

ENCYCLOPÆDIA
OF
CONTEMPORARY BIOGRAPHY,
OF
PENNSYLVANIA.

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SIMON CAMERON.

THE venerable Simon Cameron, politician and statesman, ex-United States Senator and ex-Secretary of War under President Lincoln, born in the closing year of the past century, and still hale and hearty in the closing years of the present, is a resident of Harrisburgh, where, after a career of a wonderfully varied and responsible activity, including years spent in the seething centre of that great abolition period which shook the country to its circumference, he passes the remaining portion of his life quietly at his home "Lochiel"—a famous old stone house built by one John Harris in 1765—and at his country place in East Donegal township; a veritable Cincinnatus, surely, for he was as much of a warrior as if he had borne arms upon the field instead of fighting the battles of his country from its Capital. As the name would almost indubitably prove, Simon Cameron is of Scotch blood, and the earliest ancestor in this country was Donald Cameron, who with his sons John and Simon and wife and Ann McKenzie (who was probably the sister of Simon's wife, who is known to have been a McKenzie), came to our shores in the spring of 1772. They were tenant farmers in their native place, and when they came to Donegal with Rev. Colin McFarquhar* (who came over in the same ship, and in 1775 became pastor of the celebrated old Donegal Presbyterian Church), they evi-

*Rev. Colin McFarquhar's wife was a relative of Mr. Cameron's grandmother.

dently had it in their minds to immediately resume their old occupation, for they took up and moved on to the glebe and farm lands attached to the church, and subsequently, when the preacher purchased a farm about two miles north of Mount Joy, they doubtless tilled that, for none of their names appear upon the Donegal assessment rolls for two or three years. In June, 1778, Simon Cameron and his brother John took the oath of allegiance, and thus we see that the family has enlisted on the side of American loyalty for over an hundred years. This Simon had a son, Charles Cameron, who it seems learned the tailoring trade at Maytown, thus breaking away from the time-honored family occupation. He married, after attaining his majority, about the year 1794, Miss Martha Pfoutz, daughter of John Pfoutz, and this humble pair were the parents of the Simon Cameron who was destined to achieve National fame, and whose name has been written upon thousands of historical pages. The family were poor, but it has been said "what they lacked in this world's goods Mrs. Cameron made up for in energy and untiring industry with her needle. She had a vigorous mind and an undaunted spirit, which triumphed over what seemed to be insurmountable difficulties that threatened to crush her spirit and challenge her husband's and her own ability to support a large and growing family." Their eldest son, William, was born in Maytown, in 1796. In the following year the family took up its home in a small frame house west of the public square in that place. In this home their sons John

Simon, James, and a sister, who married a Mr. Warford, (a civil engineer), were born, of whom James became famous as a Colonel in the late war, and was killed at the first battle of Bull-Run. The family removed from Maytown to Vinegar's Ferry, and thence, about the year 1809, to Sunbury, Pa. The Simon Cameron of whom it is our principal province to treat in this article, was born March 8, 1799, and accompanied the family to Sunbury when in his ninth year. It proved that the public career destined to extend so far down the century was also to begin very early. It was not long after the location of the family in Sunbury that the father's death occurred, and the boy was cast upon his own resources. In 1816 he entered as an apprentice in the printing office of the *Northumberland County Gazette*, then owned by Andrew Kennedy, where he continued over one year, when the proprietor was obliged to suspend business because of financial reverses. Thus suddenly thrown out of employment, he made his way on foot and by boat down the Susquehanna to Harrisburgh, where he obtained employment in the *Republican* office, carried on by James Peacock, and there he remained until he attained his majority, obtaining a thorough practical knowledge of the printing business. In January, 1821, he went to Doylestown, Pa., at the solicitation of Samuel D. Ingham, where he published the *Bucks County Messenger*. In March of the same year he entered into partnership with the publisher of the *Doylestown Democrat*, and the firm merged their papers under the name of the *Bucks County Democrat*, which publication was continued until the close of the year, when Gen. W. Rodgers purchased the establishment. Mr. Cameron then went to Washington and spent some time as a journeyman printer in the office of the *National Intelligencer*, then conducted by Gales & Seaton. Just here one cannot help feeling a little curiosity as to what Mr. Cameron's reflections may have been concerning this first sojourn in the National Capital, where in after years he dwelt so long as United States Senator and Secretary of War, and made frequent visits in the perhaps still prouder capacity of the citizen counsellor of the President. He returned to Harrisburgh in 1822, and formed a partnership with Charles Mowry in the publication of the *Pennsylvania Intelligencer*. He became State Printer, and later, through the friendship of Governor Shultze, whom he had supported for office, received the appointment of Adjutant-General of Pennsylvania, thus experiencing his first political honors. One phase of Mr. Cameron's activity in early life must not be neglected, and that is his connection with some great public works. At an early period he

took a deep interest in the development of internal improvements, and he entered into extensive contracts upon the Pennsylvania Canal, then in process of construction. As early as 1826 he began work upon the section between Harrisburgh and Sunbury, and after he had made considerable progress with this he took contracts on one or two sections of the western part of the canal. In 1831 he transferred the scene of his operations to the South. The State Bank of Louisiana, having been granted a charter which specified that in return for its privileges this corporation should build a canal from Lake Ponchartrain to New Orleans, Mr. Cameron took the contract for that great work, which was then regarded by engineers as the greatest undertaking of the time. Having employed twelve hundred men in Philadelphia, and sending them by sea to New Orleans, he and his engineers went down to that city by way of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. He spent nearly half a year upon the work, and demonstrated its practicability beyond a doubt. He was recalled to Pennsylvania, however, for political work, and never resumed the canal enterprise. Major Eaton, who was Secretary of War under Gen. Jackson, desired him to organize a delegation in his native State to attend a National Convention, which had been called to meet in Baltimore—the first National Convention, by the way, ever held in the United States—and, respecting the urgent summons which had been sent to him, he obeyed it, and, coming home, organized the delegation which went to Baltimore in the interests of Mr. Van Buren for the Vice-Presidency. A year before this Convention he had been appointed a visitor to West Point, by Gen. Jackson. He entered upon a new role, and one not fully satisfying his desires, in 1832, becoming Cashier of the newly chartered bank at Middletown. The bank was successful from the start, and Mr. Cameron remained in the position of Cashier for twenty-five years, but it did not afford him the scope that he sought, and his energies found exercise in other enterprises. His activity and ambition were far too great to be contracted in such a "pent up Utica" as a cashiership, and he found fields of broader usefulness from time to time, which, however, did not interfere with his official duties. He was the projector and creator of the railroads from Lancaster to Harrisburgh, Harrisburgh to Sunbury, and from Harrisburgh to Lebanon, and at the same time largely encouraged the Cumberland Valley Railroad. It was through his influence, too, that the Northern Central Railroad between Baltimore and Harrisburgh was made a Pennsylvania rather than a Maryland or Baltimore institution. At one time he was

President of no less than four corporations, all operating lines running within a few miles of the humble house where he was born. The real beginning of Mr. Cameron's political life may be said to have come about in 1845. The years prior to that time, dating from the early thirties, were largely devoted to railroad enterprises and other business matters, though during all that period he was a close student of affairs of state, and the occasional recipient of some comparatively small public honor. James Buchanan, however, resigning his seat in the United States Senate in 1845, when tendered the portfolio of the State Department, an election to fill the vacancy became necessary, and here, as circumstances shaped affairs, came in the opening opportunity of the man whose influence was to broaden into National extent fifteen years later. Mr. Cameron was at that time in recognized sympathy with the Democratic party, that is, of that wing which favored a protective tariff, and as such he was selected as a nominee for the place. The regular candidate of the caucus was George W. Woodward, whose selection was regarded as a triumph for the free traders. This situation rendered Cameron's chances immeasurably good, and receiving the support of many Whigs and Americans, as well as that of all the Democrats who upheld the ever-cherished policy of the State, he was elected to the United States Senate. He served from March, 1845, to March 4, 1849. On all important party manœuvres, such as the Missouri Compromise Bill, he acted with the Democrats. He was an earnest advocate of 54° 40' as the Northern boundary line between British America on the admission of Oregon, supporting the same by voice and vote, but the opposition, championed by Senator Thomas H. Benton of Missouri, triumphed, fixing said boundary at 39°. Senator Cameron proved himself true to the interests of the State, supported the principles on which he was elected, demonstrated his adequateness to the office, won the increased respect of his constituency, and in short made an auspicious opening of a great career. How well the Senator had pleased the protectionists of the State was shown, when in the winter of 1857, a candidate was to be selected to fill the place of Senator Brodhead, whose term expired on the 4th of March of that year. All of the opposition members of the Legislature, including Whigs, Native Americans and Tariff men, selected Gen. Cameron as their candidate, and he was elected for the full term. Mr. Bigler, his colleague from Pennsylvania, made a futile assault upon his title to a place in the Senate, but that body refused to consider it and he took his seat. Thus again he came prominently before the

public, and figured in all of those important antebellum matters of the Nation. It was now that there began that series of events which ushered the great Pennsylvanian into the arena of National politics. In the political movements which preceded the campaign of 1860, he became almost daily a more grandly looming figure in the minds of the people of his State, and he was named as the choice of Pennsylvania for the Presidency. His name, too, was early associated with that of Mr. Lincoln, in connection with the Republican National ticket. At the memorable Chicago Convention of 1860, when the opponents of slavery and secession were first successfully organized and enunciated the antagonism to the institutions and ideas which many men had individually opposed for years, Mr. Cameron appeared as a potent and aggressive factor. He was strongly supported for the Presidency, but lack of harmony in the Pennsylvania delegation prevented his nomination to the office. After the great political battle which followed the nomination of Lincoln, and in which our subject took an active part, Mr. Cameron was the first of those to whom the President turned for counsel. He was at once voluntarily called to a Cabinet place, and his appointment would undoubtedly have been the first one made had not intrigues interfered to prevent it. His installment in the office of Secretary of War, however, was one of the earliest movements made under the new administration, and Mr. Cameron proved splendidly equal to the arduous duties of the place. From first to last Mr. Lincoln regarded him not only as his political but his warm personal friend, and there were few, if any, such relations existing between the President and his other constitutional advisers. This fact was well known when the Cabinet was organized. While he was in the War Department his counsel was not only potential in Cabinet meetings, but was sought by the President in private. If in the Senate, during the session prior to the Lincoln administration, Mr. Cameron had been so earnest an advocate of peace, that in some quarters his loyalty was suspected, when war once became an assured fact, the sincerity of his purpose to oppose it could not be doubted by anyone. Believing that the war would require all the available resources of the Nation to preserve the Union, and doubting the speedy settlement of the trouble, he began as Secretary of War a scale of preparations to combat it which puzzled the oldest officers in the army, and brought dismay to the leaders of the Rebellion, who had calculated much on the lethargy and supineness of the Northern people. Mr. Cameron frustrated this hope by his energy, but he had the entire Cabinet against him.

He who thus labored to equip the country for a struggle, the proportions of which he alone seemed fully able in its early stages to appreciate, was assailed for his each and every act. He advocated more stringent and aggressive war measures than Mr. Lincoln was prepared to carry out, and when Gen. Benjamin F. Butler asked for instructions regarding fugitive slaves, directed him to employ them "under such organizations, and in such occupations, as the exigencies may suggest or require." Similar instructions were given to Gen. Sherman and other officers in the field. In the original draft of his annual report to Congress, in December, 1861, he boldly advocated arming fugitive slaves, but this was modified on consultation with the Cabinet. Mr. Cameron enjoyed the fullest confidence of the President, who believed in his sagacity and courage, but he could not wholly withstand the clamor against him, and that, too, on the part of men who afterwards admitted that they were mistaken, and that the Secretary's vigorous policy, could he have been permitted to carry it out, would have put an earlier end to the war, and saved an immense number of lives and an incalculable amount of money and property. To relieve the President from embarrassment, Mr. Cameron resigned the Secretaryship, June 11, 1862, was at once appointed Minister to Russia, and his influence undoubtedly tended in a large measure to secure the friendship of that powerful Nation during the Civil War. His official conduct, in a certain transaction, was censured by the House of Representatives, April 30, 1862, but Mr. Lincoln immediately sent a message, assuming, with the other heads of departments, an equal share in the responsibility. He resigned as Minister to Russia, November 8, 1862. After his return to the United States there was no abatement in the cordial relations between Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Cameron. The latter was again the most welcome of visitors at the White House, and the confidential citizen counsellor of the President. Efforts were made in 1863 to bring about the defeat of Mr. Lincoln's nomination for a second term. It was largely through Mr. Cameron that these measures were defeated. After returning from one of his many numerous visits to the Capital, our subject had prepared, at his farm in Donegal, a careful paper setting forth the merits of Mr. Lincoln as President, asserting the fidelity and integrity of his administration, and "declaring that his re-nomination and re-election involved a necessity essential to the success of the war for the Union." This paper was submitted to the Republican members of both branches of the Legislature of Pennsylvania, every one of whom signed it, and it was then pre-

resented to Mr. Lincoln and telegraphed broadcast to the press. It was a wise and politic action, and accomplished all that the statesman and the warm friend of the President anticipated or desired. It had an effect upon the party throughout the Nation, and within a few weeks the Republicans in all of the States declared for the renomination of the President, and, as all know, when the National Convention was held Mr. Lincoln came forth with all the *eclat* that could arise from an unopposed and unanimous nomination. Probably no single act of Mr. Cameron's long political career had a farther reaching or more beneficial effect than the promulgation of that one document from Donegal farm. During the years from 1864 to 1866 Mr. Cameron was unceasingly active in the politics of Pennsylvania, and it was largely owing to his untiring vigilance, and the exercise of his sagacity, that the party attained such a powerful organization as it did. In 1866 Mr. Cameron was again elected to the United States Senate, and he was appointed to the Chairmanship of the Committee on Foreign Affairs when Charles Sumner resigned in 1872. He had already served seven years in the Senate, and he now held his seat for eleven years more, resigning in 1877, thus filling the high station for a total of eighteen years—a longer term than any other man served in the same body from the State of Pennsylvania. He was a warm supporter of Secretary Seward in the necessary legislation and negotiation for the acquisition of Alaska, believing such acquisition not only advantageous to this country, but a graceful act to Russia, in appreciation of her friendly interest towards the Union during the dark days of the Civil War. From the time he took his seat in 1866, to his resignation, eleven years later, he received general recognition as one of the most useful and reliable members of that body. He was nearly always present at the sessions, even when they were supposed to be unimportant ones, and considered every measure which came up for deliberation. He was noted for his prominence in all matters of practical legislation, and his opinions on such topics as finance, internal improvements, fortifications, the public land question, commerce, manufactures, the army, pensions and the like, were always eagerly sought and regarded as sound counsel from a sagacious and conscientious student of public affairs. He warmly encouraged the building of the first Pacific railroad, and was an ardent and unceasing advocate of the opening of the public lands to actual settlers. He not only supported but urged the organization of new States, and regards the expansion of the actual boundaries of the Union—the boundaries of settlement—as the only true

course to preserve the equilibrium of power between the sections. Mr. Cameron, it is probable, had as large an influence on National legislation as any man who ever served in the Senate, and this was the more singular from the fact that he made no pretensions to oratory whatever, and, indeed, seldom took part in debate. When he did, however, his argument was always sound if his words were simple, and his delivery plain. He knew how to present facts in a manner to force an idea of their impregnability. While he had nothing of fervency nor of magnetism, as it is sometimes called, in his language, no artful trick of words or tone or manner, he was always armed with facts and he knew how to deliver such solid round shot as those most effectively. His strong, common sense views of things were tersely expressed, and he perhaps carried conviction as much because his honesty was respected as for any other reason. While other men glittered and were admired, he produced practical results. In the Senate he was essentially a strong man—a man of earnest purpose. As such he had the respect of his fellow Senators and of the Nation, and precisely as such he will pass through the pages of history, to be respected by coming generations, who will look upon him as one of the truly great statesmen of the time in which he lived, while the flash and fervor and wit of many more simply brilliant, but less sincere, men will have been forgotten. Mr. Cameron married Margaret Brua, daughter of Peter Brua, of Harrisburgh, and their children were Rachel Brua (married Judge Burnside, of Bellefonte), Margaret (married Richard J. Haldeman), James Donald, (now United States Senator), and Virginia (wife of Hon. Wayne McVeagh, Attorney-General under President Garfield).
