

A PROMINENT SCOTCH-IRISHMAN.

In the early settlement of the territory now included in Lancaster county, the portion north of the Mine Ridge was occupied mainly by those speaking the German language, while those speaking English "took up" the portion south of that ridge and familiarly known as the "lower end." Of these the emigrants from the north of Ireland, usually termed "Scotch-Irish," from their Scottish ancestry, were the most numerous, the English Quakers coming next in Point of numbers.

Subsequent settlers naturally divided in the same manner, each family trying to locate among those speaking a familiar language ; and this rule holds good in the main to this day.

Early in the spring of the year 1796 Charles Sproul, a native of county Armagh, in the north of Ireland, with his wife and family sailed for Philadelphia, his son, James Sproul, the subject of this sketch, being then a lad of eleven years of age. The whole family, including father and mother, would seem to have been liberally educated for that time, and with a rigid regard for the Bible and its teachings, as understood by the Scotch-Irish pastors of the Covenanter and Presbyterian churches of one hundred years ago.

After the usual stormy passage of nearly three months they arrived safely in Philadelphia and located in that city; but not liking the city, they soon removed to Spring Mills, in Montgomery county, where James supplemented his Irish education with a winter or two in the not very promising country school of that day. That James made the best use pos-

sible of these limited opportunities to secure an education cannot be doubted in view of his subsequent career.

He was anxious, however, to get to work, and being a born mechanic had a strong desire to deal with and manage machinery. His only opportunity for this near his home was in a country mill, so he prevailed on the miller to take him as an assistant.

In a few months he had so mastered the details of the mill that it is said he knew more about the machinery than the owner and made small repairs that the owner could not have done; but the mill needed greater repairs than he was capable of making, so a millwright was secured and James became his helper. In this position he was entirely at home and became so useful and efficient that the millwright determined to secure him, and between them they procured the miller's consent to his leaving to learn the trade of a millwright.

In this he rapidly became an expert, and followed it for several years, working along the Schuylkill river and its tributaries, on all kinds of mills and on all sorts of machinery propelled by water. While here he assisted in building the first mill for rolling iron erected by the Phoenix Iron Company, on the grounds where their present enormous plant is located.

On leaving the Schuylkill he came to Doe Run, in Chester county, and formed a partnership with the Clarks, a firm of contracting millwrights, but the war of 1812 to 1815 was now on and the price of iron was advancing rapidly, and young Sproul thought he saw a fortune in the business.

He accordingly formed a partnership with a Frank Paik, and together they erected a forge at White Rock, on the

east bank of the west branch of the Octorara, in Colerain township, this county, near where White Rock station now stands. Before the forge was ready to operate Paik got tired of the venture and withdrew from the firm, but Sproul stuck to it, probably receiving some financial assistance from the Colemans, who were also Scotch-Irish, from the county of Donegal.

On the completion of the plant the price of iron was falling and the war was nearing an end, so that the venture was not nearly so profitable as he had hoped, but he had a good, well built forge as compared with others and he ran it quite successfully for some twelve or thirteen years, making considerable money. While here he secured quite a large interest in Black Rock Furnace, four miles up the stream from White Rock. He was also interested with Edward Coleman in the Conowingo Rolling Mill, on the site or near the Conowingo Furnace, and with one of the Gruhb family in the forges at Codorus, York county, Robert Sproul, a younger brother of James, managing them.

By this time Sproul had established quite a reputation as a successful iron master, and he determined to concentrate his operations, which, in his opinion, had become so much scattered that he could not personally supervise their workings. He leased his White Rock Forge to John Alexander, another representative of the Scotch-Irish of Lancaster county, and purchased from John Withers a large tract of land with three forges on it, in Sadsbury township, on the west bank of the east branch of the Octorara, so fully described in an article just read. He removed to these forges in 1828, and after enlarging and improving the same commenced operations.

His intention now was to make a very superior iron and sell the same for special uses, at a price considerably above ordinary hammered iron, and in this he was fairly successful. The forges were known as the upper and lower Sadsbury forges and the Ringwood forge. The upper forge was arranged to refine the iron and make it into what was known as anconies, when it was transported to the lower or chafery forge, *where* a higher welding heat was given to it and it was hammered into the required shapes.

The pig iron was boiled or puddled in much the same manner as now, but the process was very crude, much longer, more laborious and less productive of finished iron than now. Very much of the iron passed off as cinder in the operation and every forge had large banks of cinder around it. Mr. Sproul knew that large quantities of iron remained *in* this cinder, and therefore built an addition to the upper forge expressly to deal with these immense cinder piles, and was successful in reclaiming about 40 per cent. of the weight of this cinder in iron, though the quality of this cinder iron was not nearly so good as the other iron.

This cinder addition, however, was very ^P profitable and all the cinder on the ground and all that was made was put through this process. This gave Mr. Sproul quite a variety of irons at a variety of prices, so that he could accommodate all customers, and he did quite a thriving business.

He sold considerable iron to the hardware stores and manufacturers of Lancaster, Wilmington and Philadelphia ; but his best customers were Whitney & Co., of Hartford, Conn., who were large manufacturers of firearms. He hammered this gun iron into octagonal shapes, from $3/4$ to $1 1/2$ inches in diameter, and

while it was necessary to take only the very best stock, employ only the most skilled workmen and exercise the greatest care in making it, the buyers were willing to pay a good price for it and Mr. Sproul found it profitable to strive for their trade, which he secured almost entirely and continued to hold until his death. The raw material he found best adapted to his use was the Cornwall and Colebrook pig iron with a small percentage of good wrought scrap.

As soon as his business got to running smoothly he purchased what was known as the Hamilton tavern, on East King street, this city, which occupied the ground on which the house of George Nauman, Esq., and the two houses next, east of it, are built.

He reserved a portion of the yard of this tavern for his own use and made arrangements that the sellers of the pig iron should deliver to that point, where his teams loaded it and hauled it to the forges. Sproul's wagons were drawn by six mules or horses and made as a rule two round trips per week, though in seasons of great activity sometimes three trips were made. Their load was 1 to 2 1/2 tons, according to the condition of the roads. The teamsters carried hay and feed for their teams and bedding for themselves.

When there were orders from Lancaster parties for finished iron the teams would have loads both ways, but more frequently they went to Lancaster empty.

When Mr. Sproul came to Sadsbury he was over forty years of age and unmarried, having always been too busy to marry, but in 1830 he was married to Miss Annie Johnson. Seven children blessed this union—Charles N., now living in Philadelphia and unmarried ; James C., died in *infancy* ; Margaret A., married to

Robert H. Hodson, and living near New London, in Chester county ; William H. married to Dora Slokom, daughter of the late Samuel Slokom, of Christiana, now living in Chester, Delaware county, Pa. ; Mary D., married to John T. Dewitt, and living in Cecil county, Md. ; James, married to Mary R. Slokom, daughter of Samuel Slokom, and living in Chester, Delaware county, Pa. ; and Robert C., living in New London, Chester county, and unmarried,

Whatever Mr. Sproul forgot or neglected by reason of his active, busy life, it cannot be said that he forgot or neglected his early Irish religious training and the Sproul mansion, we are assured, was rather a doleful place on Sunday to the household of youngsters named above. The place was quite secluded and they were not permitted on that day to go visiting, or to leave the house except to go to church. Newspapers, of course, were wholly unthought of and the only books permitted were the Bible, the larger and shorter catechisms, Fox's "Book of Martyrs," Baxter's "Saints' Rest" and his "Call to the Unconverted," supplemented by the "Westminster Confession of Faith" and perhaps a volume or two of carefully selected sermons of the **seventeenth** century. "The Pilgrim's Progress" was not quite orthodox, not being of Presbyterian origin. It was rather tough on the rising generation, but since they have grown up it cannot be said that they were hurt by it.

The story frequently told of James Sproul that while a young man, employed as a wood chopper by the Colemans, he secured his first promotion by sending in an order from the woods to the store so beautifully written that he was at once sent for and put into the counting room, seems to be like so many similar stories,

wholly without foundation. He was never employed by the Colemans in any capacity, though they were always his fast, firm, unwavering friends, and on more than one occasion, when things went wrong with him and he was in great danger of failing, came to his assistance. For many years preceding his death, however, it cannot be said that he required any financial aid. He died January 7, 1847, aged 62 years, possessed of quite a large estate.

After Mr. Sproul's death, the forges were rented to different parties who ran them with varied success. Some of them ran at times until the close of the war of the rebellion, but the expensive hauling by wagons, the growing scarcity of charcoal, the cheapness and general introduction of steam power as a motor, the immense rolling mills that grew out of this, and perhaps above all the more scientific manipulation of the iron in immense quantities, were too much for the country till hammers with their single advantage of a cheap water power, so they gradually faded away and are gone.

The reader claims no credit for the above sketch. The subject of it died fifty years ago. To-day none of his active contemporaries can be found, and his living children were all too small in his life to understand or remember much of his varied operations, so that it **was** extremely difficult to trace his career with accuracy. It may be said to be the joint contributions of his descendants, mainly of Wm. H. Sproul, of the firm Sproul & Lewis, wholesale grocers, Chester, Pa., who is his third son.

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