

A

NARRATIVE

OF THE

LUG
971.034
V274

AFFAIR OF QUEENSTOWN:

IN THE WAR OF 1812.

WITH A REVIEW OF THE STRICTURES ON THAT EVENT,
IN A BOOK ENTITLED, "NOTICES
OF THE WAR OF 1812."

BY SOLOMON VAN RENSSELAER.

N E W - Y O R K :

LEAVITT, LORD & CO., 180, BROADWAY.

BOSTON :--CROCKER & BREWSTER.

.....

1836.

PREFACE.

THE apology for this publication, if any is needed, may be found in that law of a soldier's nature, which prompts him to repel a base attack on the reputation of the brave and the deserving, in the same spirit with which he would meet an assault on a military post or position, which had been committed to his own special keeping. He flies irresistibly to the rescue of his comrade, when in danger, and he is always ready to thrust himself in, to receive any blow which he sees aimed at his beloved commander. The law of resistance is all the stronger, when he finds himself worthy to be honoured with the personal notice of the common enemy, and involved in a common peril with those with whom he stands in the relation of an intimate military connection.

A book, entitled "Notices of the War of 1812," has lately been ushered before the public, which seems to have been specially devoted to the work of detraction and calumny. It would have received an appropriate dedication, "To the spirit of all evil." It comes to us in the guise of history, but care has been taken to work up in its constitution, just truth and principle enough to disguise the poison infused into it, without, in the least degree, diluting its strength, or weakening its virulence. It is offered professedly as a medicine,* skill-

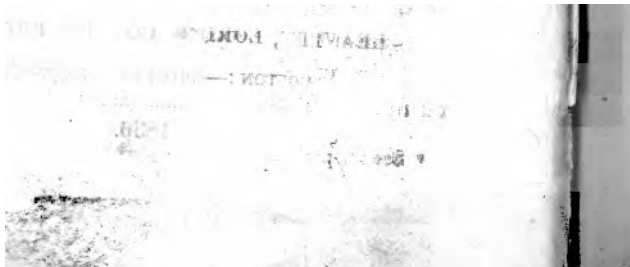
* See the preface to the book, consisting of an extract from Mabby,

571833

Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1836,
BY LEAVITT, LORD & CO.
In the Clerk's Office for the Southern District of New-York.

NIAGARA FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY
SEP 11 1957

H. H. D. 4



fully honeyed over with the appearance of sweet temper, sensibility, and candour, to make the public believe it will do them good to take it ; while it is, in truth, a deadly compound into which the apothecary has emptied his most malignant vials, expressly with a view to the production of as much individual suffering and distress as possible.

The author of this work is the too celebrated Gen. Jno. A. Inistrong, a name entitled to the undisputed distinction of being second to only one in infamous notoriety, out of the host of our revolutionary worthies.* It happened that this man was called, in an evil hour, to assist in the administration of the government, during the arduous and eventful period of our second war with Great Britain. As the head of the war department, he had it in his power to perpetrate the most extensive mischief, not only by his want of capacity, but in the indulgence of art unhappy, restless, and malignant temper ; a power which he did not spare to use, at first to the oppression of all individuals whom he honoured with his enmity, and finally to the disgrace and degradation of his country.t That country was fated to

* Arnold's treason was developed in the midst of the war ; Armstrong reserved his for the close of it. The success of the design, entertained by the author of the Newburgh Letters, would have been much more fatal to liberty, than would have been the delivering of West Point into the hands of the enemy.

His interference with the plans of general Wilkinson may serve as a commentary on this text. General W. wished to attack Kingston, and there rest for the winter in good quarters, to organise the different departments of the army, build boats, &c. and carry Montreal early in the spring. This delay could not operate against us; as the St. Lawrence opens between the two places before it does below, the attack could have been made before any reinforcements could arrive from Europe. If General W. had been suffered to take his course the British fleet at Kingston would have fallen into his hands, and the

purchase its release from the hand of this functionary, at no less a sacrifice than the overthrow and sacking of the national capital, by a feeble and insulting foe. Here justice *did* overtake him ; and, finding that no artifice could suffice to enable him to throw off the just responsibilities of the position he had occupied, he passed into retirement.*

millions of dollars afterwards expended in ship building for the two lakes would have saved the country ; but the secretary was on the spot and manœvered to defeat his plan. It was said he had an eye on the presidency, and if Montreal could be taken that season, it would facilitate his object, for if successful he would have assumed all the credit; as it was, he managed to avoid the responsibility by throwing all the blame on poor Wilkinson, (see General W.'s trial before the court martial at Troy.-1st. Vol. of his Memoirs)

* The affair at Bladensburgh occurred under General Armstrong's own immediate supervision as secretary at war. In this case, although an attack had been long apprehended, a much larger force, it is true, than absolutely required for the purpose of repelling it, was collected, but no organization or system of defence having been arranged, our army, composed of the regular cavalry, artillery, infantry, and a large body of militia, were disgracefully routed without a show of fight, except from the gallant Corn. Barney, by comparatively a handful of British troops, who were exhausted by the fatigue of a long forced march. Near three weeks before the attack was made upon Washington, I received a letter from an officer of high rank in the army, who writes, "such is the want of preparation for defence at this place, that three thousand men can destroy it." Can it be supposed for a moment that if this Author, the dispenser then of honours and promotions in the army, had identified himself with our troops, 'they would have retreated on the approach of the enemy ? No never ! yet he was among the first to set the cowardly example. If a more manly course had been pursued, though driven from the first stand, the road passing over a rolling country skirted by woods, afforded many positions, equally as strong and as admirably calculated for the most effective disposition of the different kinds of troops employed, and they might have fallen back from one position to another with equal advantage and have harassed even a larger force of the enemy, so that they never could have reached Washington. But had every effort under this course failed, a few hundred men thrown into the Capitol, would have saved the City. The

His obscurity in his retreat, and his long silence had made his countrymen half believe that, perhaps, his unhappy temper was now softened, that he was melted under the just rebuke and neglect of the world, and that he was preparing, by an honest use of his pen, an instrument which he had shown himself capable of wielding skilfully, to offer to his country a proof of the sincerity of his repentance, in the composition of some work of high historical value. Rumours even, of his labours in this respect had reached the public ear. It was said, his thoughts were turned exclusively to the times of the Revolution and the earlier scenes of our history, and it was understood that nothing would be published, until he should be beyond the reach of any acknowledgments for the important service he should thus render. His injured but generous fellow-citizens had begun, already and by anticipation, to feel that forgiveness, which they only waited the proper occasion to accord and express..... These "Notices," however, have effectually put this pleasant delusion, to flight : it is now seen how differently his retirement has been occupied,—in brooding over thoughts of malice and revenge,—in nursing the energies of that dark spirit which can endure nothing bright or pure above him, or around him,—in watching the favourable moment for the discharge of his poisoned arrows, and when he could sate himself with victims and sacrifices.

It will be seen that in this work two distinct purposes

SIX pounders used by the enemy, could have made no impression upon the walls of this building, while a brisk fire from its windows and from the stone parapet surrounding its roof, would effectually have arrested their progress. The same defences might have been made at the President's house, flanked as it was by the state and treasury offices on the right, and by the war and navy on the left. The navy-yard was equally susceptible of defence.

are sought to be effected, though by a single blow. The one is to destroy individuals ; the other is to degrade his country. Neither, alone, would satisfy his capacious and comprehensive malice. The shaft, aimed at persons, which did not pass quite through and reach the bosom of the Republic, would not accomplish the errand whereto it was sent, and, to do him justice, it must, be confessed that his selections for this effect have been made with singular skill and felicity. For the most part, and always, unless by a mere error in judgment., his attacks have fallen on those, with whose names and reputation the honour and glory of the country were most nearly identified, while his commendations, sparingly applied, but designed to help forward his main purpose, have been reserved chiefly for those in whom the country has no interest, but that their names and exploits should be forgotten ; whose celebrity cannot be preserved, but at her expense.

It is not the design of this publication to meet the whole mischief of Gen. Armstrong's book, or attempt the vindication of the many worthy men whom it assails. It is intended to answer a definite and limited purpose •, to disabuse the public in relation to a single event, one of the most important of the war of 1812, and to rescue one individual at least from the desperate assaults of this hoary calumniator. It is believed that the interests of history will be subserved by the relation which will be made. It is time that the celebrated affair of Queenstown should be understood, and that the high merits of the citizen general, who conducted the campaign of which this affair was the chief feature, should be placed beyond the reach and danger of detraction. The possession of all the materials necessary for the

complete performance of the task, seemed to impose a corresponding and indispensable obligation. It is not, however, intended to be intimated that the author of this narrative and review is wholly uninfluenced by personal considerations and motives. He purposely embraces the opportunity to do an act of justice to himself, while engaged in vindicating both his country and his commander; and, in so doing, he is not conscious of even the danger of drawing on the indulgence of the public, beyond what it is accustomed to accord to the honest and characteristic frankness of a soldier.

A

NARRATIVE, &c.

A REQUISITION having been made by the general government for a body of New-York militia, it was the pleasure of Gov. Tompkins to appoint Gen. Stephen Van Rensselaer to take command of the forces which should be raised or the defence of the northern and western frontiers of this State, in answer to that requisition. That officer entered upon his command on the 13th of July, 1812, having done me the honour to request my services as his aid. I was anxious to serve my country in the contest in which she was engaged, and I did not hesitate, therefore, to take the situation thus offered me.

On reaching the Niagara frontier towards the middle of August, the General found his troops scattered along the whole line of the river, and exposed to be cut up in detail. Having inspected his ground, his resolution was promptly taken to concentrate his forces at Lewiston. Orders to that effect were immediately given. His camp was formed, and the duties of discipline and instruction were entered upon without delay. From the moment of his assuming the command, his position was one of the utmost exposure and danger. He lay within sight of a powerful enemy, separated from him only by a narrow river, for the crossing of which, that enemy possessed every facility. He had a line of thirty six miles to guard, and his whole force was considerably less than one thou-