
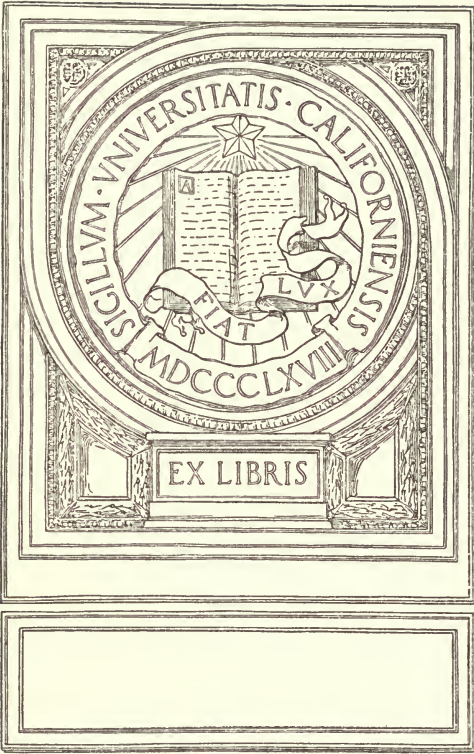


E  
356  
3A7

UC-NRLF  
  
#B 31 220



YD 12380



*Charles O'Connor Esq.*

REVIEW

OF

T. L. MCKENNEY'S NARRATIVE

OF THE

CAUSES WHICH, IN 1814, LED TO

GENERAL ARMSTRONG'S

RESIGNATION OF THE WAR OFFICE.

BY

*Charles O'Connor Esq.*

KOSCIUSZKO ARMSTRONG.

---

NEW YORK:

R. CRAIGHEAD, PRINTER, 112 FULTON STREET

1846.

W13A7

TO VIND  
AIRBORNE

REVIEW OF T. L. MCKENNEY'S NARRATIVE, &c.

---

My attention has lately been called to a work published by Thomas L. McKenney, which, though chiefly devoted to a defence of his official conduct as Superintendent of Indian Affairs, contains, dove-tailed among its chapters, one of political reminiscence, evidently intended as an attack on the late General Armstrong.

Having been for some time engaged in arranging the General's correspondence, and preparing a sketch of his life, with a view to publication, my first determination was, to leave Mr. McKenney's misrepresentations uncorrected, until such time as my work should be ready for the press. Circumstances, however, beyond my control will, probably, delay its appearance for some months; and I have thought it well in the meanwhile, to give to the offensive chapter, the notice it deserves. The following extract from Mr. McKenney's book will place the subject at once before the reader.

"During the late war with Great Britain, or the greater part of it, as is known to everybody, Mr. Monroe was Secretary of State, and General Armstrong, Secretary of War; it is known also that soon after the capture of Washington and the conflagration of its Capitol, General Armstrong was superseded in the office of Secretary of War by Mr. Monroe. It was soon whispered that this change had been produced by the undermining agency of Mr. Monroe. Whence the rumor came, or by whom it was originated, no one knew, but it remained a *source of deep disquiet to harass Mr. Monroe to the hour of his death.*"

How far the Secretary of State was implicated in the intrigue so successfully employed to produce his colleague's resignation of the War office, cannot now be ascertained. He was suspected of being "art and part" in this dirty business, on the well established principle, that he who profits by the crime is most likely to be the criminal; and the death bed scene so graphically sketched by his friend and follower, shows, that Mr. Monroe knew that he labored under such suspicion, and felt disquieted by it to his last hour. Is it not extraordinary, that a mere "rumor," as McKenney characterizes the charge, should have so impressed the mind of the Ex-President, that fifteen years after the event that gave it birth, it continued to be a source of secret, corroding thought? One more disposed than I am to form uncharitable conclusions, might see in this continued apprehension, strong evidence of the working of a conscience ill at ease.



My business, however, is not with the dead Monroe, but the living McKenney, who, under pretence of salving over the reputation of his maker and master, has thought proper to lend the weight of his evidence (such as it is) to the old calumny, that General Armstrong's neglect of duty led to the capture of Washington. Before I proceed to comment on the testimony, it may not be amiss to say a few words of the witness. He was the leading member of the famous, or infamous Georgetown-mob Committee, who waited on the President in 1814 to demand General Armstrong's removal from office. He stands therefore before the public in a doubtful position,—denying the existence of a plot of which he was himself one of the most active and unscrupulous agents, and offering his own naked assertion as proof of his innocence, and of that of him who was suspected, (perhaps erroneously) of being his employer. Mr. McKenney seems not yet to understand, that the man who thus comes forward as a witness in his own cause, should either possess a character for truth, placing him above the suspicion of corrupt motives, or else, is bound to furnish such additional evidence derived from other sources, as may make his story credible. Not even this gentleman's vanity can lead him to believe that he stands in the first named category, and it shall be my business to show, how impossible it is for him to fulfil the conditions, required by the last.

Knowing the value of scenic effect, Mr. McKenney enters on his subject with dramatic skill. The reader is brought to the bedside of the age-worn Ex-President, whose thin features, emaciated form and church-yard cough sufficiently indicate, that he is about passing from time to eternity. With a voice weakened by emotion or disease, he alludes to the existing suspicion, that he had been instrumental in producing "General Armstrong's separation from the War Department"—solemnly protests his innocence, and beseeches his friend and follower to narrate the circumstances of the case. Thus abjured, the pious Thomas begins:

"My intercourse was frequent with General Armstrong, beginning with the arrival of the British forces in the Chesapeake. It was made my duty to report to him the arrival of troops, and their wants in equipments, &c. He appeared to me to doubt the intentions of the enemy to invade the Capitol; and under the influence of this belief, in which I have no doubt he was sincere, I found some difficulty in procuring the necessary arms, &c., for troops as they came in."

The narrator shared, I believe, in the danger and glory of this brilliant campaign, as volunteer aid of General Smith, of the Georgetown militia. He does not tell us *how* it became his peculiar duty to report the arrival of troops, or to procure arms

for men not belonging to the brigade to which he was attached. I am therefore at liberty to suppose, that as officers of the regular army were on the spot whose business it really was to attend to the wants of the soldiery, Mr. McKenney's applications, if he made any, were regarded at the War office as the impudent interference of a meddler who trespassed beyond the line of his duty. Taking this view of the subject, it is not surprising, that *he* found some difficulty in procuring arms, &c. But how was it, that when the Committee of Investigation were in session, not a syllable was heard from him of these difficulties? How happened it that a fact bearing materially on the subject of inquiry, should have been carefully concealed when its revelation was so important? How came it, that at a moment when the crimination and condemnation of General Armstrong by a Committee of Congress, were events which, if purchaseable, the Government would have bought at almost any price,—this willing witness, should not have been forthcoming? These questions admit but of two answers: either the alleged difficulties could not justly be attributed to the Secretary of War, or were of a nature so frivolous, as to take from them all importance. I proceed to the next paragraph.

“After Commodore Barney had been forced to blow up his flotilla in the Patuxent, and our troops being at the Battalion Old Fields, and I had come in as a vidette, having rode along the enemy's flanks for over a mile, and picking up on my return to camp two British deserters whom I brought in with me, I found on horseback in our camp, President Madison, General Armstrong, and two or three persons, to whom in presence of the commanding General, I stated the position of the enemy and what appeared to be their numbers, and gave it as my opinion that they would be at our encampment before daylight next morning. To which General Armstrong replied,—“They can have no such intention. They are foraging, I suppose, and if an attack is *meditated by them upon any place*, it is Annapolis.”

The reader will observe, that the above story has some of the characteristics of truth; it is told with minuteness, and with the confidence of a narrator apparently having no cause to distrust the accuracy of his recollection. The object is, doubtless, to show that as late as the 23d of August, the day preceding the battle of Bladensburg, General Armstrong had no faith in the meditated attack on Washington, but believed, that Annapolis was the object of the British invasion, if, indeed, that invasion had *any object at all*.\* As no witness of this pretended conversa-

---

\* I might point to the absurdity of this opinion, as in itself conclusive, that neither General Armstrong nor any other man could have expressed it. Mr. McKenney's zeal or malignity outran his discretion; acting on the parasitical principle that, “who peppers the highest is surest to please,” and discovering with the unerring instinct of toadyism, the hopes and wishes of his sick patron, he made General Armstrong not only express an utter disbelief of the enemy's intention of moving upon Washington, but a doubt whether the British invasion had *any object whatever*.

tion, other than the narrator is now in existence, Mr. McKenney may have thought himself secure against the risk of detection: it will be for me to show his mistake, and make the *dead* speak to his shame and confusion.

I am willing to admit, that in the early stage of the campaign when the British force was so placed as equally to menace three points—Baltimore, Annapolis, and Washington; and when its movements were not yet sufficiently decided to indicate a preference for one of the three, General Armstrong was of opinion, that the most important and most vulnerable of these would probably be selected by the enemy. But, even as early as the 19th of August, the Secretary of War's belief appears to have been modified, since in a letter of that date he advises the Commander-in-chief—"if the enemy's movements *indicate an attack on Washington*, to push forward his cavalry without delay, remove cattle, horses," &c. Again: on the 22d of August, he counselled him verbally and by letter, "to throw a corps on the enemy's flank, and by such demonstration, *prevent his advance towards Washington*."\* On the night of this day he reached the camp at Battalion Old Fields in company with the President, and now it is that I will produce the evidence which I intend to oppose to that of Mr. McKenney; the reader will easily determine which is most worthy of credit. I must premise that, since the parties to this pretended conversation are all dead, but one, it is not possible for me to find any testimony *directly* contradicting that which he offers. The most which can be done or required, is to furnish a chain of evidence sufficiently strong to support the inference, that the witness has misrepresented what passed, and that the opinions which he assumes to have heard, are such as could not have been expressed.

It has been seen, that on the 22d of August, General Armstrong believed in the possibility of an attack on Washington, since the written advice which he then offered to Winder was calculated to meet such an emergency. That early on the morning of the 23d his opinion was unchanged, is shown by Colonel Allan McClane, who states in his account of the occurrences of the campaign, that the Secretary of War, at the council held at the

---

\* Report of Committee of Investigation, pp. 116, 126.—Again, on the 19th of August, General Armstrong thus gave his opinion in a note to the President on the question whether the flotilla should be blown up without fighting. "It may be asked, what will be the effect of destroying the flotilla without a contest? *Will it not invite to further aggression. A soldier's objects enlarge and multiply with his good fortune.* Under this view of the subject my opinion is, that unless Barney's position be decidedly indefensible, it ought to be held, and to Barney alone should be left the question of its tenability." The reply was, that Barney *had* his orders, and these orders of President Madison were for the immediate destruction of the flotilla! Had Barney been left to defend the position, as he wished to do and could have done, who can believe that Ross would have ventured further?



President's quarters in camp, recommended to General Winder the occupation of the Capitol, and adjacent buildings, as offering the best means of defence for the city.\* And lastly, that on the afternoon of the same day the War-minister's opinion remained what it had been in the morning, is proved by the direct evidence of a witness now living, Mr. Jacob Barker, who, after describing the disorder and confusion of Winder's army at Battalion Old Fields, speaks in the following words: "The President and Secretary returned to Washington convinced, that *if the enemy marched on the city*, they would have an easy conquest. *I was that evening present*, and heard General Armstrong make this statement to George W. Campbell, then Secretary of the Treasury, and to William Jones, Secretary of the Navy. These high functionaries replied to the Secretary—"Why do you not take command of the army yourself, *and defend the city*?" His answer was, "I have no right to do so—my duties are, by law, confined to my chamber."† I believe the foregoing testimony is sufficiently full, on the subject of the opinions held by General Armstrong, relative to the object of the British movement, to shut out, I will not say the probability only, but the *possibility* of his having made the assertion ascribed to him by Mr. McKenney: yet, this is not all. I am enabled to offer to the reader the following strong presumptive proof of the falsity of our author's statement, derived from a letter of the Secretary of the Navy to Commodore Rodgers, and from General Winder's narrative.

The letter, evidently written to give effect to a resolution adopted in the Camp Council, is dated "Battalion Old Fields, 8½ o'clock, August 23d," and contains the following passage: "I have now to direct, that with the utmost possible celerity, you will move on with the seamen and marines under your command to Bladensburg, and endeavor to have as early communication as possible with General Winder." "The President and Heads of Departments are now in this camp. The enemy were last night at Upper Marlborough, from which *it is probable they will advance to-day towards Bladensburg*." Now, is it at all credible, that General Armstrong, having at 8 o'clock in the morning, made part of a Council who thought the enemy's movements so mena-

---

\* Notices of the War, Appendix, p. 235.

† Letter to the editor of Commercial Advertiser, May, 1843. For a confirmation of the material facts in Mr. Barker's statement, see G. W. Campbell's letter to the Committee of Investigation, p. 7. If the Secretary had felt any disposition to transcend his authority, and give *orders* instead of *advice*, he would have been effectually precluded from doing so, by the operation of a rule, served on him by the President on the 13th of August, expressly forbidding him from "issuing any military order, having for its object the movement of troops, without Mr. Madison's sanction."

cing to Washington, as to require the hurried march of Rodgers's seamen, should, at 10 o'clock (the hour of the review of troops), have ventured the positive assertion in the presence of the President, Commanding General and Naval Secretary, that "if the enemy had any object of attack, it was Annapolis?" Thus condemning, as worse than useless, the measures he had concurred in but two hours before!

Again: If McKenney's story be true, how shall we account for the fact, that General Winder, in his minute narrative of the events preceding the affair of Bladensburg, should say nothing of the consultation held in the saddle, to which the President and Secretary of War are alleged to have been parties? He confirms McClane's statement as far as relates to the early visit which he paid to Mr. Madison and the War-Minister for the purposes of report and counsel; he speaks of two prisoners "taken in a dexterous way by Captain Herbert," the result of whose examination led him to believe, that the British army would make *no movement* that day from Marlborough; he mentions a variety of conflicting reports by men who saw or pretended to have seen the enemy,—but not a word of McKenney's reconnoitring exploits, or of the deserters he brought in. It is a fact, too, abundantly shown by the same official narrative, that General Winder, at this time, leant to the opinion that Annapolis might be the enemy's object;\* yet, though sufficiently diffuse in stating the reasons of this creed, he makes no allusion to the similar belief, asserted to have been avowed in his presence, by the Secretary of War,—an omission the more extraordinary, as this belief, had it found utterance, would have been, in some measure, a justification of Winder's. The conclusion is obvious, the Commanding General makes no mention of the Secretary's opinion, respecting the danger of an attack on Annapolis, because that opinion *was never given*.

"While engaged in the duty of throwing up batteries on the shore of the Potomac, at the foot of Wind Mill Hill, General Armstrong, of whom we had heard nothing after the evening of the interview at the Old Fields, rode on the ground. The impression had become universal that, as Secretary of War, he had neglected to prepare the necessary defences; and that owing to this neglect the capital had been desecrated, and the glory of our arms tarnished.

---

\* See Report of the Committee of Investigation, p. 156, Winder's Narrative. The General thought that Annapolis might be chosen as an object of attack—because it presented to the enemy a fine port,—comfortable quarters,—stores and store-houses, and might with little difficulty be made almost impregnable to a land attack. These were good substantial reasons at one period of the campaign, but when the enemy had passed Marlborough, there was no longer much cause to believe, that he would strike at Annapolis.

Indeed, many went further, openly and loudly. Charles Carrol, of Bellevue, the moment General Armstrong rode upon the ground, met him and denounced him openly and vehemently, as the cause of all the disasters that had befallen the city, when, with one impulse, the officers said to General Smith—‘There, sir, are our swords; we will not employ them if General Armstrong is to command us, in his capacity of Secretary of War; but we will obey the orders of any other member of the Cabinet.’ At the same moment the men at the batteries threw down their spades, avowing a like resolve.

“General Smith called me to him, saying,—‘You see the state of things; I have just ordered Major Williams to report it to the President, that under the orders of any other member of the Cabinet, what can be done will be done.’ We rode off in haste, and overtook President Madison, Richard Rush (I believe), and a third person on F street, in Washington, on horseback—the Government having been again organized at Washington. The message delivered to President Madison was in accordance with the above to the letter,—the last sentence—‘*But under any other member of the Cabinet, the most cheerful duty will be rendered.*’ The answer by the President was,—‘Say to General Smith, the *contingency* (namely that of any future orders being given by General Armstrong) *shall not happen.*’”

Imagination and memory are so blended in our author, that it is impossible to say where the operations of the one cease, or of the other begin. It is not easy, at this late date, to ascertain whether or no General Armstrong ever was at Wind Mill Hill, as Mr. McKenney asserts;—but, in default of positive testimony, there is enough of moral evidence to show, that the tale of Carrol’s open denunciation is a miserable fiction. In no contemporary record, and I have searched many, have I found any allusion to this event. Now, let the reader for a moment look back to the circumstances of the times,—to the violence of the press, and the rancor of party spirit,—and ask himself how it could happen, that General Armstrong’s personal and political enemies, so numerous and active, should not have found a subject of loud exultation in this story of Carrol’s unrebuked insolence? Wilkinson, too, who will certainly not be suspected of a disposition to favor the War-minister, or hide any circumstance tending to his discredit, was then living at Washington, in habits of close intimacy with Carrol—the frequent companion of his board and bottle; yet, his Memoirs (otherwise so calumnious) are silent on this head, and indeed, so far from attributing to General Armstrong any disposition to submit patiently to affronts, he represents, him with equal injustice, as the terror of Metropolitan politicians.\* But before I offer any further commentary on Mr. McKenney’s statement, it is necessary to make known a few facts to the reader, by the light of which he may more easily discover the hidden source of that “impulse” which led the chivalry of Georgetown to cast away their innocent swords, on Wind Mill Hill.

---

\* “I am indeed shocked when I take a retrospect of the evidence of the *terror* in which that minister kept more than one great man at Washington.”—Wilkinson’s Memoirs, vol. i., p. 762.



After the defeat of the American army, the President designated Fredericktown as the temporary seat of the Cabinet, and thither the Secretaries of the Treasury and of War went, in full faith, that Mr. Madison and their colleagues would follow. The President, however, changed his mind and repaired, after Ross's retreat, to Washington, where General Armstrong did not join him until the 29th of August. The three days that elapsed previous to his return, were employed by the Georgetown militia, (as Mr. McKenney informs us), in marching and counter-marching on the Baltimore road, and throwing up batteries, which appear to have been erected on the wise and well approved principle of "shutting the stable door after the horse had been stolen." But, though these military mummeries furnished employment to the mass, there were a select few who turned the three days of the Secretary's absence, to a more personal account. A committee, purporting to represent the citizens of the district, was chosen to wait on the President, and demand General Armstrong's removal from office. The select men were Messrs. Hanson, Bowie, and *McKenney*; the first a Federal editor, whom the spirit of party rancor moved to this action, and the two last, *warm, personal friends of Mr. Monroe*, whose motives may be as easily understood.\* When their names were announced, the President declined communicating with more than one of these unwelcome visitors, and designated Mr. McKenney as the least obnoxious of the three. With him he was *closeted for upwards of an hour*, and what passed between them is known only by report. That at this time, more was required than the President would give is certain; and McKenney carried back to his coadjutors the news only of a doubtful success. Even this step had been gained with so much of difficulty, that it was feared the President might, on further reflection, return to a sense of what was due to himself and his minister, particularly if that minister (whose arrival was hourly expected) was allowed time for his defence.

The Committee thereupon determined to "strike whilst the iron was red," and to assist the *civil* movement by the more dangerous threat of *military* revolt. This, at once and clearly accounts for the farce got up upon Wind Mill Hill. Mr. McKenney returned to Washington, no longer the representative of peaceful, pudding-headed burghers, but the emissary of that valorous corps whose rapid movements had been so conspicuous on the field of Bladensburg, and a new cause of alarm was thus presented to the tremulous mind of the worthy Madison.

It was to be expected, that a temper never noted for its firm-

---

\* This account is founded on information contained in the letters of a resident of Washington, who had the means of reaching the truth, whatever care was employed to hide it. It is, besides, in strict conformity with the public impressions of that day.



ness, should yield to this double pressure; yet, it seems that the Committee, fearful of losing all by asking too much, had now limited their demands, and instructed their agent to require only the curtailment of the Secretary's authority so far as the District of Columbia was concerned. Mr. Madison eagerly availed himself of this middle course; and, without adverting to the fact, that if the charges brought against General Armstrong were *true*, he deserved instant dismissal, and if *false*, had as clearly a right to a firm, unshaken support, he gave to Mr. McKenney, the assurance required.

The reader can now easily understand, why our author in relating, for the benefit of his dying patron, and the guidance of future historians, this tale of other times, should have carefully omitted all allusion to the Georgetown Committee,—to the secret closet and more secret conversation,—to the mental struggles of the President, and the mischievous activity of General Armstrong's enemies. These things, but too distinctly indicated, that a *plot* existed; and it became necessary to sink them out of sight, and represent the whole business as springing out of a sudden fit of patriotic indignation, caused by General Armstrong's appearance on Wind Mill Hill! Who could, from McKenney's narrative, suppose, that he was in this matter anything more than the innocent bearer of General Smith's message? Who could discover in his plausible story, the fact, that for *three days* he had been laboriously engaged in defaming a man who was not present to defend himself? Yet, however cunningly the fable be devised, one fact escapes him which may serve to guide us to a right conclusion, with respect to the leading motive of all this dirty villainy,—it is, the message so pregnant with meaning, of which Mr. McKenney was the bearer: "*Under any other member of the Cabinet, a cheerful and ready obedience will be rendered.*" What was this but an intimation to the President, that Colonel Monroe was expected to succeed to the vacant place? For neither Campbell, nor Jones, nor Rush, could have any pretensions to fill it. It was virtually telling Mr. Madison, "It would not suit our purpose, were you to seek a successor to General Armstrong out of your own Cabinet; *Mr. Monroe is the man for whose interests we have labored.*"

Political intrigues are seldom to be proved by direct evidence; it is by combining circumstances, trifling when taken alone, but quick with conviction when brought together,—that weakness becomes strength, and darkness light. It is sufficient to show the existence of an *end*, *means* and *agents*. How was it in this case? A competitor for political power had appeared, whom it was necessary to jostle out of Mr. Monroe's way: this was the *end*. Calumnies, founded on the capture of Washington, and intended to deceive the people, whilst other influences were employed to incite the President—such were the *means*; and as for

the *agents*, it is but necessary to read the names of Smith, Carrol, Mason, Graham, Bowie and McKenney, to be fully convinced of their ready subserviency to the interests of what was termed in that day,—the Virginia Dynasty.

“We learned, and I remember we confided in the source whence we derived our information, that President Madison suggested to General Armstrong, in view of the state of things as narrated, whether it might not be proper for him to suspend his functions as War-minister over the District of Columbia, but to exercise them elsewhere. To which the General was said to have answered, ‘he would be Secretary of War over the whole, or none.’ Mr. Madison receiving this as an inadmissible alternative, told him so, when General Armstrong ceased to be Secretary of War.”

The above paragraph contains (with one exception) a sufficiently fair account of what passed between General Armstrong and Mr. Madison. The source of McKenney’s information, (though he does not say it) was, the President himself, and I acknowledge this the more readily, as it will justify me in offering what may be new to the present generation of readers,—the Secretary’s letter to the public on the subject of his resignation. This simple, manly address for a time produced its intended effect;\* neither the President, nor any of his friends, ventured to controvert a single fact stated in it. But the calumnies it exposed, continued to be spoken in whispers, and no effort was left untried by official pimps and parasites, to turn the stream of public opinion into a channel unfavorable to the War-minister. The contest between an individual and a government was too unequal to be long maintained, particularly when that individual, not being a party man, could not claim a party support; yet, there were a select few whose homage and respect followed General Armstrong in retirement, and among them men whose *names rank highest in the military annals of America.*† Those who

---

\* Extract of a letter from Governor Desha, of Kentucky, to General Armstrong, dated Washington, September 26th, 1814.—“Clamor ran high against you here, but from the effect produced by a letter you addressed to the editors of the Baltimore Patriot, together with the opinion of a number of members freely expressed respecting your qualifications, conduct in office, &c., it has been measurably silenced. Indeed, I have heard members who have not been heretofore well disposed towards you, express a wish that you were still at the head of the War Department. They speak freely of your capacity and conduct while in office. They say that your *energy* was invaluable in a Cabinet where *indecision* and a disposition for *temporising* have been the order of the day.”

† The General was no collector of testimonials; what he left among his papers of this character, was given unsought, and perhaps, not estimated by him at its proper value. I select a few of these favorable expressions of opinion merely to show, that the assertion in the text is not made without good reason.

Extracts from letters of Major General Brown to his brother Major Brown—“Canandaigua, March 28th, 1814.—Armstrong is a great man, who with a single eye to the public good has pursued the honor and interests of the army.” The same to the same—“Fort Erie, September 13th, 1814.—It is reported that Secretary Armstrong is removed; if this be so, it is a great misfortune. Rely upon it, he is the only military man in the Cabinet.” The same, to General Armstrong.

were most capable of estimating the value of his services, were best disposed to do him justice. With this brief preface, I pass to the letter itself.

“It may be due to myself, and is certainly due to others, that the reasons under which I retired from the direction of the War Department, at a juncture so critical as the present, should be fully and promptly made known to the public. These reasons will be found in the following brief exposition of facts.

On the evening of the 29th ultimo, the President called at my lodgings and stated, that a case of much delicacy had occurred; that a high degree of excitement had been raised among the militia of Georgetown and the city; that he was himself an object of their suspicions and menaces; that an officer of that corps had given him notice, that they would no longer obey any order coming through me as Secretary of War, and that in the urgency of the case it might be proper, so far to yield to the impulse, as to permit some other person to exercise my functions in relation to the defence of Washington.

“To this statement and proposition I answered substantially,—that I was aware of the excitement to which he alluded; that I knew its source, and had marked its progress; that it was not a moment to examine its more occult causes, objects, and agents;

—“It is a source of great gratification for me to know that my conduct is by you approved. Popular applause is very well—it is not to be despised, nor too strongly coveted,—but the approbation of the select few, who have the means and the ability to judge, has higher claims; and I should be dead to all honorable feeling did I not proudly estimate such praise as you can bestow.—December 20th, 1814.”

Col. Richard M. Johnson to General Armstrong.—“January 19th, 1816, Washington. I look back with interest to the time when you composed a part of the Cabinet. I recollect with pleasure the decisive character of your measures from which so much good resulted. It must at all times give consolation to reflect, that we have done our duty in the most difficult and trying periods. For my part, I have always regretted your separation from us, and the unfortunate occurrences which produced it”

General Macomb in a letter of the 19th of January, 1826, forwarding certain public documents, says: “It affords me great pleasure to have an opportunity of addressing you, and of assuring you that my attachment to your person and esteem for your character have not been diminished by the distance in space and time which have separated us. I shall be ever ready to testify to the efficiency of your administration in the War Department, as *laying the foundation of many of the most valuable attributes now possessed by the army*. The present condition of the army, which has been the result of labor and of time, is highly creditable to those who have taken a part in rendering the establishment what it is, and a review of the several administrations under whose guidance it has been trained, would be an interesting and valuable exhibit to the nation at large.

“I have been led to these remarks by a chain of associations of thought referring to our military connection, and the more I reflect on the part you took, the more I feel inclined to assure you of the homage of my highest consideration and esteem.”

To these names, I might add those of nearly all the distinguished men of the army of 1812-13, and 14. And the reader will remark, that these flattering words were not employed to propitiate the successful candidate for political power; but were voluntary expressions of regard for one who, in retirement, could no longer confer, or withhold benefits.



that it ostensibly rested on charges *known to himself to be false*; that it was not for me to determine how far the supposed urgency of the case made it proper for him to yield to an impulse so vile and profligate—so injurious to truth and so destructive of order, but that for myself there was no choice; that I would never surrender a part of my legitimate authority for the preservation of the rest; that I must exercise it wholly or not at all; that I came into office with objects exclusively public, but that to accommodate myself or my conduct to the humors of a village mob, stimulated by faction and led by folly, was not the way to promote these, and that, if his decision was taken in conformity to the suggestions he had made, I entreated him to accept my resignation. This he declined doing. It was an extent he was pleased to say, to which he meant not to go; that he knew the excitement was limited as well with regard to time as to place; that he was now and had always been, fully sensible of the general zeal, diligence, and talent, which I had put into the discharge of my duty, and that it would give him pleasure, were I to take time to consider, the proposition he had made. I renewed the assurance of my great personal respect, and my readiness to conform to his wishes on all proper occasions. I remarked, that whatever zeal, talent and knowledge I possessed, had been employed freely but firmly, and according to my best views of the public good, and that as long as they were left to be so exerted, they were at the service of my country—but that the moment they were required to bow to military usurpation, or political faction, there should be an immediate end of their public exercise. We now parted, with an understanding that I should leave Washington the following morning.\*

---

\* That Mr. Madison looked forward to the time, when they should again form part of the same administration, is shown, by the following extracts from two letters, written by General Parker, Chief Clerk of the War Department, the evidence contained in which is confirmed by the subsequent testimony of Mr. Jacob Barker. The first letter is dated, September 4th, 1814, three days after General Armstrong had left Washington, and before the appearance of his address. It contained these words: "The President has expressed himself highly favorable towards you. I expect you back in October." The second bears date, "May 20th, 1833—Your leaving Washington in August, 1814, and subsequent withdrawal from the War Department, has, I believe, changed our whole history from that time. Your movement has nowhere that I have seen been fully explained or accounted for. You spoke to me the evening before you left only of making a visit to Baltimore, and the next day, Mr. Madison stated to me, that it had been deemed advisable to allow your temporary absence,—that we should go on with the War Department as before, and that you would probably return before the meeting of Congress, and resume your duties as Secretary of War."

From the above it is apparent, that the President had awakened to a sense of the great weakness he had betrayed in listening to the suggestions of a miserable faction, and would, had shame permitted it, have retraced his steps. At the time of General Armstrong's interview with him, he was not aware of the fact that the President had that *very morning* committed himself by a promise to the Georgetown Committee. This he learned in Baltimore, and immediately determined to resign. Mr. Barker says:—"I joined him at Baltimore, and *assured him from*



"It has been since stated to me as a fact (to which I give the most reluctant credit) that, in the morning of the 29th, and before my arrival in the city, a Committee of the inhabitants of Georgetown, of whom Alexander C. Hanson, the reputed editor of the Federal Republican, was one, had waited on the President by deputation, and obtained from him a promise, that I should no longer direct the military defences of the District. On this fact, comments are unnecessary.

"I now proceed to exhibit, and to answer the charges raised against me, and which form the ground-work of that excitement to which the President thought it prudent to sacrifice his authority in declining to support mine.

"1st. That I gave orders for the retreat of the army in the action of the 24th instant, and under circumstances not making retreat either necessary or proper.

"This charge has not for its support the shadow of truth, and I appeal to the President himself, whether I did not, by his request, take a position which rendered it impossible for me to have given such order. From this position, I pointed out to him the disorder and retreat of the first line, soon after the action began.\*

"2d. That in despite of the remonstrances of General Winder, I did, by the interposition of my authority, prevent him from defending the Capitol.

"This charge contains in it a total perversion of the truth. When the head of the retiring column reached the Capitol it was halted for a moment. General Winder took this occasion to state to Colonel Monroe and myself, that he was not in a condition to maintain another combat, and that his force was broken down by fatigue and dispersion. Under this representation, Colonel Monroe proposed, that he should occupy the heights in the rear of Georgetown, and in this opinion, I united.†

*the President*, that he expected him back as Chief of the War Department in two or three weeks, and would assuredly support him therein. General Armstrong's reply was—"My determination is taken—here are my [written] reasons—they will appear in print, if a newspaper can be found free enough to publish them." Jacob Barker's letter to the editor of the Commercial Advertiser, May 20th, 1843.

\* The truth of this assertion is *proved* by Mr. Monroe's letter to the Investigating Committee, from which I make the following extract: "After some pause, the President remarked to the Secretary of War and myself, that it would be proper for us to retire to the rear, *leaving the military movement to military men*, which we did."—P. 69 of the Report of the Committee.

† That General Winder made no remonstrance, and did not wish to defend the Capitol is *proved*, by the following extract from his Narrative [p. 168, Report of Committee]. "In a few moments, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of War joined me; besides that, they had been witnesses to the dispersion of the troops, and the exhaustion of those just halted by me, I stated the diminution of my force, and the extent of the positions which rendered it impossible for me to place the force I then had in such a position, as to prevent the enemy from taking me on the flank as well as the front, and that no reasonable hope could be entertained, that we had any troops who could be relied on to make a resistance as desperate as necessary, in an isolated building, which could not be supported by a suf-

“3d. That I had withdrawn the covering party from the rear of Fort Washington, and had ordered the fort to be blown up and all obstruction to the passage of the Potomac abandoned, without firing a gun.

“This charge is utterly void of truth. The covering party was withdrawn by an order from General Winder, and Captain Dyson’s official report shows, that the orders under which he acted were derived from the same source—though no doubt mistaken, or misrepresented.\*

“4th. That by my orders the Navy Yard was burned.

“This, like its predecessors, is a positive falsehood. I sent an aide to apprise Commodore Tingey that the army was retiring, and would no longer be able to cover his establishment. He was thus left to follow the suggestions of his own mind, or to obey those of the Head of the Navy Department.†

“5th and lastly, that means had not been taken to collect a force sufficient for the occasion. Under this head, as the subject will probably become one of legislative inquiry, I shall at present make but two remarks :

“1st. That no means within reach of the Government had been omitted or withheld; that a separate military district embracing the seat of Government had been created; that an officer of high rank and character had been called to take charge of it; that to him was given authority to call for supplies and a militia force of fifteen thousand men, to which might be added the 36th regiment of the line, a battalion of the 38th, detachments of the 12th, of the artillery and dragoons, and the flotilla crews and Marine corps under Commodore Barney, making a total of sixteen thousand three hundred men. General Winder’s official report shows, how much of this force was actually assembled, and the causes why a greater part of it had not been brought

---

iciency of troops from without.” Mr. Monroe’s agency in the retreat from Washington is *proved* by the following extract from his letter : “ We both advised the General to rally and form [the army] on the heights above Georgetown, believing, as I did, that much would be hazarded by an attempt near the Capitol.”

\* That the covering force was withdrawn by an order from General Winder, is *proved* by the following extract from the letter of Brigadier Young : “ General Winder despatched the trooper back with verbal orders for my brigade to *cross the Potomac*, and form a junction with his army in Montgomery County, Maryland. *I accordingly crossed the troops over to Alexandria*, on the night of the 24th of August.” That the fort was blown up under a mistaken view of General Winder’s order, is *shown* by his own Narrative, p. 174 of the Report of the Committee. “ I sent by Major Hite, directions to the commanding officer at Fort Washington, *in the event of his being taken in the rear* by the enemy, to blow up the fort, and retire across the river.”

† The facts stated above are *proved* by the following extract of a letter from Commodore Tingey to the Secretary of the Navy :—“ After receiving your orders of the 24th, directing the public shipping, stores, &c., at this establishment to be destroyed in case of the success of the enemy over our army, no time was lost in making the necessary arrangements for firing the whole, &c. About 4 P.M., I received a message by an officer, from the Secretary of War, with information that he could protect me no longer.”—P. 277, Report of the Committee.

together—causes, altogether extraneous, and beyond the control of the National Government.\*

“2d. From what is now known of the enemy’s force, of the loss he sustained in the enterprise, and of the precipitancy of his retreat, it is obvious that if all the troops assembled at Bladensburg had been faithful to themselves, their *number* was fully competent to have beaten the enemy, and to have saved the Capitol.”†

I know with what reluctance the generality of readers turn from the text, to examine notes; yet, I cannot but beseech those who feel an interest in the truth of history, not to pass, unattentively, the extracts I have made from public documents. A close examination of these will show, that every assertion set forth in the above nervous production was proved true by subsequent evidence before the Investigating Committee. But, let us return to the subject under review.

“This,” said Mr. Monroe, “is all that I want. It exonerates me from the charge of having undermined General Armstrong by any agency of mine. So far as the facts were made known to me at the time, you state them correctly; and the rest I have had from other sources since, and they corroborate what you say.” I promised to write out the narrative as requested, and did so. Mr. Monroe died a few days after this interview, and with him the demand for a forthcoming of the facts.”

With more of success than Macbeth’s Apothecary, Doctor McKenney seems to have discovered the art of “ministering to a

---

\* *Proved* by the following quotation from the Report of the Investigating Committee, pp. 37—8. “On the 2d of July, the tenth military district was constituted, and the command given to General Winder. On the 4th, the requisition upon the States for 93,500 men was made. On the 14th, the Governors of Pennsylvania and Virginia acknowledged the receipt of the requisition, and promised promptitude. About the 10th, the Governor of Maryland was served with a requisition, and took measures to designate a corps of six thousand men—the whole quota from that State. On the 12th, General Winder was authorized, in case of *menaced* or actual invasion, to call into service the whole quota of Maryland. On the 17th, the General was farther authorized to call into actual service not less than two nor more than three thousand of the drafts assigned to his command, to form a permanent force, to be stationed in some central position between Baltimore and the City of Washington. On the same day, he was authorized to call on the State of Pennsylvania for five thousand, on Virginia for two thousand, on the militia of the District of Columbia for two thousand, together with the six thousand from Maryland, making an aggregate force of fifteen thousand drafted militia; three thousand of which, authorized to be called in actual service (the residue in case of actual or menaced invasion), besides the regular troops estimated at one thousand, making sixteen thousand, independent of marines and flotilla men. This was the measure of defence contemplated for military district No. 10, and the *measures taken by the War Department up to the 17th of July in execution of it.*” Five weeks before the enemy’s attack on Washington, General Armstrong had *fulfilled his duty.*

† The force actually assembled by Gen. Winder, amounted to upwards of six thousand five hundred men of all arms, and twenty pieces of artillery. It was attacked and routed in twenty minutes by the advance guard of the British army, consisting of fifteen hundred men. The severity of the engagement may be estimated by the greatness of the American loss, ten killed, and thirty wounded!



mind diseased." The dose prescribed by him, with such signal effect, consisted of one grain of truth, mixed with ninety-nine of fiction, and, unlike medicines in general, appears to have been equally well suited to the disorder, and the palate of the patient. Yet, I may be permitted to ask, how it happened, that President Monroe should have suffered the moral cancer gnawing at his vitals for so many years, when this convenient friend was ever at hand to administer a cheap and effectual remedy? Had the brightness of Mr. McKenney's memory suffered a temporary eclipse? Were the facts which now fall so glibly from his pen, lost for a time amid the maze of Indian accounts and disbursements? Or, am I to believe, what I confess seems to me most probable, that when he represents his friend and patron as suffering for years from the dread of posthumous condemnation, he paints with a brush too thick, and a coloring too high? There is also something equivocal in the expression of Mr. Monroe's satisfaction. "This," he says, "is all that I want. It exonerates me from the charge of having undermined General Armstrong, by *any agency of mine.*" Had he said, "*by any agency of others,*" notwithstanding the solemnity of the occasion, McKenney must have laughed in his face.

But why publish this defence, since the contingency has not happened, on which the Ex-President founded his request for its appearance? Like Mr. Monroe, General Armstrong has done with this world, and his latest and best work is not disfigured by any allusion to personal wrongs, which he despised too much to feel very deeply. The foregoing question admits but of one reply: though the injured party could forget and forgive, his enemies (of whom our author is one) have more memory and less charity. Not contented with temporary success, they seek, as far as practicable, to mislead future inquiry, and stamp their falsehoods on the record of the past. There is also in Mr. McKenney an affectation of candor, which, if possible, renders his conduct more reprehensible. This is, especially evinced in the last paragraph of the chapter, which has been the subject of notice. It is as follows:

"The charge of traitor, which was lavishly employed against General Armstrong, I never believed. *His whole fault lay in a total absence of faith in the intention of the British to attack Washington.* And, indeed, the act struck every military mind then as it does now, as one of the most unexampled temerity. An incursion, such as was made into a country densely peopled, without artillery or cavalry, exposing both flank and rear to the capacity of such a city as Baltimore, was one of that kind of onsets which secures success *only by the general apathy arising out of the belief that nothing so desperate would be attempted.*"

Without being as sceptical as the renowned Walter, the Doubter, Mr. Thomas L. McKenney may well avow his disbe-



lief of a charge so false and foolish, as to have found credence and circulation only among the dregs of a militia camp. Treason! why, the foul suspicion was never breathed in any circle of honest men; and the admission that he heard it, is a damning proof of the filthiness of his associations at that period. As for the "*total want of faith*," ascribed by Mr. McKenney, to General Armstrong, I have already shown to the satisfaction of every unprejudiced mind, that it consisted only in a reasonable, well-founded *doubt* as to the intentions of the enemy; and this, too, at a time when nothing short of omniscience itself could have sufficed to determine what those intentions were, or rather, what they would be, for they shifted (as is proved by British authorities) with every incident of the march.\* Again: It will not escape the reader's observation, that with a logic as defective as his memory, Mr. McKenney, in this closing paragraph, imputes to General Armstrong, the *serious fault* of sharing in an opinion which it seems was held by the whole community; since, according to our author, the success of the British attack on Washington was occasioned, "*solely by the general apathy, arising out of a belief that nothing so desperate would be attempted.*"

Is it not a fair inference, that if "general apathy" was alone to blame for this capital misfortune, General Armstrong was treated with much injustice? And to what, after all, amounts this charge against him of incredulity with regard to the enemy's intentions? Granting it to be true, in its fullest extent, it is without force, unless it be shown that this "want of faith" was productive of other and greater *wants*? So self-evident is this proposition, that the censurers of the War minister have, from that day to this, made "neglected preparation" the burthen of their song: yet on this head I stand armed with the decision of *seven* gentlemen, distinguished alike for character and talent, who, after a long and laborious investigation, in which they sought and invited whatever evidence could be procured, came to the unanimous conclusion, that the President's plan of defence was put in full execution as far as the Secretary of War could execute it, five weeks before the enemy's attack.†

---

\* "We remained during the night at Nottingham, nor were we as usual early in motion in the morning, and hesitation had taken place as to the course to be pursued, whether to *follow* the gun-boats, or *return* to the shipping."—Campaign at Washington, p. 117. Again: "The truth is, the *capture of Washington was not the original end of the expedition*. To *destroy the flotilla* was the sole object of the debarkation; and but for the instigations of Admiral Cockburn, who accompanied the army, the Capital of America would have escaped our visitation." P. 152.

† The members of the Committee of Investigation were Johnson of Kentucky, Lowndes of South Carolina, Stockton of New Jersey, Miller of New York, Goldsborough of Maryland, Barbour of Virginia, and Pickens of North Carolina—*four* Federalists and *three* Republicans.

As respects the management of the troops in the field, General Armstrong neither had, nor could have anything to do with it. On the 13th of August he had been served by the President, with the following rule: "No order shall be issued by the Secretary of War to any officer commanding a district, relative to military movements, without previously receiving the Executive sanction." Understanding this as an intimation that General Winder should be left free and unshackled, to form and execute his own plans on his own responsibility, the War-Minister limited his interference to mere *advice*, given only when requested by the General. What that advice was has already been shown, and little doubt can now exist, that if it had been adopted, it would probably have saved the city from capture, or at all events, have surrounded its fall by such circumstances of glorious resistance, as would have made the loss of their capital an event to be spoken of by Americans, without a blush.\*

But some curious inquirer may ask;—If public opinion, misled by faction and falsehood, has hitherto condemned the innocent, can you furnish the means of rectifying the mistake by pointing out the guilty? A full answer to this question would necessarily require much time and labor and research: suffice it to say, that when Mr. McKenney spoke of the "public apathy," he but stated one of the leading causes of the disaster. "I reported to the General," says McClane, "that the people between the rivers had not appeared disposed to fight; it was common to see before the houses a pole with a white cloth attached, as a signal of *submission*."† Certain it is, that with such materials as that portion of the country afforded, the formation of an efficient army was no easy task; nor is it to be wondered at, that many of Winder's battalions, when set in opposition to a small but well-disciplined corps, should have suffered "the love of life to prevail, over the love of country and of honor."

---

\* The advice offered by General Armstrong to General Winder and the President may be thus recapitulated:

- 1st. Harass the enemy on his march by front and flank attacks.
- 2d. Let Barney defend his flotilla against the enemy's boats, if the position he has taken is susceptible of defence.
- 3d. Fight your decisive battle, not in the open field, but in and about the Capitol, where your militia will have the benefit of cover.

† McClane Papers, His. Soc. N. Y.

M122969

E356

W3A7

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

