

ENCYCLOPÆDIA
OF
CONTEMPORARY BIOGRAPHY,
OF
PENNSYLVANIA.

VOL. 1.

ILLUSTRATED WITH PORTRAITS ON STEEL.

NEW YORK.
ATLANTIC PUBLISHING & ENGRAVING COMPANY.

1889.

FELIX R. BRUNOT.

HON. FELIX R. BRUNOT, a prominent citizen and philanthropist of Pittsburgh, and for more than forty years connected with the steel industry of that city, was born February 7, 1820, at the United States Arsenal, Newport, Ky. His father, Col. Hilary Brunot, was a native of Pennsylvania, and was appointed from that State to the United States Military Academy, where he was graduated in 1814. At the time of his son's birth he was temporarily stationed at Newport Arsenal, but a year later was ordered to Pittsburgh. Five years later he retired from the army and purchased a large tract of land covering the site of the present Union Railway Depot. He was successful in his business enterprises, attained prominence in local affairs in Pittsburgh, and died there March 26, 1872, in the seventy-seventh year of his age. His eldest son, the subject of this sketch, entered Jefferson College, at Cannonsburgh, when fourteen years of age. Having finished his collegiate studies he engaged as a civil engineer with W. Milnor Roberts, and was occupied in this profession until 1842, when he became interested in the milling business at Rock Island, Ill., whither he removed. In addition to this he dealt in wheat and grain and owned and managed a store at Camden, on Rock River, where his mill was situated. The business of his mill proved very successful owing to the universal advance in the price of breadstuffs which took place at that period and which was consequent, in part at least, upon the famine in Ireland. In 1847, finding himself in the possession of a comfortable fortune, Mr. Brunot returned to Pittsburgh, established himself there permanently and invested a portion of his wealth in the steel works founded in the following year by the firm of Singer, Hartmann & Co., in which he became a silent partner. Their works were probably the first on a large scale established in the city of Pittsburgh, where about seventy per cent. of all the steel used in the United States is manufactured. They are among the largest and most perfectly equipped in the United States, cover an area of between nine and ten acres, and give employment to upwards of six hundred workmen. In 1859 changes were made in the firm which in that year took the style of Singer, Nimick & Co., Limited. Mr. Brunot's connection with the

business has been continuous from its foundation to the present day. It is said of Mr. Brunot that from a very early period in his life he has evinced a warm interest in everything having for its object the advancement of the public welfare, and that "there has not been a moment in his manhood in which he has not had some benevolent or reformatory interest in hand or in heart." An enthusiastic believer in the great value of education and the importance of reading as a means of enlarging knowledge and strengthening character, he was one of the chief movers in the work of founding the Mercantile Library. This institution, the building of which alone cost a quarter of a million dollars, is one that has accomplished no end of good in an educational way, and it is justly regarded with pride by every intelligent citizen. Mr. Brunot was its President during many years, and, apart from his labors in founding it, has aided very materially in its advancement during his long connection with its affairs. He was the projector of Library Hall and is still one of its managers. In various other avenues and fields of usefulness, Mr. Brunot found more or less scope for the exercise of wise philanthropic effort, and, at the opening of the War of the Rebellion, he had already made for himself a name and fame which without another deed would have long survived him. The son of one of the nation's trained soldiers and by profession an engineer, his services would doubtless have proved of high value in a military capacity, and such was the opinion of a personal friend, high in authority, who offered him rank and military command soon after the breaking out of hostilities. Mr. Brunot's patriotism was perfectly equal to any personal sacrifice or risk, but he knew his own heart best and respectfully declined the high honor tendered him. Conscious that he could accomplish the greatest amount of good by devoting himself to the sick and wounded soldiers—a duty for which he was admirably fitted by nature and the training of his life—he determined to give himself up to this work. His first opportunity came with the great battle of Shiloh. The wail of suffering that reached the North from that field of carnage touched every heart. At Pittsburgh two relief boats were immediately stocked with medicines and supplies; and Mr. Brunot, who had been among the most active in getting them ready, giving liberally of his means in procuring what was necessary, was placed in command. Accompanied by a small band of volunteer nurses and surgeons, he moved with his little fleet down to the Tennessee River, using all possible speed, and at Pittsburgh Landing began his noble work. After rendering all the aid in his power at this point, Mr. Brunot took nearly four hundred of the sick and wounded aboard his boats,

and returned to Pittsburgh. On the way back Mr. Brunot was himself prostrated by his arduous labors and actual contact with disease; and, suffering from blood poisoning, was confined to his home for several weeks. He was no sooner up and about again than he resumed his self-appointed task, working with all his heart and energy. It was sufficient for him to know that his services were required at any point. Thither he went with all possible speed, perfectly regardless of danger, being greatly aided in his movements by "a pass from Secretary Stanton which allowed him to go through the lines at all places, wherever and whenever he would." Early in the summer of 1862 Mr. Brunot was requested to place himself at the head of a small corps of volunteer surgeons, medical cadets and others, organized under the auspices of the Pittsburgh Sanitary Committee for work at the front. He gladly accepted the call, and with some twenty-five persons proceeded to the field. "They had been engaged in their work at Savage Station several weeks when the battle of Gaines' Mills, the first of the great seven days battle, was fought on June 27th. McClellan's change of base had commenced. The Union troops, where Mr. Brunot and his band were stationed, were ordered to retreat. Such was the suffering about them among the wounded that were to be abandoned, that Mr. Brunot could not bring himself to leave, but with eleven of his young men who would not desert him, he stayed behind and kept faithfully on with his work. When the Union forces withdrew, the Confederates took possession of the point where they were located at Savage Station. Mr. Brunot was told he would not be molested provided he would aid the men in gray as well as those in blue, to which he consented. He kept at his work for nearly a week, when for some reason of their own the rebel authorities broke their word and took the whole party prisoners and sent them to the awful harboorage of Libby prison. They were thrust in with the others, the only advantage allowed being that Mr. Brunot was treated as a physician and permitted to sleep in the room set aside for that class of prisoners. They were robbed of their medicines, and of any little appliances for personal comfort they had about them. After an incarceration of eight days, during which he had full opportunity to realize the horrors to which the Union prisoners were subjected, Mr. Brunot was called out by the authorities and told that he was to be sent to Washington to negotiate an exchange of himself and two of his companions for the well known Lawrence Washington and two prominent Southerners who had fallen into Federal hands under grave circumstances. A pledge having been ex-

acted from him that in the event of the failure of his mission he would return to confinement, he was despatched to the Capital by the way of Petersburg and Fortress Monroe. When admitted to Secretary Stanton's presence he said: "I came to see if you would exchange me for a rebel." "I would give nine of them for you," replied Stanton, who was a warm personal friend of Mr. Brunot. But when the conditions were stated Mr. Stanton explained that the exchange could not be effected. He further said that Mr. Brunot must not think of returning to Richmond, as he was arrested and imprisoned in the face of the most explicit stipulations between the two armies that men engaged in aiding and caring for the wounded on the field of battle should not be taken or held as prisoners of war. But Mr. Brunot had given his word and he was not the man to regard his obligation lightly. He, therefore, braved the anger of the Secretary and went back to Savage Station, reporting the failure of his mission. Fortunately for him the exchange commissioners were then at that point and his exchange was soon effected. Upon his departure he received from the Confederate officers a written attest that he had kept faith with them and returned as agreed. His course during the remainder of the war was marked by equal devotion to the Union cause. Whenever he heard of a battle he proceeded with all despatch to the place it had occurred or was occurring, and was unremitting in his efforts to succor those who sadly needed his care. The conclusion of the struggle found him so debilitated by the arduous character of his services and the effect of malarial poisoning that he was ordered to give up everything and betake himself to Europe as the only chance of recovery. After several month's foreign travel, in which he was attended by his devoted wife, he felt a change for the better, and in the fall of 1865 he returned to America. In 1868, when Gen. Grant, then President, attempting to ameliorate the condition of the Indians, whom he believed were not always in the wrong, as many asserted, appointed the famous Board of Indian Commissioners, he named Felix R. Brunot, of Pittsburgh, first on the list. Mr. Brunot was chosen Chairman of the Board. His associates were Robert Campbell, St. Louis; William Welsh, Philadelphia; Nathan Bishop, New York; William E. Dodge, New York; John V. Farwell, Chicago; George H. Stuart, Philadelphia; Edward S. Tobey, Boston; John D. Lang, Maine, and Vincent Colyer, New York, as Secretary. The last named resigned soon after the organization of the Board and was succeeded by Thomas K. Cree, of Pittsburgh. Without compensation for their time or services, and with nothing

from the Government save transportation, these gentlemen entered upon their mission. The purpose of the creation of the Board was very clear, and in order to arrive at a just conclusion it was necessary to investigate the complaints of the Indians against the white men charged with duties towards them; and also to examine the supplies furnished to the red men, which it was alleged were grossly inferior and insufficient. The result bore out President Grant's views on the subject. Great good resulted from the investigation, and for a few years at least there was no record of flagrant outrages. In the prosecution of this eminently philanthropic work Mr. Brunot took the most intense interest. "He spent five summers in travelling among the various tribes and from post to post, going into Wyoming, Colorado, California, Washington, Oregon and Montana. He visited the various tribes, told them of his mission and asked them to freely and fully state their complaints. His reports, as sent to the President, of their various interviews, with reproductions of the speeches of the chiefs and head men, are full of an absorbing interest." Mr. Brunot met many distinguished Indian chiefs, and in common with his fellow Commissioners, was deeply impressed with the justice of their claims. Unfortunately other interests at Washington conflicted with any serious attempt to remedy these grievances substantially and permanently; and because it saw that it would never receive the support which should have been extended to it, the Commission resigned. But all the members of it retained their interest in the Indians and did good work in their behalf. Mr. Brunot in particular was active "in season and out of season," in advocating their cause and appealing for justice to them. A glance at his official reports will show the basis of his reasoning as well as explain the methods by which he thinks justice could be done them, safely and with advantage. Among these latter are granting lands to the Indians in severalty, encouraging them to work and instructing them how to farm. He disbelieves in placing them in charge of the War Department, but advocates dealing with them on truly Christian principles and in a common sense manner. Two of his sentences advocating justice to the Indian deserve to be written in letters of gold in the Halls of Congress. "If National honor," says he, "requires the observance of National obligations entered into with the strong, how much more with the weak. To repudiate, either directly or by indirection, our solemn treaty obligations with this feeble people would be dishonor, meriting the scorn of the civilized world." It is safe to say that no man has ever more honestly performed a labor

delegated to him by the National Government than has Mr. Brunot this labor in connection with the Indian grievances. Although working in such broad fields of philanthropy as those mentioned, Mr. Brunot is not insensible to his obligations as a citizen of Pittsburgh. On the contrary, he takes a hearty interest in its affairs at all times and in many ways has rendered valuable services to the people and to the municipality. In business walks he is as active as he was twenty years ago and holds directorships and trusteeships in a number of leading corporations, including the Bank of Pittsburgh, the Safe Deposit Company, the Monongahela Navigation Company and the Allegheny Cemetery Association. He is also a prominent director of the Western Pennsylvania Hospital and of the General Hospital of Allegheny; one of the managers of the Western University, and for many years has been an active member of St. Andrews Protestant Episcopal Church of Pittsburgh, of which he is Senior Warden. His life has been full of good works—in which he has been ably counselled and assisted by his devoted wife, an educated Christian woman, whose own deeds of kindness and charity would require a volume to record—and there is no disputing the fact that the high honor in which his name is held in all parts of the Nation has been won by a series of self-sacrificing and noble labors which have had few parallels in our time.
