NOTES ON THE LIFE AND WORK OF ROBERT COLEMAN.

BY JOSEPH LIVINGSTON DE LAFIELD.

ROBERT COLEMAN, b. Castlefinn, near Strabane, county Donegal, Province of Ulster, Ireland, November 4th, 1748; d. Lancaster, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, August 14th, 1825; m. at Reading Furnace, Chester County, Pennsylvania, October 4th, 1773, ANN OLD, (dau. of James and Margaretta (Davies) Old, of Pool Forge, near Churchtown, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania); b. May 21st, 1756, but where does not appear; d. October 11th, 1844, but where does not appear.

It has been said that Mr. Coleman's father was Thomas Coleman, b. 1709, d. July 30th, 1778, son of Peter Coleman, b. 1664, d. May 2nd, 1726, both of Castlefinn, and both buried there in the Dononyhome Churchyard; however, another account gives his father's name as Isaac Coleman, a son of Abraham Coleman, both of Castlefinn. Nothing certain appears as to whether his father's family was of English or of Scotch descent, or how long resident in Ireland. The coat of arms and crest of the Coleman family is said to be exactly like that carried by the family of the same name in Langley, County Wils, England, viz:—

Coat of Arms:—on a pale rayonnie or a lion rampant, gules.

Crest:—a caltrop or, between two wings ar.

From this has arisen the rumor, that Mr. Coleman's family was one of the many English families who were induced to settle in Ireland, on being given large grants of land by Charles I, King of England, or by Cromwell. It is said that the family name was then spelt "Colman." No mention of his mother has been found. That he had a full brother, William, and no full sisters, appears to be
undoubted, while the rumor that he had other brothers either of the whole or half blood, seems to be without foundation. His father married twice, having, by his first wife, the two children mentioned, and by his second wife, six daughters.

The family homestead at Castlefinn, seems to have become over crowded, and it is said that the two boys William and Robert, were sent to America by a brother-in-law, a clergyman of the Church of England, then settled in Ireland. William, the eldest, left home when quite young, immigrating to Canada where he settled and left, it is believed, a numerous progeny. In 1764, Robert followed his brother's example and sailed for Philadelphia, taking with him letters of introduction from his father to fellow countrymen, who had previously settled in America, among them Marks Biddle, a merchant of standing and wealth in Philadelphia. It is said that he landed at Philadelphia with but three guineas in his pocket. There appears to be no doubt, that young Coleman first found employment with Mr. Biddle in his store. By one account, there was among his father's friends in Philadelphia one Blair McClanachan, to whom the young man presented his letter of introduction and this gentleman took an interest in him, recommending him to Mr. Read, the prothonotary at Reading, Pennsylvania, where Coleman obtained employment and remained for about two years. When he left Reading, he took service with Peter Grubb, one of the best known of the iron masters of his day, and is said to have come to his employer's favorable notice, because of a fellow workman desiring an order asked Coleman to write it. This order came to Mr. Grubb's attention, and he inquired who wrote it, and immediately installed Coleman as his bookkeeper at Hopewell Forge at one hundred pounds per annum. There he remained for about six months. On leaving Mr. Grubb, he took what proved to be his last position as an employee, namely, a clerkship at Quittopehilla Forge, near Lebanon,
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under James Old. Another account has it, that while he was in attendance at Mr. Biddle's store, James Old, of Spring Forge, Chester County, Pennsylvania, appeared in person to buy a lot of goods and was so much pleased with the address of the young man and with his good handwriting, that he offered Coleman better wages to come with him and act as bookkeeper and clerk at the forge. Mr. Coleman accepted the offer, and before long was in full confidence of his employer, which led promptly to his being taken into partnership.

JAMES OLD was born in Wales, in 1730, but in what town does not appear. No mention of his parents has been found. He came to America in about 1750, but where he landed is not known. From the first he showed his great enterprise and ability, becoming a most successful iron master and one of the founders and captains of the industry in America. He served under Captain Matthew Smith, in the Quebec Expedition of 1775, enduring the terrible hardships of the march through Maine, and in 1776, was rewarded by a Captaincy in the Chester County, Pennsylvania Militia. He was a member of the Pennsylvania State Legislature from Lancaster County in 1791, 1792 and 1793; a Justice of the Peace for the districts composing the townships of Caernarvon and Brecknock, Lancaster County, and a Justice of the Court of Common Pleas. He owned and operated mines, furnaces and forges in Lancaster and Chester Counties, Pennsylvania and in Albemarle County, Virginia, and cast cannon and shot for the Colonial forces. He married Margaretta Davies, a daughter of Gabriel Davies, a Welshman, who had settled in Radnor, Delaware County, Pennsylvania, but whose wife's name does not appear. Mr. and Mrs. Old had several sons and daughters, but it is said, that there are now no living descendants who bear the name of Old. Mr. Old died on May 1st, 1809, and was buried in the Bangor Churchyard, at Churchtown, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.
While in the service of Mr. Old, Coleman lived with him and his family. It seems that he was at Speedwell Forge, one of Mr. Old's properties, and from thence removed, with Mr. Old's family, to Reading Furnace, on French Creek, Chester County, Pennsylvania, where he took to wife one of his employer's handsome daughters, Anna Old, the marriage ceremony being performed by the Rev. Dr. Thomas Barton. One account has it, that James Old being opposed, a runaway match ensued. Soon after his marriage, Mr. Coleman rented Talford Forge, near Norristown, where he remained about three years; from there he moved, in 1776, to Elizabeth Furnace, Lancaster County, which he first rented and afterwards purchased. Another account states that when that furnace was sold as the property of Baron Stiegel, Coleman was employed as its manager and that it was not long before he obtained a share in the company which operated the furnace, and finally came to possess the entire interest in the same. He became the best known iron master of his day, owning and operating mines, furnaces and forges in three counties in Pennsylvania, of which the Cornwall iron mines, in Lebanon County, are famous to this day, and not less than fifty thousand acres of timber land, from which to obtain the necessary supply of charcoal then used in smelting.

He was Lieutenant in Col. James Cunningham's Battalion of "Flying Camp," Lancaster County Militia, Pennsylvania, in 1776, and an officer in Colonel Pott's Battalion in the same year, and served in the battles of the Jersey Campaign of that year. He was with his Battalion at the Battle of Long Island, where he saw hard fighting and his men suffered severely. He continued in service as an officer until 1781. During the Revolution, Mr. Coleman cast cannon and ball for the use of the Continental Army, and forged chain bars which were designed to span the Delaware River for the defense of Philadel-
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He served in the Pennsylvania State Legislature in 1783 and 1784 and was a member of the Pennsylvania State Constitutional Convention of 1790, which framed the Constitution of that State. He was appointed an Associate Judge of Lancaster County in 1791, and served for almost a quarter of a century; for nearly twenty years of which time he acted as Presiding Judge in consequence of Judge John Joseph Henry's indisposition. In 1792 he was Presidential Elector at large, and in 1796 was elected Presidential Elector from Pennsylvania, with instructions to vote for John Adams. He raised and commanded a troop of cavalry during the Whiskey Insurrection.

In 1809 he retired from active business and took up his residence in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where on his death his remains were buried in the Episcopal grounds and later, with the remains of his wife, removed within the walls of St. James Episcopal Church, Lancaster.

Mr. and Mrs. Coleman had issue fourteen children.