ENCYCLOPÆDIA

OF

CONTEMPORARY BIOGRAPHY,

OF

PENNSYLVANIA.

VOL. 1.

ILLUSTRATED WITH PORTRAITS ON STEEL.

NEW YORK.
ATLANTIC PUBLISHING & ENGRAVING COMPANY.

1889.

WILLIAM THAW.

While iron and steel are among the chief lines by which Pittsburgh joins herself to the outside world, there are many other great interests of which she is the fountain or in which she has a part. As a point of distribution to the West and South the city has made for herself a history, and the canals of the older days and the railroads of to-day have proved themselves mighty arms by which she has reached out, and with which wonderful things have been accomplished. While no attempt is made herein to give even an outline of the history of Pittsburgh as a shipping and forwarding point, some things of interest thereon have been noted and briefly set down. When the history of the growth of transportation in America comes to be written, the theory of evolution as applied to one great line of commerce will be proved beyond all cavil. And that history, if put on record with reference to the philosophy underlying it, will be of absorbing interest. No chapter in it can

contain more in illustration of man's venturesome energy than that relating to the passage of the Allegheny mountains and the connection of the great mart of Philadelphia with Pittsburgh, the early point of distribution for the West and Southwest. When the pioneer adventurers during the last century sought out paths over these mountains, they did a daring thing. When the heavy wagons cut their way through the woods and bridged the mountain torrents, they added toil and patience to that daring When the canals were dug to the foot of the range on each side, and the portage created between the termini of the waterways, people said that science and skill had exhausted their resources and that man must be content with what he had. Some of these definite prophets have ridden many times across these mountains and over these chasms in the palace cars of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and looked anxiously at their watches and grumbled lest a minute should be anywhere lost in the long and rapid run from Pittsburgh or the West to Washington or New York. In their minds the stage coach and the canal boat are dim and grotesque events under the dust of the middle ages, and lost forever out of the memory of man. And yet there are men to-day only in the prime of their years and usefulness, who have in their labors bridged over the chasm of development and invention that lies between the stage coach and the palace car. We say there are men, and yet they are very few. The work of one of them, William Thaw, Second Vice-President of the Pennsylvania Company and manager of one of the great lines that belong to that powerful organization, touches on many points of interest, and in telling it one records much that the general reader of to-day has never heard of or has forgotten. Mr. Thaw has been a spectator of many interesting changes in the space of fifty years. His connection with transportation is remarkable, as illustrating the rapidity with which its methods were adapted to the advancing tide of population and traffic that rolled through the gateway of Pittsburgh and on for a thousand miles into the West. He saw the original old Portage road of the Pennsylvania State works staked out, in 1830, with the connecting canals, in 1832, with daily lines of steamboats on the Ohio River, carrying the whole passenger traffic onward to its destination. He has seen the road wagon supplanted by the canal, the canal and steamboat by the railroad. He has, in the early days, seen traffic that was handled and paid for at every change of carrier—from railroad to canal, from canal back to railroad, again to canal, and then on to the steamboat—and also seen it in these later days moved between all points, however remote, without a change of vehicle, and billed from its starting-point clear to its destination—from Maine to Mexico if need be; in short, the modern railroad freight system, to the use of which we have grown so accustomed that we cannot realize that any other course was ever pursued. In his own business as forwarder or carrier he has paid five dollars per the one hundred pounds, to the wagoner, for a three hundred miles' haul between Philadelphia or Baltimore and Pittsburgh, occupying twenty days; and has lived to see tonnage scrambled for at rates one hundred times less. In short, Mr. Thaw has spent fifty consecutive years in one line of business, and that, too, over a time in which some marvelous changes have taken place. That he has kept abreast of the times and made each of these changes subservient to the demands and use of his calling, let his life and its wonderful success stand for answer. William Thaw was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on October 12, 1818. Of Scotch-English lineage, on his father's side, his descent can be traced, traditionally, back to a still more distant period, but, reliably, to the time of Cromwell—with whom in his revolutionary movement, his kindred of then, being zealous Covenanters, were in hearty sympathy. His great-grandfather, John Thaw, was born in Philadelphia in 1710, where he lived to a ripe old age, and where, near by, dying in 1795, his bones now lie buried in Abingdon church-yard. Benjamin, next in the line of succession, was born in 1753, married Hannah, daughter of Benjamin and Deborah Engle, Quakers—the family originally planted in Philadelphia late in the seventeenth century—and died in 1811. Of their issue, John was born in 1779, and married to Elizabeth Thomas, daughter of a sea-captain (lost at sea not long afterwards), in 1803. His career was an eventful one. Apprenticed early in life to Paul Beck, a Philadelphia merchant, and from his calling having much to do with those that "did business in great waters," he acquired a fondness for a sea-faring life, which he soon was offered the opportunity to gratify. He was appointed supercargo of a vessel, which upon its first West Indian voyage, with himself, was seized (under Napoleon's Milan decree) and taken into Guadeloupe, whence, when at length released, he managed to return; only to be overtaken on the way, however, by a more serious distress—the yellow fever; that fell disease breaking out and striking down his crew, he, almost alone of all on board, escaping. Afterwards, undertaking to trade on his own account, he sent a ship laden with such wares as were merchantable there, to Senegambia. The captain of the vessel reaching his destination, disposed of his goods, bought slaves on his own account, sold them, returning, in the West Indies,

and ran away with the proceeds. The loss resulted in financial ruin to Mr. Thaw. He next sought and found service in the Bank of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia; was one of two sent out, shortly after, to establish a branch at Pittsburgh, in 1804, which, in 1817, was transferred to the old United States Bank, he shifting with it, to serve as its cashier until the doom decreed of President Jackson brought it to an end. Having acquired a comfortable competency he then retired, living at rest until his death, in 1866. It was fourteen years after the removal of his parents to Pittsburgh that their son William, the subject of this sketch, first saw the light. His early education, commenced under charge of a local schoolmaster, was completed in the Western University of Pennsylvania. He opened his business career in 1834 as clerk in his father's bank. On February 9, 1835, he engaged in the forwarding and commission business as a clerk with McKee, Clarke & Co. In 1840, in connection with Thomas S. Clarke, he formed the firm of Clarke & Thaw, canal and steamboat owners and transporters, which company continued in business until 1855. These were fifteen busy and remarkable years. The canal system was the great avenue of communication between the East and the West. The opening of some such artificial channel was suggested as early as 1762, but the almost insuperable barriers in the way deterred from any practical attempt. Nothing was done until in 1823 or '24 a bill passed the Pennsylvania Legislature authorizing a commission for the exploration of a route from Harrisburgh to Pittsburgh *via* the Juniata and Conemaugh, the western branch of the Susquehanna, the Sinnemahoning and Allegheny. Public sentiment was stirred up to aid the project along. In August, 1825, a convention of the friends of the enterprise was held at Harrisburgh, in which forty-six counties were represented, and strong resolutions of endorsement adopted. The Juniata and Conemaugh route was reported as the most practicable, and was adopted and the contracts let. In the fall of 1827 water was let into the levels, but the defects of soil were such in many places that it had to be let out again and the sides lined with clay. In the fall of 1834 the Philadelphia & Columbia road, and the Allegheny Portage road over the mountains were completed, giving at last a through line from the metropolis of eastern Pennsylvania to that of western Pennsylvania. It is needless to say that it gave Pittsburgh a wonderful commercial impetus, with the canals feeding her on one side and the great lines of river steamboats on the other. The mineral resources of that section of the country were soon on their way to development—salt, iron, coal, etc. The canal and great rivers meeting here, it is needless to say that the business of forwarding was one of the great enterprises of the day, and that there was rivalry of the most intense character. Nor need many be told that the Pennsylvania & Ohio line, owned and managed by Clarke & Thaw, held its own with the rest. Under the canal rules each line owned its own boats and horses, employed its own men and ran on its own schedule, paying tolls for the use of the waterway to the State. Each line also owned and loaded or unloaded its own cars on the connecting railways, the owner of the road providing the motive power and charging so much to haul each car a given distance. To overcome the disadvantages of these alternate links of railroads and canal which constituted the main line of the Pennsylvania system of public works, devices were in use by which a canal boat built in three or four sections was placed upon trucks built to hold one section securely, and so carried over the mountains by rail. The State encouraged this system by supplying the trucks and by discriminating tolls, but the inherent defects of the plan prevented its general adoption. Under this cumbersome and unique system, individual activity and vigilance counted for much, as the great point of one line was to carry its goods to the point of destination before the others. A great business that seemed as though of permanent character was built up, and a large capital was invested in it. But the new order of things commenced gradually to dawn. The possibilities of steam began to suggest themselves, and experiments of a crude but potent nature were tried with a main result of success. When the firm of Clarke & Thaw was only six years old, on April 13, 1846, the now great and powerful Pennsylvania Railroad Company had a small and humble beginning. Its original line was declared to be between Harrisburgh and Pittsburgh. The work of construction was begun at the first named place in July, 1847. The division from that point to a junction at Hollidaysburgh, at the eastern base of the mountains, with the Portage Railroad—then a State work and operated in connection with the canals—was opened September 16, 1850. The western division, from the western end of the Portage Railroad at Johnstown to Pittsburgh, was opened September 10, 1852. The mountain division was opened February 15, 1854, and the subsequent purchase by the Pennsylvania Railroad Company of the Philadelphia and Columbia road from its original owner, the State, gave a direct rail connection from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, and put an end to the canals. For the works purchased of the State, between those two points, the Pennsylvania Rail-

road Company paid $7,500,000 in its five per cent. bonds, payable at the rate of $460,000 annually, the balance, after the payment of interest, going to the reduction of the principal. When the railroads began to offer their competition to the canal and river boats, which long experience and care had placed on the footing of good management, and to which an undisputed field heretofore had given possession of the then existing business, the steam railroad lines were such clumsy and ill managed affairs that, for a year or so, the transporters by the old methods actually held their own, and began to believe that the new order of things would not disturb them so much after all. But gradually they came to see their mistake. As the railroads developed and stretched out into points where the water lines could not reach, as connections with this city or that were made, as the new monster settled to his harness and became more manageable, as the crude methods of the early days began to work into those that were of a better order, the inevitable result began to be seen. The course that had made a success of the waterways had a like effect on the iron lines. Experience, method and the adjustment of clashing interests brought harmony and smoothness, and steam began to gain the victory. The weaker, as has been the case in every contest since that between Eve and the serpent, went to the wall. The year 1855 saw Mr. Thaw, with others in a like position, with a difficult task on his hands—which was to dispose of his vessel and canal-boat interest with the least possible loss. He gave the year to the task; the canal boats were sold here and there as they could be, the most of them going to canal systems that were yet in operation. The great boats on the Ohio proved a more difficult task. By close figuring and hard work, Mr. Thaw had about completed an arrangement to run them on the lower Mississippi as mail boats, when the Postmaster-General, for political reasons, gave the contracts to a weak and poorly equipped line, and so that avenue of escape was closed. The attempt made to hold their own against the roads lasted over several years and was attended with inevitable loss. Had the owners taken some of these boats that, in 1852, were worth $40,000 each, and run them, early in 1853, on a sand-bar and set fire to them without insurance, they would have saved money, so costly did the competition become. The history of the great Ohio steamers was, in short, a repetition of that made by the palatial lines on Lake Erie in the decade between 1850 and 1860. The course of the roads at first was not altogether a success, as they had their discouragements and heavy trials. Some of them were able to raise just enough money to build the roadway and lay the iron, and were compelled to depend on others for equipment. Mr. Thaw himself was one of a partnership which built one hundred cars—a great undertaking in those days—and leased them to the poor and struggling Fort Wayne road. In 1856 Mr. Thaw joined his former partner, Thomas S. Clarke, who had the year before undertaken the conduct of the freight traffic of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company to and from all points west of Pittsburgh. This was a business then only in its infancy, and about to leave the Ohio River for the lines of railroad just opened from Pittsburgh to Chicago and St. Louis. The crude and tedious methods of handling freight have been alluded to above, but those who have been used only to the methods in operation to-day can hardly understand how cumbersome the old way was and are surprised that an improvement should not have been earlier suggested. A small line of railroad would carry a miscellaneous load of goods to the terminus of its responsibility or authority, turn them over to the next line, unpack from one car into another, receive pay for the distance traversed, new bills would be made for the next line, and the same operation repeated at every change of road. Depots were built apart, and traffic had to be hauled across from one to the other on drays, causing expense and delay. The whole thing was an experiment, we must remember, and had to go through the usual stages of development and growth. It was a great step forward when the point was reached where a car was unloaded and its contents directed to be kept together and sent forward as a designated carload on the next line. By 1864 the progress of railway construction and the great increase of traffic forced the adoption of methods to avoid these transfers and rehandling and to meet the public demand for responsible through bills of lading in place of the divided and irresponsible way in which, until then, the several roads forming any long line conducted their through business. In meeting this want the Pennsylvania system of roads devised the first organization for supplying through cars, both to avoid transfer and to supply equipment to the then new and poor roads west of Pittsburgh. Of this undertaking, known as the Star Union Line, Mr. Thaw had charge until 1873. It was followed by similar methods on other roads; and, with modifications to meet the increasing growth of tonnage, it still remains in operation in the larger organization of the Pennsylvania Company. Those who, as spectators, viewed this solving of the great traffic problem, and noted the value of the new method that had supplanted the old, give to William Thaw a large share of the credit thereof,

feeling that it was his keen vision, his ready appreciation of what was needed, and executive ability in adapting opportunities to those needs, that largely produced the desired result. But Mr. Thaw, with an earnestness that means sincerity, and with a modesty that is one of the chief characteristics of the man, disclaims any credit of a special nature, and says that his labor was shared by many men, and that the new order of things came by its own motion and because there was need of it. In some way, and by some hands, he feels, it would have been worked out to a solution. Mr. Thaw's next onward step in the railroad business was taken in connection with the Pennsylvania Company. That great enterprise was chartered by the Legislature of Pennsylvania on April 7, 1870, for the purpose of managing in the interest of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company the railroads leased and controlled by the latter west of Pittsburgh. Its power, immensity and responsibility may be imagined from the following summary of the lines under its control: Total length of line leased to the Pennsylvania Company, 1,357.5 miles; length of line through stock ownership, 1,433.2 miles; length of line through advances and guarantees of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, 420.5 miles; aggregate length of lines operated, 3,211.2 miles. Among these lines are such important railways as the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago, the Erie & Pittsburgh Railroad, the Cleveland & Pittsburgh and its branches, the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati & St. Louis Railway (Pan Handle), the Chicago, St. Louis & Pittsburgh Railroad, the Cincinnati & Muskingum Valley Railway, the Little Miami, the St. Louis, Vandalia & Terre Haute Railroad, the Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad, and many more of a smaller nature that need not be recapitulated here. The capital stock of the Pennsylvania Company was originally $12,000,000, of which $8,000,000 was preferred and $4,000,000 common. The common stock was issued, but in 1874 was purchased by the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. Subsequently the capital stock was increased to $20,000,000 and is entirely owned by the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, so that the Pennsylvania Company, in all its forms and possessions, is the sole property of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. Mr. Thaw, in addition to being a director in the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, is Second Vice-President of the Pennsylvania Company. Since 1873 he has been largely relieved of duties connected immediately with transportation, and has been giving his attention mainly to the internal and financial affairs of the corporation he serves. He is also Second Vice-President of the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati & St. Louis Railway, managed by the Pennsylvania Company. Mr. Thaw has been a member of the Third Presbyterian Church for many years. He is a director in the Allegheny Cemetery. To the Allegheny Observatory he has been a warm and generous friend, and much of the grand work that Professor Langley has done for science and to render the name of his institution known the world over could never have been done without the ample and unhesitating generosity of Mr. Thaw. The expedition made to Mt. Whitney, in Southern California, some years since by Professor Langley, from which such admirable scientific results were obtained, was largely possible through the help of Mr. Thaw; and when Professor Langley, in April, 1885, in his lecture at the Royal Institute, London, spoke of "the liberality of a citizen of Pittsburgh, to whose encouragement the enterprise was due," and who had "furnished the costly and delicate apparatus for the expedition," no one in Pittsburgh needed to be told who was the man so delicately described. Mr. Thaw has been married twice and has a large family of children and grandchildren. Six sons and four daughters are living, three of them married. Mr. Thaw, in his personal relations, is one of the noblest and most charitable men of Pittsburgh. His immense fortune is worthily used, and such good done with it that no one can begrudge him its possession. His affection for his *alma mater*, the Western University of Pennsylvania, is such that he has given it at various times from three to four hundred thousand dollars, while other like institutions, such as Oberlin, Hanover, Wooster University, Geneva, Carroll (Wisconsin), the College at Maryville, Tenn., the Western Theological Seminary, were not forgotten nor neglected. The Pennsylvania Female College (at Pittsburgh), after large sums of money had been expended, and heavy debts contracted, in its erection and maintenance afterwards, could not uphold itself, fell into distress and was about to perish, when he came to its relief, eased it of its encumbrances, strengthened it in that in which it was weak, and set it whole upon its feet again. Churches, hospitals, asylums; societies for the improvement of the poor, for the care of the aged, the orphaned, the destitute; sanctuaries for the shelter, relief, and succor of the unfortunate, the forsaken and the fallen; institutions and enterprises of whatever name or nature, under whatever form, or no distinctive form of faith, provided only that the ends they aim at are true, and pure, and good—all are objects to the care and support of which he has been, and continues to be, a generous, constant contributor. He is, mentally, a remarkable man. Gifted with a high order of intellect, which has been ripened by long years of observa-

tion and thought, he grasps quickly the salient points of any subject presented to him, and reasons rapidly to a conclusion on the questions it may contain. Caution, however, marks all his efforts to reach the solution of any matter in which he has to exercise sound discretion and good judgment. Though impetuous in temperament and persistent in the assertion of his convictions, he listens well to any one in whom he has confidence that may happen to differ from him, and willingly changes his views when he is convinced that they are wrong. But whoever assumes to set him right must be well prepared on the question for discussion, for Mr. Thaw has a rare command of language and facts, and always delivers himself with such a degree of earnestness that few men are his match. His reasoning is based on his moral conivctions of right and duty, and never on mere speculations such as policy or expediency might suggest. Honest, sincere and self-reliant, he never shrinks from the discharge of what he has to do, nor from asserting his well formed opinions. In enterprises of great moment he takes broad and comprehensive views, such as always secure the confidence of his associates, and is regarded as a safe and prudent adviser. In the social walks of life he is all that kindness could require or courtesy could expect. Buoyant in disposition, mild and gentle in his intercourse with his fellow-men, and strictly upright in all his dealings, he is well entitled to the high rank he holds, for his character in all its elements is beyond reproach and his reputation without a stain. His confidence once gained is rarely lost. The friends of his early years are the special objects of his regard, and their children and grandchildren share, by inheritance, the love he bore the parent stock. Neither time nor adversity has changed him towards them, nor will, while the warm emotions of his nature continue. His sympathy for the sick and suffering, his large benefactions to those whose calamities have made their lives bitter and full of sorrow, and his constant efforts for the advancement of projects of a humane character, have won for him the admiration and love of his fellow-citizens. Perhaps there is nothing more striking in the structure of his mind than the generous impulses it sends forth. If the widow, the orphan, the sick or the suffering tell him the story of a blasted life, or of the sorrows that have fallen upon them, his heart throbs with emotion at the recital, and his tears are companions of those that course the cheeks of the unfortunate ones. Though rich, he has shown how wealth may add to the glitter of gold by making bright the desolate home and fireside of the poor and needy. He has lived to benefit many, and in a plain, unassuming way, has passed thus far through life, and will, long after the grave closes over him, be remembered for his good deeds.