

**IN MEMORY: THE LAST
SICKNESS, DEATH, AND FUNERAL
OBSEQUIES, OF ALEXANDER H.
STEPHENS, GOVERNOR OF
GEORGIA**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649363148

In Memory: The Last Sickness, Death, and Funeral Obsequies, of Alexander H. Stephens,
Governor of Georgia by I. W. Avery

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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I. W. AVERY

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54 Aug 1 1883
4-22-28

In Memory.



The Last Sickness,
Death,
And Funeral Obsequies,
of
Alexander H. Stephens,
Governor of Georgia.

By ^{John} ~~W.~~ ^{hector} Avery.

Atlanta, Ga.
T. P. Sisson, Publisher.
1883.



The North at Stephens' Bier.

The Georgian household stands beside
The coffin where he lies:
They speak his praise with mournful pride
Amid their sighs.

Sweet Southern plants their leaves expand,
Though Spring has scarce begun—
Does Winter come to this fair land
Of flowers and sun?

No purchased skill has draped the room;
The ready hand we trace
Of Love, which lightens up the gloom
With tender grace.

A Northern stranger, as I gaze,
Come thronging thick and fast
The memories of other days,
Forever past.

Once more I hear the fierce debate;
I watch the rising tide
Of headlong rage which would not wait,
Nor turn aside.

O, voice, which strove in that dark hour
The trumpet to restrain!
To save us was beyond your power,
Your words were vain!

Could human strength avail to break
Such torrents' awful flow?
Had we a choice which way to take?
We may not know!

Could we have listened—bitter thought,
When thinking comes too late!—
Yet can we give HIM thanks who fought
Against our fate!

So, though a stranger, musing thus,
My Northern eyes grow dim:
The Union which is dear to us
Was dear to HIM!

"PEACEMAKER!" let the word be wrought
On monumental stone:
That PEACE, which for his land he sought,
Is NOW HIS OWN!

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E. N. S. L.

ATLANTA, GA., MARCH 8, 1889.

Alexander H. Stephens.

The Death of Gov. Stephens.

AS CLEAN AND PURE, as able, strong and great a spirit as the world has ever shown, went to its final home of painless light at 30 minutes after three o'clock, Sunday morning, March 4, 1883.

As I stood on that crisp Sabbath day by the cold clay in the parlor of the Executive mansion, the caressing breezes, with gentle noise, stirring through the room and rustling the curtains audibly, I thought what a marvelous life that fragile and tortured casket held. For seventy-one years and twenty-one days this frail body had carried, take it all in all, the most famous and unspotted career of the last half century in this broad country. The familiar face in its last repose looked so natural! The expression was as peaceful as in slumber, the features life-like, the only striking index of inner characteristic being the firm-set lips. The pictures of the man represent a low brow and small head. With the scant, silvered hair brushed back, the real majesty of his head was disclosed, looking strangely broad and high, with a beautiful, expansive forehead, having the aspect of the massive. The slender figure was encased in his customary suit of simple black broadcloth, the bird-like hands, that with their white, nervous eloquence moved the historic roller-chair, folded in gloves across his breast.

Sad as was the sight, I could but think it was a fit ending of a noble life. The great old man died in official harness, the chief magistrate of his loved State, in the unabated vitality of his faculties. For nearly fifty years he had been in distinguished public trust, and he flashed out gracing the most exalted duty of all.

K. H. S.

The circumstances of his last illness were peculiarly touching. He had returned from Savannah, where he had been the vital and historic figure of the Sesqui-Centennial. On his arrival he took his bed and never rose from it again. The Sabbath morn witnessed his return home; the Sabbath morn two weeks later witnessed his gentle fading out. It can hardly be said that his trip to Savannah caused his disease. Its fatigue undoubtedly helped the sad death. He was taken sick riding up in a carriage with a broken glass; the sharp morning draft chilled him and brought on his old neuralgia of the bowels. The attack was very severe. His digestive organs were so struck as to lose him voluntary control of them. Powerful opiates and astringents checked his disease, but left him very ill. His delicate organism became fearfully disordered. Perhaps had he have had the care that knew his phenomenal system he might have improved. No one can tell. He had honest attention. He, however, did executive work in bed, and he saw everybody. And all this time the brave and very sick old statesman was weakening daily. He first could not hold nourishment; that overcome, he had hourly nausea; that baffled, he then could not sleep. It seemed as if the angel of death was after him.

For ten days there was no lull in his clearness of mind. He was bright and alert, knowing everybody, talking cheerfully, doing business, dictating letters. A day or two after he was taken, when he was in much pain, his digestion uncontrolled, and he sick with morphine, for a moment he surmised of death as a possibility, but it was only for a moment, and on Wednesday he said he would be up the next day. Some one sent him some oranges—a box from Savannah. He had Aleck, his boy, sort them out, and then he divided the thirty good ones into fifteen piles of two each, and every member of the household, white and black, old and young, by name received a sunny brace of the golden fruit in token of his remembrance.

When he first came into the mansion, he took the room at the end of the hall on the left going in, with its little cosy ante-chamber. He put out the large, stately state bedstead, and used

a cheaper single bed, which he placed in the off corner, heading north and footing south, after the rule of his life. In the opposite corner he had Aleck's cot placed. He bought a clock the first thing, and then a table and frame of pigeon-holes for papers, and here he did most of his work. Colonel Seidell was always on hand to write as he dictated. He received company here, and made it his home and office. One of his roller-chairs he had carried to the Governor's office in the capitol, for use whenever he should ride down. And there it is now, and there it should be permitted to remain, a typical reminder of the great old man. He occupied it a few times during the session of the Legislature, but since then he has been waiting for the warm, sunny days of human summer which will never come to him.

As he took more rest and checked his nausea, those near to him had faith in his recovery. He had been many times nearer to death, and survived. He did not assimilate his food, however, and he began to be restless. His sleep was not refreshing. His doctors stopped the current of visiting, and cut off work. He began to wander in the delirium of morphine, to mutter in his naps, to make scraps of speeches and rehearse his office business. The brain was at work upon the weakness of inanition. His intervals of clearness, however, reconciled those around him. He said, with a smile, to his private secretary, who was urging food on him, "Seidell, don't you know you oughtn't to feed a horse till he whickers?" He signed Senator Colquitt's certificate, also warrants for the payment of money; and on Wednesday, the 28th, he signed a remission of a fifty dollars fine for a man named, curiously, John Stephens, from Fulton county, who had committed an assault and battery. This was his last official act.

Dr. Steiner came Friday afternoon. He came from the death-bed of Gen. Dudley M. DuBose—Governor Stephens' predecessor in Congress in the Eighth District—to Governor Stephens' death-bed. I shall always hold in mind the slender figure of Dr. Steiner, with cool, gracious courtesy and intelligent but self-poised intensity of interest, sitting for nearly thirty-six hours beside his illustrious patient, battling against death to save his friend as he had so often

saved him. I could but think of Governor Stephens wanting him, a year ago, to stay and see him die; and this time, after the first recognition and invitation, his lying in the busy activity of his errant brain, oblivious of the devoted friend and physician who, with hand on his pulse, sat in steady vigilance to give the sufferer recovery.

When Dr. Steiner first came, he saw his patient with improved capacity for nourishment and freedom from nausea, and with his vital organs unattacked. He was hopeful. Up to noon Saturday there was no sign of the end. Nourishment had been taken, but there was that restlessness to conquer and sleep to woo for the patient, or there was peril. Food enough had been taken to replenish the waste; the organs were all right; but the nervous system must be rested, and sleep only could do this.

Running into the night, there began to be an ominous sinking. There was a diminishing pulse to alarm. Dr. Steiner had resolved to give chloral, if necessary, to secure the needed sleep.

"The Governor is dying!"

This was the message that greeted all comers about ten o'clock. In the parlor fronting the quiet group was the Stephens historic chair, empty and desolate looking. So long had he lived with it, so intimately had its life been interwoven with his, so completely had it pulsed and throbbed and quivered under the touch of his gentle fingers, and so faithfully had it responded to his slightest impulse, and interpreted his innermost and unuttered thoughts, that it seemed to be part of him as it sat there so still and silent.

As the rooms were filling gradually the other parlor was lighted, and the whole lower floor was lit up just as it was when, a few months ago, many of the same persons who were then present had escorted Mr. Stephens, amid the applause and enthusiasm of a vast crowd, to his first night in the mansion. The callers made sad groups in the parlors, the library or the hall, and talked in low tones. As one of the doctors came from the sick man, he was at once surrounded by questioners. The steady response was: "He is sinking rapidly, and can live but a few moments." Even after all hope had been abandoned by those who knew best, many clung

to the idea that the Governor would still fight his way through the cloud that gathered about him.

Drs. Miller and Steiner remained at Mr. Stephens' bedside almost constantly. In the bedroom were only the physicians and relatives of the Governor. No one was denied admission, and many friends paused in the door for a moment. The Governor was lying on the front part of the bed. He was very much emaciated, and his pallor was intense. He seemed to be in no pain whatever, but breathed heavily with apparent effort. His eyes were half closed, and wore a strained expression. His left hand was resting on his breast and his right hand lost beneath the cover.

At about two o'clock in the morning it was evident that Mr. Stephens was much weaker, and that a crisis was approaching. The doctors had prepared a strong mustard plaster and put it on his wrist. They let it remain there for perhaps twenty minutes. When they removed it there was not the slightest sign of inflammation, showing that there was very little vitality left. At about half-past two his extremities became cold and clammy, assuming a purplish hue. Dr. Miller said:

"The end is not far off."

As the close drew near, Mr. Stephens was lying on his back, with his head turned slightly to the right. The husky rattle in his throat that had been plainly perceptible earlier in the night had ceased entirely. There was no more heavy breathing, and not the slightest gasping. He was as quiet as a baby asleep in its mother's arms. Dr. Miller held his slender wrist anxiously. The tired pulse had almost ceased to beat. Only once in a while could the trained fingers detect a flickering throb, as the ebbing tide wasted slowly away.

At three o'clock Drs. Steiner and Raines, who had gone to sleep, were awakened. When Dr. Steiner reached his bedside, Mr. Stephens was very much weaker. Two ladies, Mrs. Stephens and Mrs. Grier, who had retired for a little sleep, entered the room and took their place by the bed. There was then present, besides those and the physicians, Hon. J. T. Henderson, Judge Hall, Col. John A. Stephens, A. L. Kontz, T. B. Bradley, C. W. Seidell, R. K. Paul,