

General John A. Rawlins.

The telegram this morning brings us the sad news of the death, yesterday, of General JOHN A. RAWLINS, Secretary of War. The health of this distinguished officer has long been failing, he having contracted during the war a bronchial affection which matured to the consumption that caused his death. It has frequently been asserted, of late, that before the next session of Congress he would resign a post whose duties were too arduous for his shattered constitution to bear; but it was the general hope of the public that Summer might restore him to vigor and to his customary energy.

The event has disappointed this hope; and the death of General RAWLINS is at once a grievous loss to the Cabinet and to the country. His appointment as Secretary of War was a pledge of ability and success in army administration—a pledge already amply fulfilled by the skill he has shown in economizing and consolidating without undermining or weakening. A civilian by education, a lawyer by profession till the outbreak of the war, he nevertheless made himself a thorough and accomplished soldier in the stern school of the camp—the forcing-house where military talent ripens fast. He has always been regarded as an “army man,” and as upholding the “army view” of whatever relates to the army; meaning thereby the deductions of long experience as opposed to the rash and crude speculations of reformers.

The career of General RAWLINS, like that of President GRANT, really began with the war, and as they came together into public notice, so their fames have been linked together from that day to this, and together will go into history. Born in 1831, at Gilford, Illinois, of humble parentage, he educated himself, adding one more to the roll of distinguished “self-made men.” He chose the legal profession, and began the practice of law at Galena fifteen years ago. Political excitement then ran high. Plunging enthusiastically into the contest, he rapidly found favor with his fellow-citizens, and rose to great popularity. He was a thorough Douglas Democrat, and in the Presidential canvass of 1860 he was a candidate for elec-

tion on the Douglas ticket, “stamping” his

Congressional District with great success, and winning laurels as a public speaker.

When the flag was lowered on Sumter, a meeting of the citizens of Galena was held, and a prominent Democrat took the chair. He had begun to talk of “Republican responsibility for the war” and of “compromises,” when E. B. WASHBURN rebuked him by exclaiming, “Mr. Chairman, any man who will try to stir party prejudices at this time is a traitor.” At the same moment RAWLINS entered the hall, and loud cries called him to the stand. He advanced and made a spirited speech, ending with these words:

“I have been a Democrat all my life; but this is no longer a question of politics. It is simply country or no country. I have favored every honorable compromise; but the day for compromise is passed. Only one course is left us. We will stand by the flag of our country, and appeal to the god of battles.”

Two evenings later, RAWLINS and GRANT, who had a slight acquaintance, met at another meeting, and RAWLINS half jestingly proposed to GRANT that they should raise a company of volunteers for the war. “As you have seen service, you shall be Captain,” he said; “and ROWLEY and I will toss up to see which shall be First Lieutenant.” The Galena company was raised, but GRANT was not elected Captain, nor RAWLINS Lieutenant. When, however, some months later, GRANT was made Colonel, and subsequently Brigadier-General, one of his first acts was to procure a commission as Captain and Assistant Adjutant-General for RAWLINS, and on Sept. 15, 1861, the latter reported for duty on GRANT’S staff. Nor did he ever leave it until he was confirmed as Secretary of War.

To recall the “war record” of General RAWLINS would be as unnecessary, so far as public information is concerned, as to rehearse that of General GRANT. He served with GRANT in every campaign from Belmont to Appomattox Court-house; he was his trusted staff officer from 1861 to 1869, and in nearly all the important orders connected with GRANT’S campaigns, the name of RAWLINS will be found. GRANT’S history is his history; he advanced as his illustrious superior advanced, from grade to grade; as in the case of General GRANT, a new office was created for him, and at last, in 1866, he was made Chief of Staff of the Armies, with the rank of Brigadier-General and brevet of Major-General.

When, therefore, General GRANT was elected to the Presidential chair, it was generally conceded that General RAWLINS would go into the Cabinet as Secretary of War, and the retention of General SCHOFIELD was regarded by the best-informed persons as but a temporary arrangement to accommodate General RAWLINS. The latter was, indeed, always somewhat reluctant to accept the duties of the post. He had not been in good health since the close of the war, and had but lately been forced to go North from Washington to a more invigorating climate. But he accepted the high position, and his appearance in General GRANT’S Cabinet was hailed as a fresh pledge of harmony of action. His rare military experience and his eight years’ association with the army had given him the traditional views of army management which only experience can furnish; and both by temperament and education he was singularly qualified for the post. The very nature of his staff duties, combining, as they often did, both civil and military functions; both the duties of civic administration in captured cities and campaigning operations in the field, eminently fitted him for the War Bureau. And it is this fitness which makes his loss, as we have said, a public calamity.

To General GRANT, the death of his townsman and friend, his constant ally and trusted counselor in war and peace, whose honest and intelligent advice was always asked, and always given, will be very great. It is doubtful whether he would feel more keenly the loss of any of his old companions in arms, than that of this constant sharer of his campaigns.

Of General RAWLINS as an upright public officer and a worthy gentleman, it would be difficult to speak in too high terms of praise. His energy, honesty, ability, courage, courtesy, industry, and spotless integrity were always the theme of general and well-deserved praise. He was a man of much intelligence, and though far removed from being a mere partisan politician, yet had a good knowledge of public affairs. The single speech he made in the late campaign—the one at Galena two nights before the Presidential election—showed him to be a disciple of the “manifest destiny” school of politics; it revealed also that while he had become a Conservative Republican of the best type, he had not forgotten that he was once a Douglas Democrat. He was always a thorough American in feeling and in habit of thought. In his duties as a soldier he never forgot his duties as a patriot. His private relations were as fortunate as his public, he being universally esteemed and respected by worthy men of all ranks and all parties, in the army and out of it. His great executive ability enabled him usually to drive his work before him with ease, despite his ill-health, and to have leisure for the demands of friendship; and, in his whole career, he exhibited a strongly sympathetic nature, happily guided by a

well-balanced judgment. In him, indeed, as the great dramatist phrases it, “blood and judgment were well commingled.” His place as Secretary of War can, of course, be easily filled; but it cannot be filled better or more acceptably; nor can it be filled by any man more thoroughly in harmony with that Administration in whose counsels and conduct, had he lived, he would have played so prominent a part.