

at school and entered as a student at Nassau Hall, Princeton, N. J., from which college he received his diploma at the early age of fourteen. He selected law as his profession. On his return to Savannah he entered the office of Hon. Joseph Clay, a distinguished attorney and Federal judge. He studied in Mr. Clay's office two years. In 1799 he was admitted to the bar and became an active and most successful practitioner. He was but seventeen years old when he commenced his professional career. To have achieved legal triumphs, such as were, from the first, accredited to him, presupposed the possession of wonderful ability amounting to genius. During the next few years his reputation broadened, and soon his fame as advocate and jurist became a household word in the Commonwealth.

In 1809 he was selected Solicitor-General of the Eastern Circuit and so acceptable were his services that the following year he was chosen to the judgeship of the same circuit.

His record as judge was highly creditable and thrice was he returned to the position for which he had shown such great fitness, holding the office continuously until 1821. While upon the bench this country became engaged in war with England. Judge Berrien did not permit official duties to militate against his obligations to home and country and, as Colonel of Cavalry, he saw service in the vicinity of Darien and gave his undivided attention to her coast defenses. Few cases can be cited where the sword and the gown have been worn at the same time in more perfect accord.

In 1822 he was elected to a seat in the upper house of the Georgia Legislature, and there he began a career of political renown. He was made chairman of the Judiciary Committee and was instrumental in securing the passage of many important bills. The Legislature, appreciating his commanding capabilities as a statesman, in 1824 conferred upon him the highest office in the gift of the people, by electing him to the United States Senate, where he became a conspicuous figure in a larger field. "As a strong debater his claims were at once conceded and whenever his interest induced him to participate in the

John MacPherson Berrien.

JOHN MACPHERSON BERRIEN was born August 23, 1781, near Princeton, New Jersey, at the home of his paternal grandfather, John Berrien.

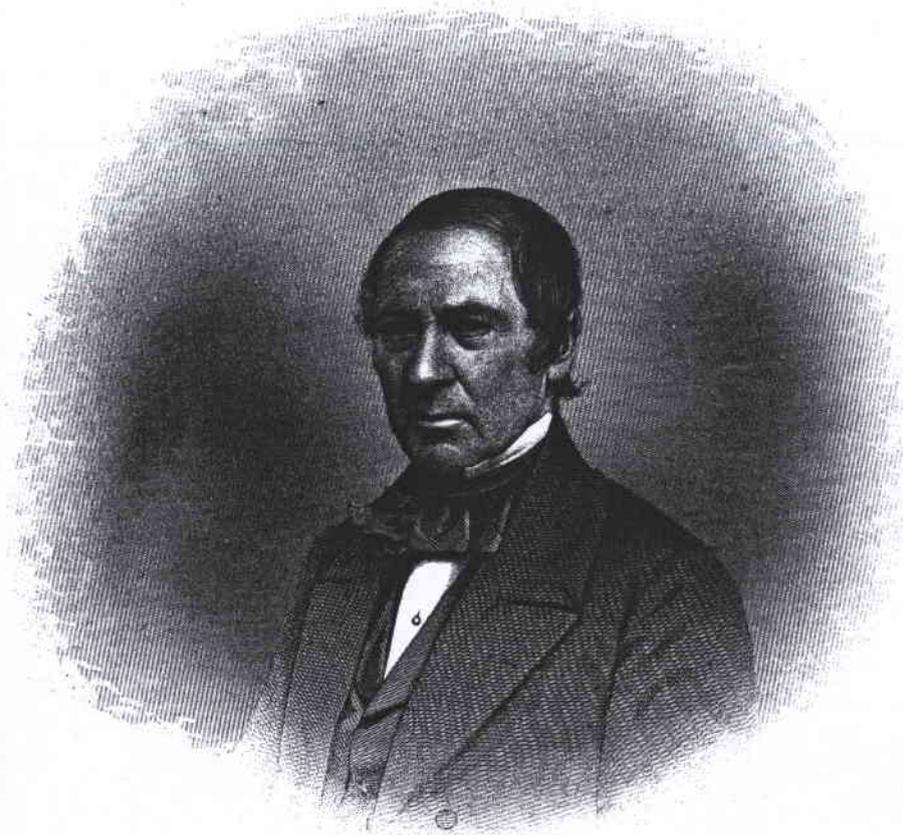
John Berrien was one of the Justices of the Colonial Supreme Court. It was in his house that General Washington had his military headquarters when he wrote his farewell address to the army.

The father of the subject of this sketch was Major John Berrien, whose gallantry as field and staff officer in the Continental service was a tribute to his Huguenot progenitors.

His mother, Margaret MacPherson, was of Scotch lineage, and a daughter of Captain John MacPherson, who commanded "The Britannia" in the Provincial Navy. Captain MacPherson was a brave soldier in the wars between England, France and Spain and was wounded nine times in battle. Margaret MacPherson's brother, Captain John MacPherson, Jr., was aide de camp to General Montgomery and shared with him a soldier's grave before the walls of Quebec, 1775. Another brother, William, was a General in the Continental Army and fought under Generals Wayne and LaFayette. These were MacPherson Berrien's pretensions to patriotic ancestry and to descent from people of influence and high repute.

Shortly after Anthony Wayne's victorious reoccupation of the City of Oglethorpe, the parents of our subject selected Savannah as their future home. This was in 1782 and for three-fourths of a century that city was the admiring witness of his numerous triumphs.

The educational advantages were very limited after the protracted War of the Revolution. Young Berrien was a precocious boy and his father determined to give him the best opportunities the country offered. He was sent to New York where he pursued a preliminary course of study. He made rapid progress



Engraved by J.C. Buttre from a Daguerreotype

John MacPherson Berrien
OF GEORGIA.

eventful discussions, his graceful diction, broad scholarship, force of argument and electrifying oratory found ready and appreciative auditors." His speeches in reference to great questions were veritable masterpieces, and his arguments were sustained by a logic and eloquence which gave universal delight.

He was an imposing and most magnetic orator. So impressed was Chief Justice Marshall with his captivating manner and superb powers in debate, that he felicitously styled Judge Berrien "The Honey-tongued Georgia Youth."

In January, 1829, during the debate on his celebrated tariff protest, the summit of his oratorical fame was reached, and he was saluted as the "American Cicero."

When General Jackson was elected President, he tendered Senator Berrien a place in his Cabinet as Attorney-General. Judge Berrien resigned his senatorial trust and accepted the Cabinet position and directed his best energies to the discharge of his new duties. He held this office more than two years with great distinction to himself and marked service to the country. At all times courtly and dignified, brilliant and profound, he was indeed an ornament and an honor to the Cabinet and of great service to the country as well. In June, 1831, he resigned his office and retired to the quiet of private life.

In recognition of the zeal and ability which had characterized his eminent services, the President asked his acceptance of the mission to England, but on account of domestic affliction (the loss of a devoted wife) he declined.

The greater part of the next ten years he lived a quiet life, but whenever the State was involved in matters of great concern, he took a very active part in all public questions.

In March, 1841, Judge Berrien was again called to the United States Senate and for a decade or more was regarded as a conspicuous figure in that high place of honor, which boasted the historic eloquence and power of Clay, Calhoun and Webster. This was the era of great and knotty questions, but Senator Berrien handled them with the skill of a master.

In 1844 he was a member of the convention which nominated

Henry Clay for the presidency and he was selected as the chairman of the committee to inform Mr. Clay of the great honor tendered him. Between 1840 and 1850 the most notable questions which engaged the United States Senate were those relating to Oregon, the Mexican War, the Wilmot Proviso and the Missouri Compromise—in all of which debates Senator Berrien took an active part. Of the compromise measure of 1850 he was a strong champion.

A distinguished writer speaking of his personality says: "He had distinctly Roman features, clear-cut, aristocratic outlines. His lofty and well proportioned form, manly bearing and luminous eyes, reflecting the greatness of the mind within, combined to make him an object of special interest at Washington. He seemed to be the only man that Webster addressed with softened voice when he turned from his seat to recognize him."

In May, 1852, Senator Berrien again resigned his seat in the Senate, and retired permanently to private life.

It is not generally known that when the Supreme Court of Georgia was organized in December 1845 it was the general wish that the Chief Justiceship of this court should first be bestowed upon Senator Berrien. When the matter was brought to his attention he promptly declined the great honor. Always alive to everything that would benefit his city, State or section, and especially in their intellectual development, he became one of the charter members of the Georgia Historical Society and over the deliberations of this distinguished body, he was first called to preside. Until the day of his death he took an active interest in the welfare of this organization.

As President of the State Society of the Cincinnati, his patriotic offices were greatly appreciated and his name stands side by side with that of his gallant father, who filled all the offices of this distinguished organization.

He was for thirty years a Trustee of Franklin College, and for his distinguished services, this time honored institution conferred upon him the honorable degree of Doctor of Laws. A similar compliment had been previously conferred by his alma

In December, 1855, at Milledgeville, Judge Berrien performed his last act of political usefulness. Infirm in health and having passed his three score years and ten, he displayed that tireless public spirit which had characterized his whole life, when, as chairman of the American party convention, he presided over their deliberations.

A few days after his return home, illness supervened and in spite of all that loving hands and medical skill could do, he was called into the presence of his God whom he had worshiped and honored all of his life. There was lamentation throughout the entire State; the city of Savannah was bowed in grief; the newspapers gave testimony to the useful services of the distinguished dead. The members of the bar attested his powers as a lawyer and a public spirited man. Eloquent testimonials of respect came from every quarter of the Union, showing that the demise of this accomplished scholar and statesman was universally regarded as a national calamity. Shortly afterwards the Legislature named one of our South Georgia counties in his honor, emphasizing the popular wish that the memory of the man who had contributed so much to the glory of the Commonwealth should be permanently embalmed in the affections of the people.

As a judge he was wise, painstaking, firm and just; as a statesman he had thorough knowledge of all public questions and broad but positive views upon the administration of government; as a citizen and a patriot he commanded the respect, the admiration and the honor of all men; as an orator he had a most graceful manner, chaste and elegant diction and a forcefulness of presentation that easily moved and captured men.