others—that *I was too unpopular to raise a corps*. Where is the evidence of this fact ? Was Gov. Tompkins, with whom, unfortunately, I had been at political variance, aware of it when I accepted his invitation, as a member of his own family, to assist him in defending the city of New-York from an expected invasion ? Was it indicated in the resolution unanimously passed by the council of appointment, to confirm my brevet as Major General, in the militia of this state,* or was my election to congress by my neighbours, without opposition in one instance, and by a triumphant majority in another, any evidence of it ? No, it only existed in the brain of a calumniator. Gen. Armstrong was at that time governed by the basest of feelings and motives ; and in the antipathies engendered in times long past, and by circumstances which should be forgotten, is to be found the whole secret of his pre-sent peculiar hostility, both to Gen. V. It and myself.

COPY

* The commander in chief having raised by brevet Solomon Van Rensselaer to the rank of major-general in the militia of this state, on account of his distinguished gallantry and public spirit in the military service of his country, and especially during the late war on the Niagara frontier, therefore resolved, that the said Brevet be confirmed, and that a commission be issued to him as major-general accordingly, in the militia of this State.

DEWITT CLINTON, *Governor.*

(Signed,)

STEPHEN BARNUM,
WILLIAM ROSS,
GEORGE ROSECRANTZ,
STEPHEN BATES.

.Members.