

SOME NEW BOOKS.

George B. McClellan.

The latest addition to "The Great Commanders" series, now in course of publication by the Apologetes, is the volume entitled "General McClellan" by the late Gen. FREDERICK S. MICHIE, who, for nearly thirty years preceding his death on the 10th of December last, was Professor of Natural and Experimental Philosophy at the West Point Academy. In a preface to the book it is pointed out by Gen. James Grant Wilson, the editor of the series, that no better person than Prof. Michie could be found to write an unprejudiced biography of McClellan, both because he was by nature honest and independent, and because he had not been connected with the Army of the Potomac during the period when it was commanded by the subject of the narrative. The impartiality of the work was attested by the late Gen. Fitz-John Porter, who, just before his own death, expressed the opinion: "So far as I have been able to judge, I think it is the best work on the subject that has been written." Another accomplished army officer, who saw the proof-sheets, is convinced that the life of McClellan now before us is absolutely just as almost to possess the quality of finality, so far as the subject's capacity for command is concerned.

The principal incidents in McClellan's life are too well known to need recalling, and the reader of this volume will naturally turn to the chapter in which the author's estimate of his subject's military abilities is set forth. It is certain that, before the publication of the book before us, no final and generally accepted judgment had been pronounced. On the contrary, among the great commanders of the war, McClellan long occupied a unique position. For, after their military careers had been fairly well established, his still remained a theme of dispute. On the one hand, it has been asserted that his military failures were due to the interference of the Government, after he had entered upon his campaigns under the promise that he should be provided with all the means that he had wanted upon the prosecution of his plans to a successful issue. On the other hand, it has been contended that his plans involved elements so contradictory, and were so ill digested that it was impossible for the Government to comply with his requisitions, and that his failures must be attributed to his own imperfections as a general. In Prof. Michie's opinion, an impartial estimate will follow a middle course between these extreme positions, both of which have their origin in a time when political turmoil and excitement affected the judgments of the men who controlled the general Government.

The author begins by recognizing that McClellan's service throughout the Mexican War merits the highest commendation. Every duty assigned to him was well performed, and he never sought to depart from the strict subordination which his position as a subaltern exacted from him. While he was never rash nor foolhardy, his coolness in danger, personal courage and intrepidity were conspicuous. The expectations founded on his early promise and training, he had graduated second in a class of six at West Point, were amply confirmed, not only during the Mexican War, but in all of his subsequent service as a junior officer. He was an indefatigably industrious and conscientiously devoted to his professional duties that he was universally regarded as an admirable type of the educated American subaltern. Up to the beginning of the Civil War the outcome of McClellan's career had been strictly conformable to the indications afforded at the military academy.

In his analysis of McClellan's military character, as this was developed and disclosed during the War of the Rebellion, the author of this book deems it necessary to search, especially in the record of his command of the Army of the Potomac, for the characteristic traits that seem to dominate the salient events. Among these traits none stands out more conspicuously than his fondness for the theoretical branch of his profession which relates to strategy. Even before he became General-in-Chief, but while he was anticipating his advancement to that position, McClellan occupied his mind with the greater problems involved in a concerted movement of all the Union armies, overhauling the movement, and making of an effective consideration of the advance of the particular army under his immediate command. In the science of generalship Napoleon was his exemplar, but Prof. Michie holds that in none of the three campaigns undertaken by McClellan is there any exhibition of the ready adaptation of means to the end in view, following the salient events. Among these strategic advantages, that distinguished Napoleon's operations. "The success of such combinations require not only the possession of a highly developed strategic sense, but also that comprehensive mental grasp and range by which every detail essential for success has been antecedently studied and adapted to the general plan." Our author thinks that in the quality defined in the words we have italicized, "McClellan was constitutionally weak."

strategical blunder which permitted Garnett's main body to escape by way of Horse Shoe Run. Prof. Michie is convinced, however, that it is on his original Peninsula plan of campaign, its subsequent modification and the degree of success attained in conducting it, that McClellan's reputation as a strategist and commander will ultimately and mainly rest. To assist this reader in arriving at a conclusion upon these points Prof. Michie recapitulates the general principles connected with this campaign, and it seems to be no doubt, that McClellan first conceived the plan sometime in November, 1861, after he had become General-in-Chief, intending it to form a part of a more general scheme of operations contemplating simultaneous movements of all the Western armies as well. The original project had in view the transportation by water of the bulk of the Army of the Potomac to that on the Hatteras peninsula, from which point it was intended to move against Richmond with the expectation that the Confederates would be forced to accept battle in a position of McClellan's selection, a position which in case of a Union victory would give such decisive results as would lead to a speedy termination of the war. As elements of success McClellan relied upon secrecy, rapidity of movement, the destruction of railroad bridges in the rear of the enemy and a quick disembarkation, so that he would have the advantage of being a two-days' march nearer to Richmond than his opponent General Joseph E. Johnston. On Dec. 1, 1861, he had about 170,000 men present for duty, of which the greater number were in the vicinity of Washington, and he estimated that the strength of the enemy was about 150,000 men. Prof. Michie submits in passing that, if McClellan believed the enemy to be as strong as he computed them to be, his own plan was utterly inadvisable, for it would have resulted in abandoning the national capital to the Confederate Army, while his own soldiers were in transit to their new base.

The general features of the plan were finally outlined by McClellan in a letter written on Feb. 5, 1862 to the Secretary of War. Though at first strongly opposed to it, and preferring an overland campaign, President Lincoln finally renounced his opposition, after a council of war, composed of twelve generals, had by a vote of 8 to 4 given McClellan's plan their approval. That the responsibility for the Urbana plan of campaign was wholly McClellan's is indisputable. Nevertheless within five days thereafter, we find him strongly advocating the substitution of a Peninsula campaign for that by way of Urbana, and a council of war, comprising the four corps commanders present, with the army, recommends the new plan in case certain specified provisions should be made, if such provisions were not made, it recommended that the overland campaign should be once undertaken.

What asks Prof. Michie, were the reasons that produced this sudden change in McClellan's mind? Elsewhere in the book before us the author has shown that McClellan's own statement with reference to the matter, a statement published more than twenty-six years afterward, is erroneous. That is to say, it is incorrect to assert, as McClellan ultimately admitted, that the fear of the Administration and their inability to comprehend the merits of the scheme, or else the determination that I should not succeed in the approaching campaign, induced them to prohibit me from carrying out the Urbana movement. They gave me the choice between the direct overland route via Manassas and the route via Fort Monroe and the Potomac. I selected the latter. Prof. Michie has ascertained by an examination of McClellan's report containing all the most important correspondence on the subject, that there is no sufficient warrant for the use of so strong a term as "prohibit" in connection with the proposed Urbana movement, while there is abundant evidence to prove that McClellan was subjected to no restriction at all. He had voluntarily abandoned his own preference for the overland route.

Prof. Michie considers it in the highest degree probable that McClellan's true reasons for substituting the route via Fort Monroe for the route via Urbana were these: First, he always had a preference for the movement up the Peninsula, because in his opinion, the best supply and all the facilities for operations on that line were superior, safer and more trustworthy than by way of Urbana; secondly, he did not choose it at first because he was afraid of the Confederate navy, but when he heard the result of the naval conflict at Hampton Roads, he decided at once to make the change, assuming that the Confederates would be more than a match for the Merrimack, and that a match for the Merrimack would be more than a match for the Merrimack. The inference of the Administration and the consequent diminution of his force compelled McClellan, so we are told by his apologists—to undertake the siege of Yorktown that caused a month's delay, during which time his army became enfeebled by disease, while the enemy were able to concentrate in his front a force of "at least equal strength." The withdrawal of Blenker's division was attributed by the General's friends to the unfriendly attitude of an arbitrary and insensible Secretary of War, who had previously treated McClellan with contumely and now designed to thwart his operations in every way, lest the military achievements which he might perform should be followed by more important political success.

Prof. Michie, for his part, is convinced that the course pursued by President Lincoln and his Secretary of War was entirely free from the taint of personal interest. "It was not possible for the Administration to ignore the absolute danger in which Washington would have been placed, had not McClellan been retained as a commander. Prof. Michie's judgment, and not the mere exhibition of an emotional nature resulting from the intense anxiety experienced on the day of battle, nothing should have prevented him from instituting a pursuit immediately while the "retreat army" was "disorganized."

become so unduly stimulated that he had begun to believe that he was the sole arbiter of the military policy to be adopted. Prof. Michie evidently thinks that a second mistake was committed by McClellan when, having arrived at Fort Monroe, he found that he could not obtain the assistance from the navy for which he had hoped, and when he also learned that his hypotheses with regard to climatic conditions, the character of the roads, the topography of the Peninsula and the security of his flanks differed materially from the facts. Owing to this change in the situation and to the news of McDowell's retention, he was obliged to recast his plan under discouraging circumstances, influenced by prudential considerations, and, perhaps, by a sense of personal grievance, he determined upon a siege, whereas a more aggressive commander would have "have treated a spirited assault." Our author points out that the month's delay which ensued, not only was of the greatest advantage to the enemy by permitting them to strengthen their defenses and to concentrate their forces at the point of attack, but it weakened the Army of the Potomac in morale and by the fatigues of an unhealthy climate and the depressing effect of inactivity. The unfortunate Battle of Williamsburg, the retention of the White House base, instead of one on the James, the isolation of Keyes's corps at Seven Pines, the unnecessary expedition to Hatteras Court House, the month's struggle on the Chickahominy, were the barren results of the ensuing campaign, the only strategic advantages of which had not been utilized.

At the time of his appointment to the duties of Commander-in-Chief, no one more clearly understood the relations that ought to exist between the several arms of the service in the composition of an efficient fighting force, and his systematic efforts to develop the artillery, which, previously, had been neglected, affords a signal example of organizing capacity. It is frankly acknowledged by the author of this biography that the individuality, which characterized the Army of the Potomac throughout its career, was due principally to the stamp that McClellan impressed upon it during its formative period, and that its subsequent splendid efficiency was the fruit of the toll he had devoted to its organization, drilled discipline. Never demonstrated by a more successful commander, with their own hands, and they go in this manner. The rule carries a rich head-stall over the bridle, and this head-stall has at the chin two ends with thick tassels of silk, and with these ends or tassels go two pieces, each on one side, which lead the mule as if by a halter. Two others go, one on each side, with their ends on the neck of the mule, and two others behind the mule's shoulders, with their ends on the mule's haunches, or on the hinder part of the saddle. King John, the possessor of the present Negus, rode after this fashion, and most Abyssinians of distinction continue more or less to uphold the custom, though King Menelik himself rides without helpers. Capt. Welby thinks that the practice originated from the king's inability to do two things at the same time. He used to hear and decide cases as he proceeded along the road, and, therefore, had no time to guide and direct his mule.

Among the sights which our traveler found worth seeing at Harrar are the bakery and brewery near the old palace of Ras Makonnen. The bread is made from a small reddish grain called *teff*, which after being ground up and mixed with water is left to ferment. It is then rolled into a thick paste and scoured out on an open pan in the shape of a thin, round cake. The bread is light enough, though owing to the fermentation it is slightly sour, the sourness is counteracted by the addition of pepper and spices. Adjoining the bakery were the *teff* brewers. To drink *teff* is the highest bliss of some Abyssinians. The process of making it is simple enough. Water is far in advance of his production, and is added in the form of a thick, white, milky substance, which gives the drink its intoxicating strength. The longer this mixture stands the stronger it becomes. It is finally the essence of *teff*—known as *work*—is distilled from it. The process of *teff*-making is much more complicated than that of wine-making. It is a long and tedious process, and requires (1) ground-up barley, (2) barley and malted, and kept till it begins to take root, (3) powdered leaves of the geesh bush, (4) ground barley ground up, (5) pieces of geesh stick. Nos. 1, 2 and 3 are first mixed together in certain proportions, and, after three days, Nos. 4 and 5 are added.

In a chapter on the country's military resources, we are told that the Abyssinian soldier is a man of few words, and that for service, he merely seizes his rifle and belt from the wall of his hut, and is ready for the field. With regard to rations the arrangements are simple; the soldier merely draws in advance something like eight pounds of grain for the month. There is no transport system, when the month's supply is gone, the soldier is apt to be very soldier. On being called out for service, he merely seizes his rifle and belt from the wall of his hut, and is ready for the field. With regard to rations the arrangements are simple; the soldier merely draws in advance something like eight pounds of grain for the month. There is no transport system, when the month's supply is gone, the soldier is apt to be very soldier. On being called out for service, he merely seizes his rifle and belt from the wall of his hut, and is ready for the field. 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