

FREIGHT FACTORS

GEORGE F. BAER

ONE of the most prominent figures among the many capitalists and officials of railroads and mining companies interested in the anthracite coal mining of the country is that of George F. Baer, president of the Philadelphia & Reading Railway Company. Although a man well past middle life, Mr. Baer is recognized as the leader among the authorities of the great coal carrying roads, and his advice and counsel are sought by them in nearly all matters pertaining to the policies of their roads. His word is received as final and his leadership is accepted without question in all crises brought about in connection with their relations to other business interests, and especially in dealing with organized labor, which is the most powerful factor to be considered in the operations of coal mines.

Throughout the great coal strike of 1902 Mr. Baer



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guided the actions of the operators and railroad chiefs, holding almost daily conferences with the presidents of the other important coal carrying roads, including W. H. Truesdale, of the Lackawanna; E. B. Thomas, of the Lehigh Valley; F. D. Underwood, of the Erie, and David H. Wilcox, of the Delaware & Hudson. As chairman of the employers' committee, President Baer took a leading part in the negotiations looking to arbitration of the strike, and his inflexible stand in upholding the property rights of the operators had much to do with the determined opposition to the miners' demands. As an example of his unwavering attitude may be cited the statement made before the Interstate Commerce Commission, in which he said:

"The Reading Coal & Iron Company ought to be making a profit of \$5,000,000 a year in order to pay 4 per cent. dividends, and until that point is reached there will be no reduction in the price of coal, unless the laws of trade make it necessary."

When the House of Representatives of Pennsylvania, in the opening days of the strike of 1906, instructed the Attorney General to bring court proceedings against anthracite coal carrying railroads, if on inquiry he should find they were violating the constitution of the State, President Baer at once issued a statement in which he questioned the right of the Attorney General to take such action, calling attention to the fact that all the corporations referred to obtained their rights and franchises under charters granted prior to the adoption of the new constitution, and in support of this stand quoted Article 18, Section 2, of the new constitution, which says: "And all rights, actions, prosecutions and contracts shall continue as if this constitution had not been adopted." Therefore, he declared, the railroads had a right to be both mine owners and manufacturers, and this right they were ready to defend to the utmost.

At another time, when popular criticism ran high, Mr. Baer delivered a lecture to his subordinates on the subject of employers' rights, pointing out to them that the coal producer, because of his dealing in a national product, was erroneously supposed to be under a higher obligation than other sellers of materials needed by the public.

"And yet," he added, "coal that is deep down in the earth is of no more use before it is mined than is an uncultivated field before some one fertilizes it for the purpose of producing crops for food."

Despite this unwavering belief of Mr. Baer that the property holder should not yield an inch, he has a reputation among his own employees for generosity and fairness hardly equaled by that of any other coal operators, whether they truckle to the union or not. He has described the union as "a menace to labor and a cruel wrong to independent workers."

Mr. Baer's reputation does not rest alone upon his splendid ability in guiding the fortunes of a great railroad, but is also materially increased by his ability as a public speaker, gained through a thorough legal training and long practice before the bar. His speech before the Strike Commission, in 1903, in which for two hours and a half he argued the case of the operators, has been described as a masterpiece of logic and clearness.

Mr. Baer's home is in Reading, Pa., where he has a splendid estate, and in his home city he is known as a very religious and public spirited man. He is simple, and almost Spartan, in his every day habits, and, although not an athletic man, secures a good amount of healthful exercise in looking after the affairs of his country estate.

Mr. Baer was born in Somerset County, Pa., on September 26, 1842. When he was thirteen years old, after attending the Somerset Academy, he served for two years as a printers' apprentice in the office of the Somerset Democrat, and in 1859 became chief clerk in the Ashtola mills, near Johnstown. During this period he was a zealous student, and in 1880 entered the sophomore class of Franklin and Marshall College, where he remained a year. He is now a trustee of that institution.

He bought the Democrat, in partnership with his brother, Henry, in 1861, and meanwhile began the study of law. In 1862 he joined the Army of the Potomac as captain of a volunteer company, which as part of the 133d Regiment took part in the second battle of Bull Run and the battles of Antietam, Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville.

Following the war he studied law in the office of his

brother, William, who afterward became a judge, and, after being admitted to the bar in 1864, practised in Somerset. Later he moved to Reading and became known as a leader in his profession. In 1870 he was made resident counsel of the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad, later being elected to its directorate. Later he resigned from this position because he did not like the policy of President McLeod. He was prominent in the reorganization of the company in 1893, however, and in April, 1901, became its president.

A few years prior to this advance he began to be known throughout the country as the right hand man of J. P.

Morgan and the Vanderbilts in all their railroad ventures in the State of Pennsylvania. He is president also of the Central Railroad of New Jersey, which is under the same control as the Reading, and of the Temple Iron Company, which is the mine owner controlled by the coal carrying roads. Among the concerns of which he is a director are the Clymer Iron Company, Keystone Furnace Company, Boyertown Mining Company, Penn National Bank, of Reading, and the Reading Paper Mills, which he owns. Mr. Baer himself, so great has been the extent of his interests, professes to be unable to remember the names of all the coal companies which he has helped to direct.
