

GENEALOGICAL
AND
PERSONAL HISTORY
OF
Western Pennsylvania

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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Thomas, son of Andrew and Rebecca (Wauchob) Mellon, was born February 3, 1813, at Camp Hill Cottage, on his father's farm, in lower Castleton, parish of Cappagh, county Tyrone, Ireland. The estate had been in the possession of the family for many generations. When brought by his parents to the United States, Thomas Mellon was less than six years old, and from that time until attaining his twentieth year spent his summers chiefly in assisting his father in the labors of the farm, and his winters in attending the log cabin school established in the neighborhood. He manifested even then signs of a remarkable intellect, and, aided by his mother, passed many hours of the night in study. It was decided in 1833 that he was better adapted for a profession than for the calling of a farmer, and he was accordingly sent to the classical school at Monroeville, Allegheny county, conducted by Rev. Jonathan Gill. After completing the course at this institution he matriculated at the Western University of Pennsylvania (now University of Pittsburgh), then situated on Third street, and presided over by Rev. Dr. Robert Bruce, graduating in the class of 1837. Two years previous to this Mr. Mellon had begun to read law with Judge Shaler, senior partner of the firm of Shaler & Simpson, leading attorneys of that day, and in December, 1838, was admitted to the bar. With rare wisdom for so young a man, Mr. Mellon, instead of immediately entering upon the independent practice of his profession, accepted the position of managing clerk in the office of Prothonotary Thomas Liggett, founder of the well known Liggett family of East End, Pittsburgh, his object being to gain acquaintance with the members of the bar and to gain experience in the work of his profession. How well he profited by the opportunities thus afforded, is related in the legal annals of the State of Pennsylvania.

In June, 1839, Mr. Mellon opened an office on Fifth avenue, near Market street, Pittsburgh, and from the outset obtained a lucrative practice, owing to his success in bringing cases to a prompt settlement. He showed, even at this early period of his career, remarkable business sagacity, his investments proving so successful as to cause him, in combination with failing health (the result of close attention to his largely increased clientele), to seriously consider retirement from active law practice. In 1858 his friends of both the bench and bar prevailed upon him to become a candidate for a judgeship that had been recently created in the Court of Common Pleas, No. 1. He was elected, taking his seat December 29, 1858, and serving the full term of ten years, at the expiration of that time declining a renomination.

As a legal practitioner Judge Mellon's specialty was as a commercial lawyer, and he was also largely engaged in practice in the Orphans' Court, where he represented many extensive estates. He was regarded as one of the most careful and reliable lawyers of his day, and many interesting anecdotes illustrative of his sagacity, watchfulness and sense of humor, have been preserved, and are of special value, inasmuch as they reveal, as by a flash-light, many of the most vivid traits in the character of this re-

markable man. The qualifications of a good judge are many and rare, chief among them being character, ability, training and temperament, and all these were embodied to an unusual degree in Judge Mellon. His wonderful capacity for quickly discerning and perfectly retaining the principal and vital points of a case was well illustrated while he was on the bench. He was then a busy man, and often, during the trial of a case, would be occupied in attending to some private business, apparently paying no attention to the proceedings. When the time came, however, for him to deliver his charge, it was soon seen that he had fully and accurately possessed himself of the entire case, and his charges were considered models of conciseness, fairness, good law and common sense. Never making any pretensions to oratory, he used only short, crisp sentences, couched in the plainest language, this being his custom both on the bench and at the bar. His practice was almost exclusively in an advisory capacity, and he was consulted in a majority of the most important cases.

After his retirement from the bench, Judge Mellon entered the banking business, founding, in 1869, the house of T. Mellon & Sons. Associated with him were his son Andrew W., and Richard B. Mellon. For almost a quarter of a century this celebrated banking house conducted a large and successful business, the steady growth of many years marking it as one of the strong banks of Pittsburgh. Throughout this period, Judge Mellon was the controlling spirit, carrying in his own head the ramified details of the immense enterprise,—strong and sagacious, in business procedure a predecessor of Russell Sage, inasmuch as he kept on hand huge sums of ready cash which, during periods of panic and disaster, were valuable profit-makers. His strong judgment and ripe experience caused him to be much sought as an astute and capable adviser. In the financial world his influence was strong and salutary, his conservatism making for safety in business interests, and he often took occasion to warn his friends of various dangerous speculations. Judge Mellon was accustomed to say that the secret of his success lay in the fact that he had never involved himself in debt, and one of his favorite maxims was, "Attending to other people's business is a waste of time when we have profitable business of our own to attend to." The story of his life furnishes conclusive evidence of the value of this precept, inasmuch as by its use he accumulated a fortune and rose to a position of prominence.

In July, 1902, the firm retired from the banking business, turning over to the new Mellon National Bank deposits aggregating \$8,500,000. Two weeks later the call of the Comptroller of the Currency showed that the new bank stood second on the list of Pittsburgh's thirty-six national banks. In March, 1903, the Mellon Bank absorbed the Pittsburgh National Bank of Commerce, with deposits of more than \$5,000,000, and the former institution, then one year old, moved to the head of the list of local banks. A few years prior to his death, Judge Mellon withdrew from active business, his affairs passing into the hands of his sons, to whom he had transmitted the ability to keep alive the enterprises his genius had brought into being, and, as events have shown, to add to them.

Judge Mellon and his sons were also largely engaged in the coal trade in Western Pennsylvania and in West Virginia, building many short lines of connecting railroad. Another subject in which Judge Mellon and his sons were actively interested was that of street railways, building the Pittsburgh, Oakland & East Liberty Passenger Railway, and for many years remaining its principal owners. This was in the days of horse cars. Judge Mellon was also interested in other railroad projects, owned much real estate in and near Pittsburgh, and was possessed of exceptional foresight in regard to its dormant possibilities.

Always an advocate of good government, Judge Mellon was active in all the duties of citizenship. From 1877 to 1886 he was a member of the Select Council, and the development of Pittsburgh was due in large measure to his wisdom, foresight and rare common sense. For the upbuilding of the Iron City as a great manufacturing centre, much of his wealth was employed, and his genius was a sort of complement of its destinies. It has been said of Judge Mellon that he never, throughout his life, failed in any undertaking to which he seriously devoted himself. His fortune was accumulated slowly but surely, by well directed enterprise. In politics he was first a Whig and later a Republican. In matters of religion he was a man of broad views and liberal sentiments. He and his wife were members of the East Liberty Presbyterian Church.

In personal appearance Judge Mellon was thought to bear some resemblance to Henry Clay. Spare and erect, alert and commanding in bearing, with the incisive face of the thinker and the keen glance of the astute business man, his presence carried with it a suggestion of conscious power. Every feature indicated character, the mouth and chin being especially expressive of decision. His dark, penetrating eyes spoke of a wonderful strength of purpose, combined with a kindly, benevolent disposition, and his manner, under all circumstances, was that of the polished gentleman. He might well have been called "the Grand Old Man" in the financial history of Pittsburgh.

Always a great reader, Judge Mellon, after his retirement from business, passed much of his time in his library, and, owing to his wonderful memory, he was an authority upon literary and historical subjects. For many years he was the oldest living alumnus of the Western University of Pennsylvania (now Pittsburgh University), and in 1906 "The Owl," the publication of the junior class, was dedicated to him. Judge Mellon considered Benjamin Franklin one of the greatest figures in the world's history, and held him up as a model to young men. At one time he caused to be printed one thousand copies of "The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin" and distributed them among struggling young men. He further testified to his admiration for Franklin by placing a statue of him in front of the Mellon Bank Building.

Judge Mellon married, August 22, 1843, Sarah J. Negley, of the old and numerous family of the East End, descended from Jacob Negley, who laid out the town of East Liberty, where he owned over a thousand acres of land, and in 1820 built the first steam grist-mill operated in Western

Pennsylvania. Judge Mellon and his wife were the parents of the following children: Andrew W., president of the Mellon National Bank; Richard B., vice-president of the same institution; James R.; Thomas A., deceased; Selwin; George N.; Rebecca; and Emma, deceased. In his domestic relations Judge Mellon was extremely happy, finding in his wife an ideal help-mate, and seeing his sons rise up to succeed him in the financial world and maintain and increase the great enterprises which owed their origin to his genius. His life, so noble and beneficent, was prolonged many years beyond the traditional "three score and ten." On February 3, 1908, the ninety-fifth anniversary of his birth, Judge Mellon passed away, "full of years and of honors." Honorable in purpose and fearless in conduct, he had stood for the greater part of a century as an example to three generations of every public and private virtue, and he passed from the scene of his long and honorable career, followed by the love and veneration of his city and his State. Among the innumerable tributes to his character and work was the following extract from an editorial which appeared in a Pittsburgh paper:

Thomas Mellon was one of the strong men who made Pittsburgh a great city. He was of that rugged, pushing, progressive type which chafed under ordinary limitations and believed in doing things on a large scale, often as a pioneer in development. Combined with a business sagacity that was unusual, he had that other gift of seeing somewhat farther ahead than most men, and thus he became a considerable factor in promoting new activities, in financing enterprises of greater or less general importance, and in opening up and improving new communities. Eventually the projects which he fathered became the foundation of great interests which were broadened and multiplied by his sons and associates until they have become known as among the most extensive of their kind hereabouts, not the least among them being the banking house which bears the family name, the largest of its class in Pittsburgh and equalled by few in the United States.

Judge Mellon was not merely a prosperous business man, but for twenty years he was a successful lawyer, developing such marked ability in his chosen profession that he was elevated to the bench at a time when he was considering retirement. He was a loyal Pittsburgher of quiet ways and homely virtues. He had earned and held the respect of three generations of his fellow-men, and he gave to the community a group of sons and grandsons who are remarkable in that they have maintained and in some instances surpassed the business success which distinguished Judge Mellon in the heyday of his vigor and activity.

By his career at the bar and on the bench, Judge Mellon added lustre to the record of the legal profession in Pennsylvania. In the financial world he was for many years a tremendous figure, augmenting and vitalizing by his genius the material prosperity of his beloved city. As "one who loved his fellow-men" he is enshrined in the hearts of multitudes. Jurist, capitalist, philanthropist,—truly, his works do follow him.
