LETTER VII.

Albany

Sept. 18th, 1834.

Sir:

In preceding letters it has been demonstrated that from 1811 to 1813, you were the advocate and supporter of that class of politicians who were opposed to the war; that you were the untiring opponent of James Madison, and the devoted adherent of De Witt Clinton. And here let me again remark that it is not intended to discuss the merits or demerits of Mr. Clinton or his friends. It is your insincerity and duplicity that I wish to expose. It is your vascillating and selfish policy that I wish to present to the gaze of the American people. It is your unworthy conduct towards Gov. Clinton that I deprecate.

Whatever may have been the mistaken views of that gentleman, or whatever errors he may have committed in reference to the war, the canals of our state are monuments to his memory, more imperishable than marble or brass. On the success of these gigantic internal improvements, he jeopardized his present character and future fame. His efforts were derided; his plans, his projects, and his estimates were scoffed and scorned, as those of a deluded visionary. By one, all the arts of the sly, cunning, and timid intriguer were used to retard and embarrass the progress of these stupendous public works. In another quarter, the denunciations of the open and reckless demagogue were fulminated against the whole system of internal improvements, and its uncompromising champion. Never-no, never, can the voice of history do ample justice to Mr. Clinton on this subject.

Of the great mass of his friends it may be truly said, that during his life, among the faithful, they were most faithful. With an unconquerable manliness they sustained him through good and through evil report; and when the dark clouds of
disappointment and adversity overshadowed him, many, very many, clung to his fortune, with an ardor and a devotion, that was as honourable to them as it must have been gratifying and consolatory to him. You, sir, at an early day, proved recreant. You abandoned him in 1813. Again in 1817, with smirking countenance and mincing step, you returned to his support, and forsook him in 1819. But I am anticipating. These events shall be detailed in chronological order, if I do not become too much disgusted with the subject.- This digression, you, sir, will pardon. It was deemed proper, as it regarded Mr. Clinton’s friends, as well as due to the memory of their late chieftain. It is well known, that you consider them as gathered into your fold; as your supporters and vassals by inheritance from Gen. Jackson; and by purchase with a few crocodile tears that you shed at the grave of their departed friend and counsellor. Are you right?—Have you indeed secured the Clintonians? Do you command their suffrages at your will and your pleasure? Have they transferred their friendship and affection from the late De Witt Clinton to Martin Van Buren, his embittered reviler, and most injurious, because most subtle, foe? If they have, then may his shade, indignantly frowning exclaim, “how fickle! how transitory! how unstable is the devotion of selfish man!”

Henceforth, for a few years, you are to be considered as having abandoned Mr. Clinton and his friends, and your merits are now to be examined, as a champion of the war. Your biographer says, that during the years 1813 and 1814, there were severe conflicts between the Senate and Assembly (the former being republican and the latter federal) which led to several public conferences, involving the justice and expediency of the war. In all of them Mr. Van Buren was a principal speaker on the part of the Senate.”

That such conferences took place, is admitted. But that you was, during the whole war, on more than one of these conferences, is untrue. I have examined the Senate journals form 1812 to 1815, and if you was selected a second time to point out “the justice or expediency of the war,” I have not discovered the case. Your biographer and your friends are now challenged to specify the numerous conferences “in all of which you was a principal speaker on the part of the Senate.” This representation, like that of your early support of the war, never had existence but in the imagination of the honorable gentleman who thoughtlessly penned it.

On the 13th of April, 1813, a conference was held, on “an act providing for the defence of the State of New York.” You was one of the conferees. Your colleagues were Gen. Root and Gen. Wilkins. The bill, however, was lost. If there is another
instance from 1812 to 1815, it has escaped my researches. Thus much for your conscientious biographer’s declaration, that in all these conferences you “was a principal speaker.”

Again, it is said—“The bill to authorise the raising of troops for the defence of this State, was peculiarly his (Van Buren’s) measure, it having been matured and introduced by him.” This was in September, 1814. You have recently received another puff on the subject of this bill. Notwithstanding the hacknied, degraded, and contemptible source from which this statement emanates, the merits of the bill, and the accuracy of the representation, shall be examined.

The hireling driveller says—“Mr. Van Buren drew the bill, which passed the Legislature, for raising an army of 12,000 men, to be placed under the command of the patriot Tompkins.” I will now proceed to give a true history of this bill, as extracted from the Senate journals. At the commencement of the legislative session in September 1814, Governor Tompkins, in his message, recommended the organization of an efficient military force to be employed, in lieu of drafted militia. He proposed twenty thousand men, and to be stationed, when necessary, as follows:

On the Southern frontier, 8,500

Champlain, "

4,500

Niagara, "

7,000-20,000

On the 28th of September, 1814, this part of the Governor’s message was referred to a joint committee of the two Houses. On the part of the Senate, General Root, Mr. Van Buren, and Col. Stranaham were the committee. On the 5th of Oct. Gen. Root reported, that the committee (eight) could not agree, but that a majority had authorised him to report a bill to raise 20,000 men, the minority reserving to themselves the right to offer a substitute. On the 6th day of October (next day) Mr. Van Buren presented the substitute.* Both bills were referred to the same committee of the whole. It will be seen, therefore, that the “measure” did not originate with Mr. Van Buren, but with the Governor; and that it was the subject of
much discussion in the joint committee previous to its being brought before the Senate. It shall be dissected in my next letter.

PATRICK HENRY.

*Patrick Henry has overlooked the most important feature in this affair. It will be perceived that Governor Tompkins recommended the raising of 20,000 troops; Gen. Root reported a bill for that number; Mr. Van Buren was in the minority of that committee, and opposed to the raising of troops according to the recommendations of Gov. Tompkins; and after uniting with the opposition in the Committee, he brought in a substitute, no doubt to defeat the whole measure. This is his system of legislation, never to meet things fairly and openly, but to defeat them by trick.—Ed. Star.

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