

JAMES SPROUL.*

The subject of this portrait, James Sproul, son of Charles Sproul, was born in Armagh, province of Ulster, Ireland, in the year 1785. When James was eleven years old, his father, with his family, removed to Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania seaport to which the majority of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians came when escaping from the oppression of the Established Church of England, and Charles Sproul, being an uncompromising Presbyterian, naturally embarked for this "haven of rest," among the Quakers, from the religious persecutions to which he was exposed in the Mother Country.

After residing a short time in Philadelphia, Charles removed with his family to Spring Mill, Montgomery county, Pennsylvania, and here his children supplemented their Irish education in the parochial schools of that community.

After spending two years in school, during which time he made rapid progress in his studies, James determined to engage in some mechanical vocation, for which he had an especial aptitude, and, in accordance with this desire, he became a millwright's apprentice, and, after serving his time, as an apprentice and journeyman, engaged in conducting the business for himself, and has the credit of erecting the first rolling mill for the now widely-known Phoenix Iron Company.

In his mechanical ventures, Mr.

*Biographical sketch of a famous early ironmaster in Southeastern Lancaster County, read before the Society by Dr. J. W. Houston on the occasion of the presentation of his photograph by his grandson, Hon. W. C. Sproul.

Sproul became an acknowledged expert, and, after spending a few years along the tributaries of the Schuylkill and erecting all sorts of hydraulic works, he formed a co-partnership with the Clark Brothers, famed for their mechanical knowledge, and removed to Doe Run, Chester county.

Becomes an Ironmaster.

During the war of 1812-1815, Mr. Sproul, seeing the rapid advancement in the price of iron, entered into a partnership with one Frank Pait and they erected a forge at White Rock, on the west branch of the Octorara, in Colerain township, Lancaster county.

Before the forge was in operation, Mr. Paik became discouraged, as the price of iron was falling, and sold out his interest to Mr. Sproul, who was of sterner mould, and who, throwing his oft-tried energy into the enterprise, determined to "make it a go or spoil a horn."

About this time Robert Sproul, a younger brother, was associated with James, and they engaged in a number of iron enterprises, and James Sproul became regarded as the leading ironmaster of Lancaster county. He purchased from John Withers a large tract of land on the east branch of the Octorara, upon which three forges had been erected, known as Upper and Lower Sadsbury and Ringwood Forges. His White Rock forge he leased to John Alexander, a worthy and deserving gentleman, thus assisting Mr. Alexander to carve out for himself a name of which his friends and family are justly proud. In after years Mr. Sproul assisted a trusty and efficient clerk, Mr. John McGowan, to engage in the iron business successfully, and become a leader in his community. Mr. Sproul sought out worthy young men and helped them on to lives of usefulness.

Mr. James Sproul was a Christian gentleman, possessed of all the attributes of Christianity. Charity, the greatest of these, was unbounded, when the recipient was worthy. No suffering in the families of his employes escaped his attention and bounty. In after years, when he had been summoned Home, many of his older employes remained about their former habitations, and, as the writer sat within the abodes of these workmen and heard them recount the many acts of kindness performed for them by Mr. Sproul, he could not but place a high estimate on his Christian character.

The Sproul Family.

Mr. Sproul was married in the year 1830 to Miss Annie Johnson. She proved to be a "Mother in Israel" and since the rearing of their children largely devolved upon her, the credit attached to the training of their distinguished family should in a great measure be hers, as Mr. Sproul's numerous business engagements required most of his time and attention.

Unto this happy union seven children were born. The eldest, Charles N. Sproul, received a classical education and read law with Hugh R. Fulton in 1875 and was admitted to the Lancaster Bar. In 1863 he enlisted in the Forty-third Pennsylvania Volunteer Militia, and was an exemplary soldier—refusing a commission which was tendered him. After his discharge from the service, he returned to his mother's home at New London, Chester county, and devoted his time to the management of her estate. He died a few years ago.

The second child, James C., died in childhood.

The third, Margaret A., married Mr.

Robert H. Hodgson, and resides near to New London, Chester county.

In order, next came William H. Sproul, of Chester, Delaware county. He has been a member of the Chester City Council for many years, and has been, and is now, associated with many of the leading enterprises of that flourishing city. He married Miss Dora Slokom, daughter of the late Samuel Slokom, of Christiana, Pa., well and favorably known to the politicians and business men of our own county. Two sons blessed this marriage, Everett, a prominent business man, formerly of Roanoke, Va., and now of Chester. The younger son, William Cameron, the donor of this handsome portrait, is also a widely known business man, and a prominent Republican leader in Delaware county, and represents his county in the Pennsylvania State Senate, having served as President pro tem. of the Senate. He is author of the Sproul Good Roads Law.

Mary D., fourth child, and second daughter of James Sproul, married John T. Dewitt, of Cecil county, Maryland.

James, the second, married Mary R. Slokom, daughter of Samuel Slokom, and sister of Mrs. Wm. H. Sproul.

The youngest child of James Sproul, Sr., was Robert C., who lived in the old homestead in New London, up to the time of his death, which occurred about two years ago. He was unmarried.

Political and Religious Affiliations.

In politics, Mr. Sproul, like all iron manufacturers, was favorable to protection—tariff for the protection of home industries. The opposing party, the Democratic, favored a tariff for revenue only, and in the years 1840 and 1844 it was a common sight to

see all of the six-horse teams of the Iron Masters, loaded with employes, attending the political meetings and elections and voting for the Whig nominees. Mr. Sproul's descendants seem to have inherited "Protection for home industries."

Mr. Sproul was in favor of education for all and freely contributed to the support of the schools. When the public school system was inaugurated he influenced the building of the No. 2 Sadsbury Public School house on his property, for the benefit of the children of his employes.

During Mr. Sproul's life the wooded hillsides of the gorge through which flows the east branch of the Octorara for three miles were studded with tenements in which resided his employes, each house having attached an acre or two of cleared land, on which was raised corn, potatoes, and other vegetables, for the use of the family resident.

While Mr. Sproul was a Presbyterian, he was not bigoted in his religious views, and freely gave of his substance for the support of other denominations, as the records of old Wasteland Methodist Church will attest.

Mr. Sproul died in the year 1847, after an active life of sixty-two years. It is with feelings of admiration and reverence that we do him honor here to-night, as a former resident of Lancaster county, and apply to our own lives the lessons taught us by his useful and exemplary career.

It affords me great pleasure to accept, in the name of the Historical Society of Lancaster county, this beautiful oil color portrait of James Sproul, and to acknowledge the graceful compliment which is thus paid our Society by his distinguished grandson, the Hon. William C. Sproul.

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