LIVES

OF THE

GOVERNORS

OF

PENNSYLVANIA,

WITH THE

INCIDENTAL HISTORY OF THE STATE,

FROM

1609 TO 1873.

BY

WILLIAM C. ARMOR.

New Edition, Revised and Enlarged.

PHILADELPHIA:
JAMES K. SIMON,
No. 29 SOUTH SIXTH STREET.
1873.

ANDREW G. CURTIN,

GOVERNOR UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF 1838.

January 15, 1861, *to January* 15, 1867.

THE Rebellion of 1861 brought great labors and responsibilities to the Executives of all the loyal States. It was a period when the exalted patriotism and devoted service of the boldest hearts were put to trying tests. Great armies were to be raised and marshalled, and inspired with enthusiasm for the national cause, from a population long given to peaceful pursuits, and ignorant of, and averse to the business of war. The productive energies of the country were to be preserved from languishing, and the means of carrying on a long and wasting contest to be provided. It fell to the lot of the subject of this sketch to come to the Executive chair just as hostilities were opening, and he occupied it until the smoke of the conflict had cleared away, and the veterans from many a hard-fought field and lonely bivouac fire, with banners streaming in triumph, came marching home. He came to that chair with the bloom of youth on his cheek, and a step elastic from the pulsations of health; he left it with a face on which were graved the lines of care, and a head grown prematurely gray. Posterity will not suffer the memory of such to fade.

Andrew Gregg Curtin was born on the 22d of April, 1817, at the village of Bellefonte, Centre County, Pennsylvania. His father, Roland Curtin, had settled there in 1800, having emigrated to this country from Ireland in 1793. He first engaged in business as a merchant; but in a limited way, for the population was then sparse, and in that wild, mountainous region the only means of transportation was by pack-horses.

In 1807 he erected a forge on Bald Eagle Creek, about four miles from Bellefonte, and in 1817, a furnace, where shortly after he removed with his family. With a single exception, that of General Philip Benner, his was the first manufactory of iron established in all that region, and in this business he continued until his death, which occurred in 1851, and his sons after him to the present time. He was a man of considerable literary attainments, having been educated in Paris, where he was sent at the age of eighteen. He was twice married; the second time to a daughter of Andrew Gregg, for many years a member of Congress, a United States Senator, Secretary of State under Governor Heister, and candidate for Governor in opposition to John Andrew Shulze.

The subject of this sketch was one of seven children by the second marriage. He was first taught in his native village, where Mr. Brown, a man of learning and culture, was employed to instruct a dozen or more boys, and where, among others, he was associated with Roland Curtin Boileau, since remarkably successful as a merchant of Meadville. He was afterwards sent to a school under the charge of Dr. Keagy at Harrisburg, and was finally placed in a widely celebrated institution at Milton, of which the Rev. Dr. Kirkpatrick was principal, where he finished his academic education. He then returned to Bellefonte, where he commenced the study of law in the office of William W. Potter, afterwards a member of Congress from that district. Attracted by the fame of Dickinson College, which at this period had a law department in a flourishing condition, Mr. Curtin was matriculated in the latter, where he became a pupil of Judge Reed, who was regarded as one of the ablest lawyers in the State.

In 1839 he was admitted to the bar in Centre County, and commenced practice at Bellefonte, in partnership with John Blanchard, an eminent lawyer and afterwards member of Congress. At the very opening of his career he took a leading rank in his profession. Of commanding presence, and ready elocution, he was able, from his well-stored mind, to hold the attention alike of judge and jury. Possessed of

exuberant spirits, and a keen sense for wit and humor, he was often able, by a few master-strokes of ridicule, to make what seemed in his opponent's case to be plausible, appear utterly indefensible. In criminal cases he was especially successful, and it was before a jury in such causes that his power was most conspicuous, and in conducting which he took great delight.

His tastes and training admirably qualified him for the political arena, and he early entered it embracing the principles of the Whig party of that day, of which he soon became a most successful advocate. In 1840 he labored for the elevation of General Harrison to the Presidency, and in 1844 made a successful canvass of the State for Henry Clay, exciting great enthusiasm wherever he appeared. In 1848 he was placed upon the electoral ticket and contributed largely in raising and maintaining that tide of enthusiasm which carried the hero of the first Mexican campaign to the Presidential chair. He performed a like office for General Scott in 1852, serving again upon the electoral ticket.

In 1854 he was strongly urged to accept the nomination for Governor, but refused, and took instead the laboring oar in securing the election of his friend James Pollock, acting as chairman of the State central committee of the party, conducting the canvass with unexampled energy and zeal, and with the most flattering success. Recognizing his eminent qualifications for the position, Governor Pollock appointed him Secretary of the Commonwealth, a post of signal honor and responsibility, as in addition to the duty of Secretary proper, he was *ex-officio* superintendent of Common Schools. In the discharge of the duties of the latter office he took a special pride, and labored zealously. It was at a period when important changes were being engrafted upon the common-school system, and before it had become firmly rooted in the affections of the people. Previous to this time the supervision of the schools in many parts of the State was lax, and the uses of the public money were often very questionable, favorites of those who had its custody often creeping into the

position of teacher with little fitness for the place. County superintendents had just then been chosen for the first time whose duty it was to examine and certify to the qualifications of teachers; and no one could be employed without such certificate. They were also to visit the schools, and annually to report the manner in which moneys had been expended. The people in many parts of the State, ever regarding with jealous eye the creation of new offices, looked with distrust upon the County Superintendency; and dishonest officials who are usually loudest in their cry for reform, saw in it the ruin of their system of ill-gotten gains. Joined to these causes of disquiet, in many counties an unfortunate choice of officers was made, and in others inadequate salaries were voted, thus crippling the services of good officers. It is not strange, therefore, that considerable opposition was manifested to this feature, and indeed to the whole school system. But by the indefatigable labors of Secretary Curtin, and his able and zealous deputy, Henry C. Hickok, it was preserved in its integrity until the new features could take root, and commend themselves by their fruits to the sober judgment of the people. To the steady hand of these officials in this trying period is due one of the most important agencies in making common-school education efficient in Pennsylvania.

In his annual report of 1855, after recounting the numerous evils which had existed previous to the establishment of the County Superintendency and other provisions of the law of 1854, he says: "It is not surprising that, as these abuses were beyond the reach of individual effort, and grew as a consequence out of the defects of the system itself, all who could afford it carefully withheld their children from the common schools." Turning to a contemplation of the happy changes which had been produced by the establishment of the County Superintendency in the same report, he says: "It has effected a useful adjustment of the business operations of the boards of directors in correcting the deranged state of their finances, and in many instances in recovering money of the schools overlooked or supposed to be lost. It has elevated

the profession and established more uniformity in the char acter and qualifications of teachers in theory and generally in practice; the incompetent and unworthy have been rejected, while the door has been opened wide for the admission of the meritorious and qualified, and a stimulus has been given to study and self-improvement. It is the great medium of connection between the Department and the schools; and, while it has produced unity and harmony of action between them, it has secured to the system power and efficiency hitherto unattainable."

But, while he thus rejoiced in the improvements in the organic law which had been achieved, and the good results which they were producing, he plainly saw that one element of strength and prosperity was still wanting, and deeply lamented the defect. "The leading feature," he says, "of every report emanating from this Department to the Legislature for twenty years, is the want of a sufficient number of well-qualified teachers. . . . . No substitute for a regular professional training, extending through years, and embracing a complete course of study in all the branches necessary to illustrate those directly taught in the schools, can make the perfect teacher."

That the Legislature might have some definite object for which to labor, in concluding his remarks upon the subject of training teachers, in his report of the following year, he portrays the features of a system of Normal Schools adapted to the wants of the State, and urges its consideration with great warmth and earnestness. "A combination of the best elements of the State and the private school, and at the same time an avoidance of their disadvantages, might be obtained by the enactment of a law of which the following is a synopsis: — The State to be divided into ten or more Normal School Districts, each to contain one school — the establishment, government, powers and duties of the schools to be uniform in all the districts, and to be regulated by the general provisions of the law. The schools to be erected and governed in accordance with the general law, by private but as-

sociate enterprise, to contain halls, class-rooms, and apparatus, with a school of practice, and the necessary facilities of instruction, for not less than three hundred students each; and only to be recognized as schools for the training of teachers under the law, when completed, in conformity to all its provisions, after inspection by the Governor, or such other officer as the Legislature may please to designate. The course and term of study to be arranged by the joint action of the proper public authorities, and the principals of all the schools. Each Normal School to receive one or two students annually from each common-school district, at a price for tuition to be fixed by the law, and to be paid either by the State or the district. Such students to be designated by the directors of the proper district, from among its most meritorious and best prepared pupils desirous of acquiring the art and science of teaching. Examinations to be made, and diplomas granted, by all the principals of the district normal schools, with the concurrence and aid of the proper State officers. Such diplomas to be conclusive evidence of the degree of scholarship specified in them; but no certificate of competency in the art of teaching to be given, until after two years successful practical experience, certified by the directors, by whom he or she was employed, and by the County Superintendent of the proper district."

At the session of the Legislature following that to which this report was made, a law was passed embodying the identical provisions here recommended. It was the crowning excellence of the admirable system of education with which the State is blessed. Already in eight of the districts professional schools have been established, or are in process of being established, presided over by able and learned professors, and filled with an aspiring and intelligent corps of young men and women in training for the office of teacher, an honor to the Commonwealth and the chief glory of the Common School system.

At the expiration of his term as Secretary, Mr. Curtin resumed the practice of the law at his old home in Bellefonte,

and was active and influential in promoting the opening of lines of railway leading into the central part of the State. In 1860, he was nominated as a candidate for Governor. Though the Democratic party in the nation was divided, supporting Breckinridge and Douglas for President, it rallied in Pennsylvania with great unanimity to the support of Henry D. Foster. The contest was an animated one, the canvass being conducted on both sides with great energy and ability. Mr. Curtin spoke in nearly every county in the Commonwealth, often addressing assemblies in two or three places in a single day. He everywhere attracted large audiences, and created great enthusiasm in his favor, especially among the young men. He was elected by a majority of over thirty-two thousand votes, much larger than the most sanguine of his friends had anticipated, considering that his immediate predecessor, of opposite politics, had been chosen by a large majority. The struggle had been intensified by the fact that a Presidential election was to follow in less than a month, and Pennsylvania was regarded as the battle-ground where the contest was to be decided. After the gubernatorial decision had been pronounced, there was no longer any doubt about the result in November, the choice of Mr. Lincoln being generally conceded.

Governor Curtin was called to the Gubernatorial chair at a time when the gravest problems ever presented to American statesmanship were to be solved. The geographical position of the State added to its overshadowing political importance, made the duties of the Executive peculiarly responsible and perplexing. Separated from the Slave States by a merely imaginary line, and looked to from both the North and the South, to exhaust its great moral and political power to avert war, every expression from its government was awaited with profound interest. It was under such circumstances that Governor Curtin was called to speak for Pennsylvania in his inaugural address of January, 1861. He spoke with words of deliberation, decision, and wisdom, and made a record of statesmanship that stood the severe test of years of bloody

and wasting war. The conflict obliterated old and sacred landmarks in political teaching; but the relations of the States to each other, and the duties of patriotism as proclaimed by him in his first official utterance, remain unchanged, and are indorsed throughout the North. In that address he said: "No one who knows the history of Pennsylvania, and understands the opinions and feelings of her people, can justly charge us with hostility to our brethren of other States. We regard them as friends and fellow-countrymen, in whose welfare we feel a kindred interest; and we recognize in their broadest extent all our constitutional obligations to them. These we are ready and willing to observe, generously and fraternally in their letter and spirit, with unswerving fidelity.

"Ours is a national government. It has within the sphere of its action all the attributes of sovereignty, and among these are the right and duty of self-preservation. It is based upon a compact to which all the people of the United States are parties. It is the result of mutual concessions, which were made for the purpose of securing reciprocal benefits. It acts directly on the people, and they owe it a personal allegiance. No part of the people, no State, nor combination of States, can voluntarily secede from the Union, nor absolve themselves from their obligations to it. To permit a State to withdraw at pleasure from the Union, without the consent of the rest, is to confess that our Government is a failure. Pennsylvania can never acquiesce in such a conspiracy, nor assent to a doctrine which involves the destruction of the Government. If the Government is to exist, all the requirements of the Constitution must be obeyed; and it must have power adequate to the enforcement of the supreme law of the land in every State. It is the first duty of the national authorities to stay the progress of anarchy and enforce the laws, and Pennsylvania, with a united people, will give them an honest, faithful and active support. The people mean to preserve the integrity of the national Union at every hazard."

Again, on the 30th of April, when the Legislature met in

extraordinary session in obedience to his proclamation, to provide for the public defence, he said: "The time is past for temporizing or forbearing with this rebellion, the most causeless in history. The North has not invaded, nor has she sought to invade a single guaranteed right of the South. On the contrary, all political parties, and all administrations, have fully recognized the binding force of every provision of the great compact between the States, and regardless of our views of State policy, our people have respected them. To predicate a rebellion, therefore, upon any alleged wrong, inflicted or sought to be inflicted upon the South, is to offer falsehood as an apology for treason. So will the civilized world and history judge this mad effort to overthrow the most beneficent structure of human government ever devised by man.

"The leaders of the rebellion in the cotton States which has resulted in the establishment of a provisional organization, assuming to discharge all the functions of governmental power, have mistaken the forbearance of the general Government; they have accepted a fraternal indulgence as an evidence of weakness, and have insanely looked to a united South, and a divided North to give success to the wild ambition that has led to the seizure of our national arsenals and arms; the investment and bombardment of our forts, the plundering of our mints, has invited piracy upon our commerce, and now aims at the possession of the National capital. The insurrection must now be met by force of arms; and to re-establish the Government upon an enduring basis, by asserting its entire supremacy; to re-possess the forts and other Government property so unlawfully seized and held; to insure personal freedom and safety to the people and commerce of the Union in every section, the people of the loyal States demand, as with one voice, and will contend for, as with one heart; and a quarter of a million of Pennsylvania's sons will answer the call to arms, if need be, to wrest us from a reign of anarchy and plunder, and secure for themselves and their children, for ages to come, the perpetuity of this Government and its beneficent institutions."

The concluding paragraph of his message is in the following truly eloquent and patriotic language:

"You meet together at this special season, surrounded by circumstances involving the most solemn responsibilities; the recollections of the glories of the past, the reflections of the gloomy present, and the uncertainty of the future, all alike call upon you to discharge your duty in a spirit of patriotic courage, comprehensive wisdom, and firm resolution. Never in the history of our peace-loving Commonwealth have the hearts of our people been so stirred in their depths as at the present moment. And I feel that I need hardly say to you that, in the performance of your duties on this occasion, and in providing the ways and means for the maintenance of our country's glory and our integrity as a nation, you should be inspired by feelings of self-sacrifice kindred to those which animate the brave men who have devoted their lives to the perils of the battle-field in defence of our nation's flag.

"Gentlemen, I place the honor of the State in your hands. And I pray that the Almighty God, who protected our fathers in their efforts to establish this our great constitutional liberty — who has controlled the growth of civilization and Christianity in our midst, may not now forsake us; that He may watch over your counsels, and may, in his Providence, lead those who have left the path of duty, and are acting in open rebellion to the Government, back again to perfect loyalty, and restore peace, harmony, and fraternity to our distracted country."

In the meantime communication between the loyal States and the National capital had been cut off by the revolt in Baltimore. The portion of troops required from Pennsylvania under the President's proclamation of the 15th of April had been promptly furnished, and many more were offering their services. General Patterson, who had been assigned to command in the State, by reason of the interruption of communication with his government and chief, called upon Governor Curtin for twenty-five thousand additional troops. He at once issued his proclamation, and the response surpassed

all expectation. From every part of the State men came singly, in squads and in companies, and the requisition was in rapid process of being filled, when, upon the re-opening of communication through Baltimore with Washington, an order was received from the Secretary of War, revoking General Patterson's requisition, for the reason, as stated, that the troops were not needed, and that less than the number already called for would be preferred to an excess.

But Governor Curtin better understood the magnitude of the impending conflict, and he resolved to prepare for it according to his appreciation of the public danger. With a long line of southern border exposed to the sudden incursions of the enemy, and the National army composed of only three-months' men, and likely even with these to be outnumbered in the field, he determined not to rely upon the mistaken conceptions of the National authorities for the protection of the State. Thousands of men were already in camp, or were on their way, their services having been accepted, when the order of revocation was received. Governor Curtin, instead of disbanding them, directed that they preserve their organization, and immediately applied to the Legislature for authority to form a corps of thirteen regiments of infantry, one of cavalry, and one of artillery, to be organized and equipped by the State, to be subject to the call of the National Government if needed, and to be at all times in readiness for immediate service. The requisite authority was granted, though not without opposition from those who sympathized in the opinions of the Washington authorities that the danger would be soon passed, and the result was the organization of the afterwards famous *Pennsylvania Reserve Corps.* Before its formation was entirely completed, the wisdom and patriotism of the Governor in recommending it were vindicated; for there came from the Secretary, who a few weeks before had refused to sanction the raising of more troops because they were not needed, a pressing appeal to have the Reserves sent forward with all possible dispatch to the capital; and when before the disasters at Bull Run the

nation stood appalled, and the capital was exposed to the attacks of the enemy, Pennsylvania had a military force well organized and equipped for the field to march at once to strengthen and reinspire the Union Army.

The reputation of the State for promptness in furnishing troops when called for by the National Government, was thus maintained throughout the entire period of the struggle. While thus zealous in the nation's cause, he was mindful also that Pennsylvania was an empire in itself, and that its vast wealth and resources were constantly tempting the enemy to devastate it. He never asked that the armies in the field should be diminished to protect the State, or maintain its authority; but while promptly forwarding troops to the front as fast as called for, he was always anxious to raise forces for local protection in addition to these. In 1864 he had just completed the organization of five thousand men for the defence of the southern border; but the disasters which overtook General Hunter in the upper Shenandoah Valley rendered necessary that they should be sent to the relief of his shattered army. The border being thus stripped of defenders, the enemy made a sudden incursion and laid in ruins the town of Chambersburg.

Governor Curtin's administration was likewise conspicuous for the beneficent and merciful policy adopted to temper the terrible scourge of war. He was ceaseless in his devotion to the interests and the wants of those whom the State had given for the national defence. He went to the field, and visited them in their camps, — not with pomp and ceremony, but to encourage them by personal intercourse. In the hospital he solaced the dying, gave words of hope to the wounded and suffering, and bore messages of affection to and from loved ones at home. No letter from a soldier at the front, whether officer or private, was ever received without being promptly answered. It mattered not how impossible was the request, if it could not be granted, the reason of the refusal was kindly told. In every time of suffering and discouragement the soldier felt that he who represented the power and

majesty of the Commonwealth at home was mindful of him. Wherever were sickness, or wounds, or death, there was the official agent of the State to perform every duty to the living and the last rites to the dead. The bodies of the deceased were brought back to sleep with their kindred, and their names enrolled in the lists of the martyred patriots.

Nor was the solicitude of the Governor confined to the soldier. He beheld his family broken, and left without support and protection by his death. The desolate hearthstone and the moans of the bereaved excited his sympathy, and he applied himself vigorously to the originating of a system of care and instruction for the orphans of the fallen slain, which should make the State their guardian and supporter until of sufficient age to provide for themselves. He was successful in his humane and patriotic endeavors. The Legislature gave an attentive ear to his appeals, and has voted liberally millions of money for this worthy object. The fruits of this expenditure will be most abundant. A body of well-instructed and morally trained young men and women will be given to the Commonwealth, instead of an equal number of the offspring of ignorance and want, which would almost inevitably have been the result had they been left to neglect. Besides, it was a just debt which the State owed to the brave men who had fallen in its defence that their children should be cared for at its expense.

At the laying of the corner-stone of one of the institutions established for their education, that at McAllisterville, presided over by Colonel George F. McFarland, himself a maimed soldier, one of the speakers on that occasion said: "Amid the vicissitudes of the camp, and the march, and the carnage of the battle-field, many of them fell never more to return to their homes, to their friends, and to their once happy families. The children of many of these fallen patriots were left without either father or mother, and often with no one to care for or protect them. Ignorant of a mother's love, and robbed of a father's tender care, the cry of the orphan appealed for pity; and, thanks to a kind Providence, the ear

of one man in Pennsylvania was not heavy. That man was Governor Curtin! He whose sympathies were the first to be touched, and whose generous nature first responded to the cry, was our honored Chief Magistrate. He first conceived the idea of making the orphans of the soldiers the children of the State! And through evil report and through good report, he has clung to that idea with a lion-hearted resolution, until he has seen his plan successfully consummated. For his arduous and patriotic labors during the past six years, and for his many services to the State, the name of Andrew G. Curtin will be illustrious in its annals. But when, in the fulness of his years, he shall be laid in an honored grave, no prouder line will be found inscribed upon his tombstone than this: 'HE MADE THE ORPHANS OF THE SOLDIERS THE CHILDREN OF THE STATE!'"

In 1863, Governor Curtin was, from his arduous labors, broken in health, and was compelled to give himself, for weeks at a time, to the exclusive care of an eminent physician in New York. President Lincoln, appreciating his services, and recognizing the necessity of a change of climate and employment, formally tendered him a first-class Foreign Mission, which the Governor signified his willingness to accept when his term should expire. But in the meantime he was nominated for re-election; and relinquishing his intention of going abroad, he accepted the call of his fellow-citizens, and again entered upon the canvass. Thousands of voters were beyond the limits of the Commonwealth, facing a still defiant foe; but they generally favored the re-election of Governor Curtin; and few letters were dispatched by them to friends at home that did not contain appeals to support the man who was generally known at the front as the "Soldier's Friend." He was re-elected by a majority of over fifteen thousand votes.

In 1864, Governor Curtin was so much reduced by sickness that his life was despaired of; and in November of that year he was ordered by his physicians to spend the severe winter months in Cuba, and thither he sailed. President

Johnson tendered him a Foreign Mission, but he felt that he could not accept it without compromising his position before the people, and he declined. In 1867, he was a prominent candidate for the United States Senate, where a large circle of his friends were desirous of placing him; and in 1868, he was warmly supported for Vice-President in connection with General Grant. Soon after the latter's inauguration, he nominated Governor Curtin for Minister to Russia, and the nomination was promptly confirmed by the Senate. Just before embarking for his new duty he was the recipient of a marked evidence of devotion. The Councils of Philadelphia unanimously invited him to a public reception in Independence Hall, and, in addition, the leading citizens, without distinction of party, united in giving him a banquet at the Academy of Music, that has perhaps never been equalled for elegance and every manifestation of popular affection and applause.

He sailed in June, 1869, and in the discharge of his diplomatic duties he has proven himself one of the most popular representatives which the nation has sent abroad. In the convention of the Liberal Republicans held in Cincinnati in May, 1872, as well as in that of the regular Republican Convention at Philadelphia, shortly afterwards, Governor Curtin had a highly respectable number of delegates who were desirous of nominating him for the Vice-Presidency. In sentiment, Governor Curtin, while adhering firmly to those cardinal doctrines of the Republic, which he believes conducive to personal liberty and equality before the law, and a general government, on the other hand, respected at home and abroad for its inherent strength, nevertheless inclines to a conservative exercise of both prerogative and power.

In person, Governor Curtin is tall and commanding, with a broad, massive head, and deep chest, indicative of great power, blue eyes, and, in youth, chestnut hair. His appearance before a popular audience is inspiring; his eye is lit with the fires of enthusiasm, his nostrils are dilated, and his action bold and commanding, suggesting the model of oratory in the best of the classic days.

Governor Curtin married Catharine, daughter of William J. Wilson, M. D., of Centre County. They have one son and four daughters. Within a few days past, August, 1872, Minister Curtin, with his family, has returned to this country. His many friends were anxious to accord him a most hearty welcome; but with sorrow they read the announcement flashed over the continent by the electric current, that his health is greatly impaired, and that his physicians have enjoined seclusion and rest.