

ROSE'S NATIONAL BIOGRAPHICAL SERIES. I.

A CYCLOPÆDIA
OF
CANADIAN BIOGRAPHY:
BEING
CHIEFLY MEN OF THE TIME.

A COLLECTION OF PERSONS DISTINGUISHED IN PROFESSIONAL AND
POLITICAL LIFE; LEADERS IN THE COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY
OF CANADA, AND SUCCESSFUL PIONEERS.

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McCrae, Thomas, of Guelph, Ontario, Stock-breeder and Farmer, is well known as the foremost breeder of Galloway cattle in Canada, and indeed the pioneer of the black polls in America. For over a quarter of a century he has advocated the excellence and hardiness of the Galloways, and now more of the first class Galloways on the farms and ranches of the Western States trace to animals from his herd than to any other herd in the continent. While he has bred and fed many good animals of other breeds—as shorthorns, polled Angus, and Ayrshires—he has never swerved from his faith in the Galloways. For many years his herd has taken a prominent place at provincial and other exhibitions, and numerous medals and diplomas attest the excellence of the animals of his breeding. Kintail, in Ross-shire, is the home of the Clan Macrae—originally spelt MacRa. The clan claims descent from the early emigration of Scots from Ireland. Icolmkill, the sacred isle of St. Columba, is the resting place of some of their early chiefs. In Kintail they were under the chief of the clan Mackenzie, and have been for a very long period allies of that clan. They took up the cause of the Stuarts, and were out in the rebellion of 1715, suffering very severely at the battle of Sheriffmuir. Many of the clan had to leave the Highlands at this time, and were scattered over the south-west of Scotland and the north of Ireland. The family from which the subject of this sketch is descended have been, since about that time, located in the hilly district of Ayrshire. Robert McCrae, of Cumnock, Ayrshire, had a son John, born in 1749. This John lived for many years in New Cumnock and married Jean McCowan. He was a very godly man, and a strong supporter of the early dissenters, his house being a resort of the preachers of the old secession. He died in 1827, aged 78. His family consisted of seven sons and two daughters. The eldest, Marmaduke McCrae, born 1772,

moved to Carsphairn, and for many years herded on the lofty Cairnsmore. He survived till 1856, being at the time of his death 84. His wife was Sarah Blackwood, and his son, David McCrae, was born at the Holm of Dalquhairn, 30th June, 1800. This David married Maria Munroe, who still survives, and their eldest son, Thomas, was born at Dukeston, Kells, 23rd October, 1820. David came to Canada with his son, and died at Guelph, in 1878, aged 78 years. Thomas had only such an education as the parish school of the Kells afforded, and at an early age he was sent to learn the mysteries of a shepherd's life. The training he then got he still retains, and he can yet pick out a sheep by its features, noting and remembering the face of the animal as others do the features of the human family. During his early life he was much among the Galloways, in their native district, and this, no doubt, accounted for his taking them up so strongly in Canada. When nearing manhood he went again to school for a time, and then went into mercantile life, and began business in the village of Lauriston, about six miles from Castle-Douglas. He built there a shop and dwelling. The shop is still the principal one in the village, and the business, with the post office, still retained and conducted by his nephews. Thomas had before this married Jean Campbell, daughter of William Campbell and Jean Scott. The Campbells were an old family on the upper ranges of the Water of Nith, William's father having been many years tenant of the farm of Daljig, New Cumnock. The family were Covenanters during the time of the persecution, as were also the Scotts, who came from near Lockerbie for greater security. Both families were strong dissenters, and supporters of the U.P. Church. In 1849, Thomas McCrae decided to emigrate to Canada, and having sold his business to his brother-in-law—Walter Scott Campbell—he left Kircudbright, with his wife, and family of two children—David and Margaret—and accompanied by his father's family, sailed by the *Countess of Galloway* to Liverpool, and thence by the ship *Empress* to New York. The voyage was anything but pleasant those days. An incipient mutiny amongst the steerage passengers was put down by the officers, and was not so formidable as the small pox which followed. Arrived at New York, they came up the Hudson to Albany, where every effort was made to prevent the emigrants from going to Canada, and some were, against their will, sent west. They

would not be turned, and by way of Rochester crossed Lake Ontario, landed at Toronto, and from thence went by boat to Hamilton. Arrived there in the month of May, the families were put in lodgings, and the heads sallied out to spy the land. Going down one of the streets in Hamilton, they saw a stage coach starting, and enquired where it was going, and received for answer, "To Galt and Guelph," and this was the first time they had heard the name "Guelph." They took passage, and after passing Galt, were the only passengers. The roads were very bad, and much of the way had to be made on foot, and several times the driver had to be assisted to pry the wheels out of mud-holes by the help of a fence rail. Arrived at Guelph, they went into the country the next day, and rented the farm of the late Mr. Davis, about six miles from the town. The families were brought from Hamilton as soon as possible, and the colonist life began. The new life was strange to them, but they went at it with a will, and did fairly well. Hearing of a church a few miles off, in Eramosa, they walked over one Sabbath day, and heard the late Dr. Barrie, of Eramosa, preach. At the close of the service the Dr., noticing the strangers, came forward, and shaking them heartily by the hand, welcomed them to the church and the land, and in his quaint, humorous way added:—"You have come to a grand country—a grand country, but the scum of all the earth come here." The acquaintance thus curiously begun ripened into friendship, which continued till Dr. Barrie's death. Thomas worked on the farm with his father all the summer and fall of 1849, but early in 1850 he moved into Guelph, and took such work as could be got. Times were dull—very dull—and even for a willing worker there was little to be got. His first job was cutting cord-wood with a buck saw. This was followed by barreling flour in the People's Mills and weighing grain, and in the spring he secured the position of clerk and bookkeeper in the Wellington Foundry. This position he held for three years, and left it to go into business with David Anderson, in the Guelph Lumber Yard. This business began as McCrae & Anderson, continued for some time, and when Mr. Anderson left for his farm in Erin, the business was continued by Thomas McCrae alone for some time, and then as McCrae & Thomson, with John Thomson. This firm purchased the saw mills and timber limits in East Flamboro', and the mills were

run till the pine timber was all cut away in the section. During this time Mr. McCrae supplied the lumber and timber for most of the large buildings in Guelph, and for the Grand Trunk while building. Some of the finest pine lumber ever manufactured in Canada was cut at these mills, and while the commoner sorts were marketed at Guelph, the clear and select was sent by team to Lake Ontario, and shipped to Albany and New York. The pine in this section grew amongst hard-wood. The trees were few, but very large and fine, and the lumber was fine soft, and much of it clear. For many years there would be made clear planks, six, eight and ten inches thick, and too wide to go between the stakes of a waggon—fifty inches. When the lumber trade was over, Mr. McCrae went into the knitting trade with J. & A. Armstrong and John Anderson, who, with Mr. McCrae's son, David, formed the firm of Armstrong, McCrae & Co. They built the woollen works in Guelph, on Horskinson street; the firm being formed in 1866. Since the Messrs. Armstrong left the firm and started the manufacture of carpets, the old firm has been carried on as McCrae & Co. The firm have a reputation for the excellence of their yarns and knitted goods all over the Dominion, from Halifax to Victoria. Thomas McCrae, from the time he became connected with the woollen trade, was anxious to utilize the long wools of Canada, and always regretted that there was no home demand for the long lustre wools that were exported to the United States. To obviate this as soon as he could arrange it, he had the firm put in worsted machinery to comb the long Canadian wools. This department is now carried on at the firm's mills on Mill-land, and the yarns turned out are sustaining the reputation of the firm for excellent workmanship. The mills of the firm employ about 300 hands, and are a great benefit to the City of Guelph. In 1863, Mr. McCrae, who had up to that time lived in Guelph, moved to his farm, a short distance to the south-west, adjoining what is now the Ontario Agricultural College. For some years before this he had been actively engaged with his Galloway herd, which he has now had for over twenty-five years. His success in this line has been already alluded to. With the pure-bred cattle he also took up Cotswold sheep and Essex pigs, and for some years has had very superior Clydesdale horses. He has a stud of seven pure-bred females, several of them prize winners. In

1870 there was no market for the beef so largely grown in the County of Wellington, and Mr. McCrae set himself to find an outlet for the beef, which at that time was a drug, and could not be sold. He formed a partnership with Gideon Hood, George Hood and A. E. Goodfellow, went to England, and opened a market there, and for some years packed and shipped the largest part of the cattle coming to Guelph market. The business, whilst it did great good at a critical time, was not remunerative, and when by the opening of the live stock trade with England a new and permanent outlet was found, the business was discontinued. Thomas McCrae is an active Presbyterian. For many years an elder in the old U. P. Church—Rev. R. Torrance's—he took an active part in all church courts where his duties called him; was for many years superintendent of Sabbath schools, and is still an active member of the Home Mission committee of the Presbyterian Church of Canada. He was a member of the Pan-Presbyterian Council, which met at Philadelphia in 1878, and was a member of the union committee, which drafted the basis of union for the different Presbyterian bodies in the Dominion. In politics Mr. McCrae is a Liberal, as all his fathers were, and a strong supporter of all measures of reform tending to the good of the people. He has never filled any municipal office, would never join any secret society, and the only municipal office he has filled has been that of school trustee, which he did for several years, taking an active interest in all educational matters. He has a family of two sons and two daughters. The eldest son, David, being the manager in the firm of McCrae & Co., and the youngest, William, being a farmer and stock-breeder near Guelph. His daughter, Margaret, is the wife of Rev. R. Leask, of St. Helen's, and his youngest daughter, Jane, is with her parents at the old homestead.