

him'. His mission was, in the words of Vansittart, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was the spokesman of the Government on this occasion, 'to retaliate upon the Americans for the outrages which they had committed on the frontiers,' and with this object in view he and his troops came to the rendezvous in Chesapeake bay.

Admiral
Cochrane's
letter to
Monroe.

An attack on Washington had no doubt been contemplated, should opportunity arise; but, from Ross's own dispatch, written after the event, it appears that the first object of his advance up the Patuxent river was to co-operate with Cockburn in destroying Barney's flotilla. Immediately after the troops arrived, the fleet moved into the mouth of the Patuxent, and here, on August 18, Admiral Cochrane addressed a letter to Monroe, the American Secretary of State, informing him that, having been called upon by the Governor-General of the Canadas to retaliate against the inhabitants of the United States 'for the wanton destruction committed by their army in Upper Canada, it has become imperiously my duty, conformably with the nature of the Governor-General's application, to issue to the naval force under my command an order to destroy and lay waste such towns and districts upon the coast as may be found assailable'. This notice, the wholesale terms of which were with reason subjected to subsequent criticism, had been called forth by more than one appeal from the Governor-General. Prevost had written in June after the raiding of Port Dover, and in July after the burning of St. David's, and had referred to the conduct of the Americans in these and similar cases, 'as calling loudly for a severe retribution which I trust, when opportunities offer, you will not fail to inflict.' Prevost's character, and the policy which he had pursued throughout the war of neglecting no occasion to conciliate rather than to provoke the enemies of Canada, lent strength to his protests, and the British leaders had now both the force and the opportunity, rightly or wrongly, to exact retribution.

The city of Washington lies in the forks of the Potomac,