

GEORGE F. BAER

George F. Baer, president of the Reading Company and of the Philadelphia & Reading Railway and the Central of New Jersey, died at his home in Philadelphia after a very sudden attack of acute gastritis on April 26.

Mr. Baer was a great railroad man in the sense that he was a great executive, a leader of men. Trained as a lawyer, a born fighter, intolerant of sham, sentimentalism and hypocrisy, and with an unusually broad grasp of both the fundamentals and details of the problems which he was called on as a railroad president to face, he had the respect and actual affection of his subordinate officers to a rather unusual degree. He combined a grasp of the detail and an accurate close knowledge of what was going on on his properties with the comparatively rare readiness to delegate authority to those under him from whom he exacted responsibility.

All of Mr. Baer's work, life and beliefs were strongly influenced by his religious faith in individual responsibility. Mr. Baer was a deeply religious man. It is a rather curious coincidence that hating hypocrisy and cant as he did, Mr. Baer's frequent use of biblical language should have been taken as an indication of affectation. The charge of affectation was wholly without foundation. The Bible and biblical language were probably as much a part of Mr. Baer's life and thought as were the figures and technical terms with which he dealt in the management of his properties. He was quite an unusually hard-headed, practical thinker, and yet he had at times an almost uncanny power of prophecy.

Like a good many other successful men of his generation, he was out of sympathy with many of the present day tendencies toward paternalism and government by nebulous investigation. He was quite out of sympathy with any form of organization wherein responsibility was divided or spread over a committee. A considerable part of his success in life was the result of his ability, as an organizer, and here again the guiding principle appears to have been individual responsibility and authority commensurate with responsibility. He was generally considered a bitter enemy of trade unionism. The following letter, written to the *New York Evening Post* by Robert W. de Forest, points out that it was not against labor unionism as such, but against certain phases of it that Mr. Baer was an uncompromising opponent.

"He was not opposed to labor unions when acting within their own sphere. It was only when they sought to interfere with the right of the non-union man to work on his own terms that his inbred belief in the right of personal liberty asserted itself. His relations to labor leaders were frank and cordial. He met them freely as man to man. They learned to know him and respect him as one who said what he meant and meant what he said. He was courageous—ready to fight, if

necessary, in defense of the property interests it was his duty to guard. But the labor leaders knew that if he fought he would fight fairly. George Baer could hit hard but he never hit below the belt.

"His relations to his employees and to laboring men were always close and sympathetic. He was intensely democratic. Mere wealth and mere social standing meant nothing to him. Character meant everything. To him all men of character from the highest to the lowest on the social scale stood on the same plane of equality. Captain of Industry he was, but not a captain who failed to respect the privates who served under him.

"I recall his telling me of the different relations in which he found himself one day several years ago. 'I went to my railroad office in the morning,' said he, 'and was addressed as "Mr. President." Then I went to my grand army meeting and was called "Captain." Later I presided over the trustees of my college and was called "Doctor." In the evening I met my classmates and found myself spoken to as plain "George." 'What I like best,' said he, 'is to be called plain "George." And he was plain George in his attitude toward those who served under him.

"He has, I know been criticized for his frequent use of biblical language. It has been thought an affectation; perhaps even a sanctimonious affectation. But it was not. Biblical language was his every day speech. He was brought up in a home where a chapter of the Bible was read every morning at family prayers. During the early years of his law practice in Somerset county, as he has told me, he and his partners opened the day's work by reading the Bible together. His knowledge of the Bible was unequalled. He used biblical language as naturally and spontaneously as a school boy of today uses slang. If his use of it struck strangely on the ears of a generation that has omitted family prayers and Bible reading from its daily routine, was it George Baer who was at fault?"

George Frederick Baer was

born September 26, 1842, in Somerset county, Pa. He got his early education at Somerset Institute, and when he was 13 began work as apprentice printer in the office of the *Somerset Democrat*. After two years' work he went back to school, attending the Somerset Academy and later Franklin & Marshall College. In 1862 he raised a company of volunteers and was made captain of the company and served throughout the war, being promoted to adjutant general. In 1870 Mr. Baer was made counsel for the Philadelphia & Reading, and was later elected a director and became a personal friend and legal adviser to the late J. P. Morgan. He resigned from the Reading directorate when the policy of the company became antagonistic to Morgan interests, but when in 1901 a reorganization of the company took place George Baer was elected president. From that time until his death Mr. Baer was the dominating factor in the anthracite coal situation.



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