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SPEECH OF HON. J. J. McREA, OF MISSISSIPPI.

Delivered in the House of Representatives on the 5th inst., on the life and character of Gen. JOHN A. QUITMAN:

Mr. McRAE. Mr. Speaker, taking my seat in this Hall for the first time, a member of the House of Representatives, I have a melancholy duty to perform. I would it were otherwise; yet that this duty should not devolve upon me, but that it should not devolve upon any one rather that the distinguished dead was here to pronounce himself as one of the illustrious living. But, sir, the wayward Providence are inscrutable, and we are all obliged to submit to them; they are imperative, and overrule us, however unwilling the obedience which we yielded to them.

It becomes my painful duty to announce to you, Mr. Speaker, and to this House, the death, since the adjournment of the last session of Congress, of one of its honored members—the death of Hon. John A. Quitman, of Mississippi.

I am before you, sir, the living exemplar that he is no more. Sent here by the constituency which honored him, to do what we all humbly may do, the place which they regarded as well filled by himself.

Death, under all circumstances, and in what-ever manner it approaches us, is always a mournfully chilling; but when it comes heralding with it sad tidings, the fall of a great and good man, it impresses with the sensibility of the warning, and fills the heart of the country with grief. To die is always a sad thing. It is to leave the beauties and glories of this world, and the enchantments of an existence there, the only one we know of, to be transferred to another, which may be bright and beautiful, or dark and gloomy, but which, the veil of mortality has never yet looked upon.

But it is not my purpose to dwell upon this. It has been the custom, in all ages, and among all people, to pay tribute to the distinguished dead; and I propose, in a few words, to perform this service to the memory of General Quitman.

General Quitman left this city a few days after the adjournment of the last session of Congress, feeble in health, but not apprehending himself, nor was it apprehended by his friends, that he was so soon to part with an unfinished end. He arrived at his home on the 20th of June, and was not able afterwards to leave it; and in about three days from the time of his departure from the scenes of his public duties here, on the evening of the 17th of July, at his seat near Natchez, he died at his residence in Mississippi. He was of the opinion himself that his disease was contracted at the National Hotel, in this city, from an infection which prevailed there two years ago, from an unknown cause, where he resided for a time, and was afterwards accustomed to accept the hospitality of his friends. And whether this be true or not, yet it is certain that he imbibed the poison there, or contracted the disease which until then had slumbered, and preyed upon his vitals until it fell into decay, and his life perished with them.

General Quitman was a native of New-York, born in Rhinebeck, in Dutchess county, on the 1st of September, 1798, and was fifty-one years of age at the time of his death. He was of German descent, his father, Doctor Frederick Henry Quitman, being a native of Prussia, of German origin, and, after his removal to this country, an officiating minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, of Rhinebeck. General Quitman's mother was of Dutch descent, on the maternal side, and was educated for the ministry; but, pursuing the inclination of his own mind as his arrival at mature years, determined for himself upon the profession of the law. At the age of twenty-one he left his paternal homestead to seek his fortune for himself, and, emigrating to the West, remained two years in the State of Ohio, where he became a licensed practitioner of the law. Thence he removed to the State of Mississippi, to pursue his calling, and, in 1822, settled in the city of Natchez, where, in 1824, he was married to the accomplished Miss Turner, the present Mrs. Quitman, who, with an interesting family, still survives him, and whose bereavement is one of the illustrious living, who, as a citizen, false as he knew it to be, and not being willing to resist the authority of the Federal Government, which, by a political fiction, the terrible power of Mississippi, he might successfully have done, nor willing to decrease the character of the State by invalidating the arrest of her Governor by a usurped Federal authority, he resigned his office, and submitted himself to arrest, release, or to this unconstitutional trial which he was destined by disease to acquittal.

At this proceeding of the Government, such was the indignation of the Democratic sentiment of Mississippi, connected with its bitter opposition, to the Fugitive Slave Law, passed in 1850, to which General Quitman was known to be strongly opposed, that he was again nominated for the office of Governor, by the united support of the Democracy in convention. As the term of office was fixed by law to take place preceding the gubernatorial election, for delegates to a convention of the State, to return to their position to accept in relation to the Federal Government, on account of the legislation of 1850, and the public sentiment and liberal, for such encouragement and support as its deserts may claim.

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