

## GENERAL GRANT'S CHIEF OF STAFF

Wilson, Major-General James Harrison. The Life of John A. Rawlins. With two portraits. Octavo, pp. xiii-514. New York: The Neale Publishing Company. \$3.00 net. Postage, 15 cents.

In writing this life of Grant's Chief of Staff and Secretary of War, General Wilson has made a notable contribution to the literature of the Civil War. The subject of the biography, Major-General John Aaron Rawlins, while ineligible for the first rank of military fame, was none the less an important figure in the great events of his time. His biographer, himself an experienced soldier and certainly an authority on the subject, speaks of him as the most remarkable man he met during the Civil War. "Altho he came from the plain people," as General Wilson expresses it, "and always held a subordinate position in the Army, it was his good fortune to exert a tremendous influence not only upon persons of high rank but upon events of transcendent importance." These are words of high praise, especially if the reader recalls that he who utters them knew intimately most of the chiefs of the Union armies—McClellan, Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, and the rest. The man to whom this tribute is paid by a brother officer, fifty years after the events described, never commanded troops in the field nor "became charged with the supreme control of great movements." Whatever he did, avers his biographer, was upon and through others, as aid, counselor, and Adjutant-General to General Grant, as Chief of Staff of the Army, and as Secretary of War. His association with Grant, both personally and officially, was of the most intimate nature, and this influence, always beneficent, had important results in molding that unequalled career.

The portrait of this distinguished soldier, who deliberately effaced himself the more effectively to further the fortunes of Grant, furnishes a unique and striking type of the American at his best, in the time "that tried men's souls." Early habituated to surroundings of poverty and hard work, he developed many of the traits that stamp Lincoln's early manhood. It was, as his biographer states, "an active, earnest, intense, and robust life" into which he was born in East Galena, also the birthplace of Grant. "The struggle for existence," writes General Wilson, "was sharp and discouraging; poverty and hardship were the lot which confronted this typical family, and the only consolation was that they were not worse off than their neighbors." It is indeed a picture of Spartan simplicity which the biographer brings before us in his description of the *milieu* that was to produce the greatest soldier of the Civil War. The little community was practically isolated; communication with the older States was by steamboat and the



## John A. Rawlins

canvas-covered wagon; the implements of industry were the plow, the ax, and the spinning-wheel; the food of the people was mostly Indian corn and bacon, while their clothes were of homespun cloth. Church and school were "costly luxuries" that came later. A large family, early taught to labor in field and forest, was the poor man's greatest wealth. Charcoal-burning was the chief occupation. The monotony of life in the Illinois of that day must have been complete. It had one interruption, however, the Black Hawk War, in which the elder Rawlins took part as a transporter of supplies to the Government troops.

General Wilson's story of his hero's successful battle to lift himself out of the narrow and sordid environment into which he was born reads like a romance. It is, in fact, a romance, but one in the sphere of reality, a story quite as inspiring as that of Lincoln or Garfield, and enhanced to no small extent by the author's method of intertwining it with that of Grant. The personality of Grant, indeed, haunts the whole narrative. It is the author's deliberate conviction that Grant's career could not have been what it was without his adjutant's cooperation and beneficent influence. After the conclusion of the war, when Grant became President, the influence, luckily for the nation, was continued. As Secretary of War, General Rawlins was a tower of strength in Grant's Cabinet and Administration. He was the only member of the Cabinet who thoroughly understood the President. The others stood in awe of "the victorious and taciturn soldier," and were prone to overrate his capacity.

The political career of this distinguished soldier, as sketched by his friend and biographer, is quite as important and interesting as were his military achievements. He early became impressed with the importance of our relations with Cuba and openly championed a Cuban republic during the rebellion of 1868. Intensely American, he believed in the Monroe Doctrine and held that we, as chief of the American republics, should encourage and help those that were endangered by foreign aggression. "He sympathized with the desire and efforts of Ireland to throw off the British yoke," writes his biographer, "and looked hopefully to the peaceful acquisition of the newly confederated British colonies in North America. Nor should it be forgotten that these were the views of the President-elect (Grant), as well as of Rawlins and the Republican party, at the time they were uttered."