

History of the Counties of Dauphin and Lebanon in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, William Henry Egle, M.D., M.M., Philadelphia, Everts and Peck, 1883

Simon Cameron, son of **Charles Cameron** and **Martha Pfoutz**, was born March 8, 1799, at Maytown, Lancaster County, Pa. On the paternal side he is descended from the clan **Cameron**, of Scotland, who shared their fortunes with the unfortunate **Charles Edward**, whose star of hope sunk on the field of Culloden. **Donald Cameron**, his great-grandfather, was a participant in that memorable battle, and having escaped the carnage made his way to America, arriving about 1745-46. He afterwards fought under the gallant **Wolfe** upon the Heights of Abraham, and during the war with France was in continuous service. His grandfather, **Simon Cameron**, was an early associator in the Revolution, and took the oath of allegiance June 1, 1778; a brother, **John**, signed the same day. Of the latter **Gen. Bingham**, of Philadelphia, is a grandson. On the maternal side he is descended from **Conrad Pfoutz**, an emigrant from the Palatinate, Germany. He settled in Lancaster County, and Pfoutz's Valley, in now Perry County, perpetuates the name of a hero of the border warfare of Pennsylvania in the days when the treacherous Delawares and perfidious Shawnees sought to desolate the homes of the early pioneers of our State,—**John Pfoutz**. **Charles Cameron** and **Martha Pfoutz** had a large family, yet a remarkable one, and the history of our country gives but few instances of the successful career of an entire family, among whom the subject of this sketch is the most prominent.

When young **Cameron** was about the age of nine years his parents removed to Northumberland County, where his father shortly afterwards dying, he was early cast upon his own exertions. There were then few advantages afforded by public schools, and his educational facilities were exceedingly limited. Having an unquenchable fondness for books, young **Cameron** was able to perceive no other means so likely to satiate his appetite as a printing-office, it seeming to him the chief centre of thought in the community in which destiny had fixed his lot. He therefore entered, in 1816, as an apprentice to the printing business with **Andrew Kennedy**, editor of the Northumberland County Gazette, at Northumberland, where he continued one year, when his employer, owing to financial reverses, was obliged to close his establishment. Being thus thrown out of employment, he made his way by river-boat and on foot to Harrisburg, where he secured a situation in the printing-office of **James Peacock**, editor of the Republican, with whom he remained until he had attained his majority.

In January, 1821, he went to Doylestown, Pa., at the solicitation of **Samuel D. Ingham**, where he published the Bucks County Messenger. As editor of this paper he evinced a breadth of information which, in view of his limited advantages, seemed astonishing. In March of the same year he entered into partnership with the publisher of the Doylestown Democrat, and the firm merged their papers into the Bucks County Democrat, which publication was continued until the close of the year 1821, when the establishment passed into the hands by purchase of Gen. W. T. Rodgers. The succeeding winter **Mr. Cameron** spent in the office of Messrs. Gales & Seaton, publishers of the National Intelligencer, at Washington, as a journeyman printer. He returned to Harrisburg in 1822, and entered into partnership with **Charles Mowry** in the management of the Pennsylvania Intelligencer, then the organ of the Democratic Party at the State capital, and enjoyed the official patronage of the State administration, and was elected one of the printers to the State, a position he held seven years. Having been the early friend and supporter of Governor Shulze, upon ceasing to be State printer, he was honored by that executive with the appointment

his of adjutant-general of Pennsylvania, the duties of which office he discharged with ability and to the satisfaction of the public.

Gen. Cameron at an early period took a deep interest in the development of internal improvements, and took extensive contracts upon the Pennsylvania Canal, then in process of construction. In 1826 he began building the section between Harrisburg and Sunbury and after this was well under way he took one or two sections on the western division of the canal. When Louisiana granted a charter to the State Bank of that commonwealth, it provided that the bank should build a canal from Lake Pontchartrain to New Orleans. **Gen. Cameron** took the contract for that great work, which was then regarded by engineers as the greatest undertaking of the time. In 1831 he started for New Orleans. He employed twelve hundred men in Philadelphia, and sent them by sea to that city. He, with his engineers and tools, went down the Mississippi River, embarking at Pittsburgh. He spent nearly half a year upon the work, and demonstrated beyond a doubt its entire feasibility. He was recalled from his work on the Lake Pontchartrain Canal by a summons from Maj. Eaton, Secretary of War under Gen. Jackson, who requested him to return to Pennsylvania and organize a delegation to the National Convention, which had been called to meet in Baltimore. This was in the interest of Martin Van Buren for the Vice-Presidency. Calhoun had served eight years, had quarreled with Gen. Jackson during his second term, and had otherwise put himself in antagonism to the prevailing popularity of Jackson. **Gen. Cameron** respected the summons, came home and organized a delegation that went to Baltimore in the interest of Mr. Van Buren for the Vice-Presidency. This was the first National Convention ever held in the United States. **Mr. Cameron** was requested to accept the permanent chairmanship of that convention, but declined, and a gentleman from North Carolina was selected.

After the National Convention in Baltimore he was appointed a visitor to West Point by Gen. Jackson, and upon performing his duties on the Hudson he made his first trip to New England. He went with a brother of **Bishop Potter**, of Pennsylvania, and thoroughly inspected the paper-mills and other manufactures of that section.

In the winter of 1832 the Legislature chartered the bank at Middletown, and he became its cashier. From the first the bank was successful, but the duties of cashier were so limited that **Gen. Cameron** sought other fields of labor and usefulness, although he remained there twenty-five years. He projected and created the railroads from Middletown to Lancaster, from Harrisburg to Sunbury, from Harrisburg to Lebanon, and at the same time gave large encouragement to the Cumberland Valley Railroad. And in this connection it may be stated that the Northern Central Railroad from Harrisburg to Baltimore was captured by him from Baltimore interests and made a Pennsylvania institution; and he was at one time president of not less than four corporations, all operating lines within a few miles of the spot where he was born.

In 1838, President Van Buren tendered to **Gen. Cameron** the appointment of a commissioner with **James Murray**, one of the most respected citizens of Maryland, under a treaty with the Winnebago Indians to settle and adjust the claims made against the Indians by the traders. These claims were for goods furnished the Indians during a long period of years, and the sum appropriated by the treaty was three hundred thousand dollars. In many cases the commissioners found the claims of the traders unjust, and every account allowed by them met with the

approbation of the commissioner appointed by the Indians. In the settlement of some of the claims, the aggregate amount having been reduced from over a million to about two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, the traders refused to accept the award, and went to Washington with charges against the commissioners. It had been the usual custom to give the entire appropriation to the claimants, but this course did not allow of any division. The charges were met by a demand from the commissioners for a re-examination, which resulted in the appointment of a new commission the next year, under whose direction the Indians were assembled in council, who approved by a united vote of their council the entire acts of Messrs. **Cameron** and **Murray**, and the account thus adjudged was paid by the government.

In 1845, when James K. Polk tendered the State Department to James Buchanan, and that gentleman resigned his seat in the Senate of the United States, an election to supply the vacancy became necessary. **Gen. Cameron** was at this time in recognized sympathy with the Democratic Party, and selected as the representative of the wing of the party which favored the policy of a protective tariff. The regular caucus nominee of the Democracy, however, was **George W. Woodward**, which was regarded as a free trade triumph, rendering it possible for some other Democrat known to be honestly devoted to the ever-cherished policy of the State to be elected by a union of the Whigs, Americans, and those Democrats in favor of the protective policy. The result was the election of **Simon Cameron** to the United States Senate. From March, 1845, to March 4, 1849, he served his State faithfully in that body, and proved himself true to the great interests committed to his charge, and he never wearied in the support of the principles on which he was elected. It may be here stated that President Polk at the first seemed inclined to ignore **Mr. Cameron**, declaring his election to the Senate as having been outside the party organization; but this treatment he found to his cost was not conducive to his own peace of mind, sent for **Gen. Cameron**, made a truce with him, and there was never any more trouble.

In the winter of 1857 the entire opposition members of the Legislature, consisting of Whigs, Native Americans, and Tariff Men, selected **Gen. Cameron** as their candidate to fill the place of **Senator Brodhead**, whose term of service expired on the 4th of March that year. The Democratic caucus nominated **Col. John W. Forney**, then the intimate friend of President Buchanan, who had written a letter to the Legislature naming him as his choice for the senatorship, although a large portion of the party were in favor of **Henry D. Foster**, who was an outspoken tariff man. The united votes of the opposition, with three Democratic votes, two from Schuylkill and one from York, in which counties **Gen. Cameron** possessed great strength and popularity on account of his firm devotion to their industrial interests, were cast in his favor, and he was elected for the full term. He took his seat in the Senate on the 4th of March, notwithstanding the futile assault made by his colleague from Pennsylvania, **Mr. Bigler**, upon his title to the place, and which that body refused to consider. **Gen. Cameron's** return to the United States Senate brought him again prominently before the public, and in the political movements which preceded the campaign of 1860 he was named as the choice of Pennsylvania for the Presidency, and his name early associated with that of Mr. Lincoln in connection with the Republican national ticket.

Gen. Cameron's national career began at the Chicago Convention in 1860, when the Republican Party, crystallized into a national organization, made its open, clear, and stern antagonism to slavery. With intuitive sagacity the advocates of slavery recognized in the Republican Party the

force which would ultimately overthrow it, and men like **Gen. Cameron** were recognized as the leaders of that force. There was no mistaking the measure of which it entered on the canvass in 1860. When Mr. Lincoln was nominated, **Gen. Cameron** made himself felt in such a manner as to win the confidence of that illustrious statesman. After the great political battle of that year, **Gen. Cameron** was the first of those to whom Mr. Lincoln turned for counsel, and the offer of a cabinet office by the latter to the former was a voluntary act, and that appointment would have been made the first in the selection of his cabinet had not intrigues interfered to defer it at the time. Mr. Lincoln looked on **Gen. Cameron** from first to last not only as his political, but his warm personal friend, and there were no 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, and heeded in such a marked manner as to create a feeling of hostility, which caused the President much unpleasantness. Then, too, believing that the civil war would require all the available resources of the nation to preserve the Union, 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 chagrined the leaders of the Rebellion, who had calculated much on the supineness and lethargy of the Northern people. **Gen. Cameron** frustrated this hope by his energy, but he had the Cabinet to a man against him. When he sought to furnish the necessary supplies for the army, he was met by sickly sentimentality about settling the war in diplomacy. The Confederates resorted to the ruse of diplomacy by means of commissioners, for the purpose of retarding this activity, but at the same time **Gen. Cameron** was filling up the arsenals which had been despoiled by the former Secretary of War, thus supplying the army with huge quantities of ordnance, and commissary and quartermasters' stores, etc. Such work naturally attracted the attention of the sordid, excited the timid, aroused the jealous, and confounded the suspicious. The minister who thus labored to equip his country for a struggle with treason, the proportions of which he alone seemed fully to appreciate, was assailed for each and all of these acts. Mr. Lincoln had the fullest confidence in his Secretary of War; he believed in his sagacity and relied on his courage, but he could not wholly withstand the clamor, the outgrowth of cowardice on the one side and the cunning greed of adventurers on the other, so that **Gen. Cameron**, to relieve Mr. Lincoln from embarrassment, resolved to resign, and on the 11th of January, 1862, returned the portfolio of the War Department to the President; but in that act he commanded the renewed confidence of Mr. Lincoln, who the day he accepted his resignation nominated the retiring minister for the most important diplomatic mission in his gift. Nor was this all: Mr. Lincoln insisted that **Gen. Cameron** should name his own successor, an act which no retiring cabinet officer ever did before or since. The mission to Russia involved the safe and sagacious handling of our relations with the Czar's government at a moment when it demanded the most prudent direction. The kindly relations which existed between the colossal power of the North and the great republic of the West dated back in their amity when Catharine declined to take part with England in the suppression of American Colonial Revolution for independence. **Gen. Cameron** restored this feeling, and thus frustrated English and French intrigue to organize an alliance with Napoleon III at its head in the interest of the Southern Confederacy. The country has never fully appreciated this fact, because it was a part of its diplomacy which admitted of no correspondence. This object accomplished, concluded **Gen. Cameron's** mission to Russia. There was in fact nothing more to do in St. Petersburg but to maintain what had been established, and he could with safety ask for his credentials and retire.

The relations between Mr. Lincoln and **Mr. Cameron** were always most cordial, and immediately upon his reaching the United States the latter was the accepted citizen-counselor at the White House. At this time efforts were being made looking to defeating the renomination of Mr. Lincoln for a second term. It was a period of great solicitude to the President, who with characteristic modesty declined to make any movement in his own behalf. In the winter of 1864 the intrigue referred to was talked of in political circles at Washington as a success. **Gen. Cameron** visited the national capital repeatedly at that time, and on reaching his farm after a return from one of these visits had a paper prepared, embodying the merits of Mr. Lincoln as President, acknowledging the fidelity and integrity of his first administration, and declaring that his renomination and re-election involved a necessity essential to the success of the war for the Union. That paper was submitted to the Republican members of both branches of the Legislature of the State of Pennsylvania, every one of who signed it, and in this shape was presented to Mr. Lincoln, and telegraphed to the country at large. Its publication accomplished all that the forethought of its originator anticipated. In three weeks after the issuing of this letter, it was a curious spectacle to watch the precipitation with which the Republicans in all the States hastened to declare in favor of Mr. Lincoln's renomination; so that when the National Convention assembled to do that act, there was no opposition to him.

From 1864 to 1866, **Gen. Cameron** took a very active part in the politics of Pennsylvania, giving to the organization of the Republican Party a prestige which enabled it to bear down all opposition. He was the one leader of that party who could rally it in despondency and hold it in fidelity to its pledges.

In 1866 he was re-elected to the United States Senate, a position he held a longer term of years than any man sent to the same body from the State of Pennsylvania. His influence on national legislation was as great as that of any man that ever served in the Senate. The singularity of this influence is revealed in greater force when it is remembered that he seldom participated in debate. He made no pretension to oratory, but his talk was sound, his argument lucid, and his statement of fact impregnable. What he lacked in fervid, flashing speech he made up in terse, solid common sense. From the time he entered the Senate until he resigned his seat in 1877—a continuous service of eleven years—he was recognized as one of its most useful and reliable members, and at the date of his resignation was chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, a position only accorded to a senator of admitted statesmanship. He was foremost always in practical legislation. His opinions on questions of commerce, manufacturing, finance, internal improvements, fortifications, and the public domain were always accepted as guiding counsel. He encouraged the building of the first Pacific Railroad, was a warm supporter of opening the public lands to actual settlers, and no man in Congress before or after he left it did more, and few as much as he, for the fostering, promotion, and protection of American industry. He lost no opportunity to advocate and further the organization of new States, and regarded the expansion of the boundaries of the Union as the only true course to preserve the equilibrium of power between the sections. He made history as few other statesmen in this country created it, by producing results in the practical walks of life, such as make men prosperous and happy, that stimulate the growth of communities, whereby the country has been constantly rendered powerful abroad and a blessing to its people at home. History in its broadest scope will ever keep such individuals before the generations of men which are to live in this country, for their models in public affairs.

Gen. Cameron married **Margaret Brua**, daughter of **Peter Brua**, of Harrisburg, and their children were **Rachel**, married **Judge Burnside**, of Bellefonte; **Brua**; **Margaret**, married **Richard J. Haldeman**; **James Donald**; and **Virginia**, married **Wayne MacVeagh**.

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