ISSUES OF A NEW EPOCH.

THE COAL STRIKE.

THE anthracite coal strike which was ended through the intervention of the President in October, 1903, was not only the most serious contest of the kind this country has ever known, but the most serious that the world has known. Other strikes have involved a larger number of men and have entailed nearly or quite as much financial loss, but none has affected the people of the entire country to anything like the extent which this one did, simply because none stopped the production of what has come to be regarded as a necessity of life. Of course anthracite is not an absolute necessity of life. If the supply were to be exhausted this year, substitutes for it as fuel would be found. The world would have to learn to get on without it; but so long as people regard it as a necessity, and so long as they know it exists and can be obtained, they will not submit to having the supply cut off without protest, more or less violent, according to their needs and sufferings. That virtually all the people did believe in October, 1903, that anthracite was a necessity both to their comfort and their health, is not to be questioned They believed it so implicitly that nothing which could be said to the contrary had any appreciable effect upon them. Their conviction was so strong that the mere threat of a coal famine sent a panicky feeling throughout every large city in the land. In the country districts a sufficient supply of wood could be obtained, but in the cities there was little or no hope of doing so. Bituminous coal was an insufficient substitute because nearly all existing heating apparatus was not adapted to its use. Without anthracite, every household in a large city was threatened with discomfort and peril. It came about, therefore, that the whole population had an intense personal interest in the strike based upon two very strong reasons—first, danger to their individual

well-being; and, second, a heavy tax upon their resources to meet the higher cost of fuel of any kind.

As weeks and months went by with one promise of settlement after another proving a delusion, and with cold weather at hand, this panicky feeling increased until it became a menace to the public safety. For five months the mines had been idle, and while the coal operators declared that there was no danger of a coal famine, it was within the knowledge of every householder that the famine was already in sight. It was only with extreme difficulty that a single ton of coal could be obtained in New York and other large cities by a small consumer, and every householder who had neglected to put in his winter's supply in the spring found it impossible to obtain it except in small quantities and at steadily rising prices. Many dealers refused to take orders and most of them were entirely without a supply. In the presence of a condition like this it was worse than foolish for the mine owners to persist in their statement, as they did daily, that there was no scarcity, for their denial of what everybody knew to be the actual fact served to arouse popular distrust of them and to aggravate rather than to quiet the general uneasiness. It was almost maddening to tell thousands of people who had been trying in vain for days and weeks to get coal that there was plenty of coal to be had and they were foolish to think there was not.

When all efforts to bring about a settlement had failed, when the state of Pennsylvania had shown itself powerless to even maintain order in the coal region, it was natural for the people of the country to turn to the Federal government for aid. This they began to do early in October, when the approach of cold weather sent a thrill of alarm throughout the land. Appeals to President Roosevelt began to pour in from all quarters, both from individuals and from persons in authority. Governor Crane of Massachusetts, Mayor Low of New York City, and the heads of municipal governments generally besought the President to use his good offices in some way to bring about an adjustment in order that the imminent peril of suffering and riot might be warded from the land. The President could not be deaf to such appeals. No president that the country has ever had could have been, for not only the comfort and lives of countless numbers of people were threatened, but stability and lawful government, and millions in property were at stake in every city of the land. The President had no authority in law and no precedent to sustain him. He was fully aware of this and he succeeded by never losing sight of the fact that he had neither. No task that he had

undertaken previously had involved so large an element of political risk as this did. It was an entirely new departure. Nothing like it had ever been done by a president. The great body of conservative opinion in the country had serious doubts about either the wisdom or the justification of the step. He felt moved to act because of the great public need and great public peril involved, and he could not escape the conviction that it was a matter of simple duty for him, as the people's president, to exert all the moral influence he had in the interest of the people. Criticism did not affect him at all, no matter what its source, once he had made up his mind. He did not count the chances of success or failure, and when he was told, as he was repeatedly, that failure would ruin him politically, he went steadily and fearlessly ahead. While both sides to the quarrel repulsed his first efforts and refused to step up to the high ground of public welfare upon which he stood and to which he invited them, he persevered in his appeals to them till both came in the end, if not willingly, at least with recognition of the fact that he had offered to them a way out without surrender. He succeeded in this, as he succeeded in all other like endeavors, by being open and straightforward in all his proceedings. He had no hidden end to serve; he leaned neither to one side nor to the other, but said simply, "I offer you my services as mediator in order that this contest which so seriously threatens the welfare and the peace of the whole country may be brought to an end." His obvious sincerity and singleness of purpose so impressed the whole country and, indeed, the whole world, that the contending forces were fairly compelled to yield to his proposals. The chorus of praise which arose from all quarters of the land, and from all the leading countries of Europe, when success was recorded, was something that no other president had received. He himself was unable to comprehend it and thought it undeserved. When it was spoken of in his presence, he said to his intimate friends, "I am being very much over-praised by everybody. I do not deserve it. It really seems to me that any man of average courage and common sense, who felt as deeply as I did the terrible calamity impending over our people, would have done just what I did."

He was not the only person in the land who felt the gravity of the situation. It has been charged and is still charged by his critics that he did what no other president before him had done and what few of them would have consented to do. It is no longer a secret that in all that he did he had the hearty approval and

sympathy of ex-President Cleveland. Early in his efforts to bring about peace between the mine operators and the miners, Mr. Cleveland took occasion to express his complete accord with him. On the day following the first meeting before the President, at Washington, of the operators and representatives of the strikers, which failed because of the refusal of the operators to consent to a commission of arbitration, Mr. Cleveland wrote to the President a letter which in addition to expressing approval of the President's course, and some righteous indignation at the obstinacy of the contestants, contained suggestions for a plan of settlement, and gave as a reason for volunteering his views that his doing so would at least "serve as an indication of the anxiety felt by millions of our citizens on the subject." The only living ex-President, and the only Democratic President that the country has had since the civil war, thus joined hands with the Republican President in believing that a crisis had arisen which was so grave as to justify extraordinary action by the Executive of the nation It is also no longer a secret, that after receiving this letter from Mr. Cleveland, President Roosevelt asked him if he would consent to be a member of a commission of settlement and that Mr. Cleveland replied in the affirmative. This acceptance persuaded the President to appoint a commission without the consent of the operators, in case they continued in their refusal to give it, and he proceeded to choose the members of it, with Mr. Cleveland as the first. The men whom he selected were mainly those subsequently appointed, but when the operators and their financial associates heard of the President's purpose and heard also of Mr. Cleveland's selection as member of the commission, they made haste to give their consent to the plan of arbitration, but protested vigorously against the selection of Mr. Cleveland They realized keenly enough what the moral effect would be upon the country of having it appear that the only living ex-President, who was also the most eminent Democrat in the land, stood shoulder to shoulder with President Roosevelt in what he had done and proposed to do. That would have ended the "Constitutional" objection to Roosevelt's course at once and forever.

But if the operators would not permit Mr. Cleveland to serve on the commission, they did allow the President to appoint to it a Democrat who indisputably ranks next to Mr. Cleveland in ability and character, and in reputation for sound Constitutional construction, when they consented to the choice of Judge George Gray of Delaware. His approval of the President's course, ex-

pressed after he had conducted the inquiry to a successful conclusion, should be a sufficient answer to the criticisms which are made of the President's course. In an interview which was published in the New York "World," on September 1, 1903, Judge Gray said:

"I have no hesitation in saying that the President of the United States was confronted in October, 1902, by the existence of a crisis more grave and threatening than any that had occurred since the civil war. I mean that the cessation of mining in the anthracite country, brought about by the dispute between the miners and those who controlled the greatest natural monopoly in this country and perhaps in the world, had brought upon more than one-half of the American people a condition of deprivation of one of the necessaries of life, and the probable continuance of the dispute threatened not only the comfort and health, but the safety and good order, of the nation He was without legal or constitutional power to interfere, but his position as President of the United States gave him an influence, a leadership, as first citizen of the republic, that enabled him to appeal to the patriotism and good sense of the parties to the controversy and to place upon them the moral coercion of public opinion to agree to an arbitrament of the strike then existing and threatening consequences so direful to the whole country He acted promptly and courageously, and in so doing averted the dangers to which I have alluded

"So far from interfering or infringing upon property rights, the President's action tended to conserve them. The peculiar situation, as regards the anthracite coal interest, was that they controlled a natural monopoly of a product necessary to the comfort and to the very life of a large portion of the people. A prolonged deprivation of the enjoyment of this necessary of life would have tended to precipitate an attack upon these property rights of which you speak· for, after all, it is vain to deny that this property, so peculiar in its conditions, and which is properly spoken of as a natural monopoly, is affected with a public interest.

"I do not think that any president ever acted more wisely, courageously, or promptly in a national crisis. Mr Roosevelt deserves unstinted praise for what he did."

It has always been contended by the President's critics that if he had not intervened the strikers would have surrendered in a very short time. Those who make this assertion overlook, in the first place, the fact that the operators had been for fully two months predicting daily the end of the strike. They overlook, in the second place, the fact that under the Pennsylvania law the entire body of available mine workers was with the strikers.

It was claimed by the mine operators that only about one-half of the laborers in the coal region were members of the organization which, under Mr. Mitchell's leadership, ordered the strike; that the other half were either members of local unions or non-union men. The highest estimate which the operators made of the number of persons whom they were able to induce

to work while the strike was in progress was 17,000. Under the Pennsylvania law, no person can be employed as a miner in the anthracite mines until he has passed an examination by a state board created for the purpose and has received a certificate or license. One of the conditions of such license is "not less than two years' practical experience as a mine laborer" in the anthracite fields. It was this requirement which most seriously hampered the operators in their efforts to work the mines without the aid of the strikers, for men brought from other sections could be employed only in violation of the law. The strikers claimed that they controlled ninety-five per cent. of all the licensed workers, and this was probably true. While the commission was in session I asked one of the regular counsel of the operators if it was not true that, if the operators had been given ample military protection to prevent all intimidation and violence on the part of the strikers toward the non-union men who were willing to work, they would still have been unable, because of the license law, to obtain a force of miners sufficient to produce a supply of coal anything like adequate to the winter's demands. He replied that it was true. That was an admission that Mitchell was master of the situation and that unless the President had intervened there would have been, if not a famine of coal, a scarcity so serious as to cause suffering and probable riots in the large cities.

One of the most interesting aspects of the President's commission for final adjudication of the questions at issue between the operators and their employees was the principle of arbitration embodied in it. This was a very different principle from the one insisted upon by Mr. Mitchell at the outset of the struggle. It will be remembered that the Civic Federation, under the leadership of Senator Hanna, made an earnest and prolonged effort to settle the strike when it was first threatened in April. A conference between the conflicting parties was held, and although an armistice of thirty days was secured, failure ensued because the operators refused to recognize the union by consenting to an arbitration with it. In an arbitration of that kind the claims of non-union men would have no standing whatever, for there would simply be two parties to it, the operators and the union. Under the President's plan, the commission was to consider "all questions at issue between the respective companies and their employees," and it was especially stipulated that pending its findings all miners should return to work and all interference with and persecution of non-union men at present working

or hereafter employed should cease. It was also stipulated, and the stipulation was accepted by both parties, that when the commission should have reached its finding these "shall govern the conditions of employment between the respective companies and their employees for a term of at least three years."

The selections which the President made for members of the commission were in accordance with the spirit of his appeal. He chose them with the single object in view of getting a decision in accordance with right and justice. It was the unanimous opinion of the country that a more competent or more impartial tribunal could not have been constituted. It was in every way superior to the Civic Federation as an arbitrating body, for it contained no member who was identified directly with either party to the controversy. The Civic Federation was, furthermore, a self-constituted body and could only offer its services in labor controversies. It was not asked to arbitrate the coal strike, and it could not get the consent of the operators to such arbitration. The President's commission entered upon its duties under the high moral authority, if no other, of the highest officer in the land, and with the consent of both the contestants and their promise to accept its decrees. It sat for nearly five months, taking a great mass of testimony and agreeing unanimously upon a report that was a compromise, in which the strikers secured about half their demands, while failing to get a hearing upon their main contention, which was the recognition of their union by the mine operators. The use of intimidation and violence in support of the strike was strongly condemned, and for the settlement of future disputes a board of conciliation was proposed, to be made up of three members from each side, who could appeal to the circuit judge of the district to appoint an umpire whose decision should be final. The report was generally regarded as equable, and both sides accepted it as they had pledged themselves in advance to do. Since the verdict was rendered there has been peace in the coal region. From time to time minor disputes have arisen but they have been settled easily under the terms of the agreement. The great results of the President's course were, therefore, an immediate resumption of mining, which supplied the country with coal and thus warded off suffering and disorder, and the establishment of peace in the region for three years. The indirect but scarcely less beneficent result was the beginning of a better understanding between operators and miners which every day of peace is developing and strengthening.