

## ARTICLE VI.

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THE ANTHRACITE COAL STRIKE.<sup>1</sup>

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YEARS of industrial expansion are usually marked by a more than proportionate number of labor troubles, and the past year has been no exception to this rule. Of the numerous outbreaks that have occurred none is more interesting or instructive than the strike of the anthracite coal miners in Pennsylvania, while some important conclusions as to the future of organized labor may be drawn from its outcome. The magnitude of the interests involved, the importance of the industry in its influence on the consuming public, the conduct of the strike, and finally the terms of its settlement—all call for a thorough understanding of the situation. Before proceeding to a discussion of the strike itself, however, we must consider briefly the conditions of the anthracite coal-mining industry as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> The writer has preferred not to burden the pages of this article with frequent references and footnotes; some acknowledgment is however necessary. The facts as to the conduct of the strike have been gathered from the daily press; a two-years' residence in the anthracite region had acquainted him with the conditions of the mining industry. The following are the best articles on the subject, and have been freely used: "The Anthracite Combinations," in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. x. p. 296, and "The Anthracite Mine Laborers," in the *Bulletin of the Department of Labor* for Nov., 1897; both of these careful articles are by Dr. G. O. Virtue. The situation in the bituminous fields is admirably set forth by Dr. J. E. George in two articles in Vol. xii. of the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*: "The Coal Miners' Strike of 1897" and "The Settlement in the Coal Mining Industry." Arbitration in the coal industry in England is described in an article by J. B. McPherson, in the *Bulletin of the Department of Labor* for May, 1900.

Practically all of the anthracite coal produced in the United States comes from the deposits in the Blue Ridge Mountains lying between the Schuylkill and Lehigh rivers and the Susquehanna. These coal basins extend over an area of about 470 square miles, and are distributed throughout several counties. If all the veins were located in one place, they would occupy a space about twenty miles wide and a little less than twenty-four miles long. The coal seams vary from six to sixty feet in thickness. Originally one vast bed of coal, the area has been broken by geological action into three distinct fields known in trade circles as No. 1, or the northern or Wyoming field, comprising upper Luzerne and Lackawanna; No. 7, or the middle or Lehigh field, comprising Hazleton and the upper Schuylkill region; No. 9, or the southern or Schuylkill field, comprising Shamokin and the greater part of the Schuylkill region. During the last year 366 mines were in operation, which employed 140,583 persons; the output of the mines for 1899 was 54,034,224 tons, about one-third of the total coal product of the United States.

When an industry is so highly localized as this one is, its concentration in a few hands is an inevitable result. And when to the ease of a centralized control is added the economic advantage of a unified management, the pressure towards combination becomes irresistible. Accordingly we are not surprised to find the anthracite coal-mining industry centered in comparatively few hands. By far the larger part—about 72 per cent—is mined by nine railroads, which are at the same time the carriers of the entire output of the region. The concentration of the industry has resulted in fierce competition between the rival companies, and lower prices have always followed increased production. From the beginning the cry of "overproduction" has been continually raised, and the necessity of limiting in some way the output has been recognized. There seems

to be no doubt but that the capacity of the anthracite coal mines is greater than the demand on the part of the public for coal at prices profitable to the operators. The mines can produce perhaps 72,000,000 tons a year; the public will consume about 55,000,000 tons at paying prices; if the mines are run to their full capacity then the prices will fall and the mines may even be conducted at a loss. This is the condition which has confronted the operators from the beginning, and it is not strange that they should have sought to restrict production by combination.

The first general combination of anthracite producers, or rather carriers, was formed in 1873, as the result of a period of glutted markets, low prices, and "cut-throat" competition. An agreement was effected between the six great corporations which then controlled the greater portion of the coal lands, which allotted the amount to be shipped by each to tide-water and fixed the price at which it should be sold. As a result, prices were maintained fairly well for a couple of years, but it soon became evident that the companies were overrunning their quotas and not living up to the agreement. In 1876 the dissolution of the combination came, and there followed a wild scramble among the companies to see which could throw the most coal upon the market. Prices fell from \$5.18 to \$2.91 a ton at New York. Shipments rose from 18.5 million tons in 1876 to 20.8 million in the following year. By the end of the year the companies were ready to unite once more. Accordingly in 1878 another compact was made, which regulated only the amount of coal mined; the fixing of prices was left to the individual companies. When this agreement was dissolved at the end of a year, a new plan of curtailment was adopted: when a weakening of the market indicated that too much coal was being mined, work was stopped at all the mines for a number of days. But a five-years' trial of this method showed its evils and

ineffectiveness, and it was followed by another agreement similar to that made in 1878.

"This is the last formal agreement of which there is any record. About the beginning of 1887 the Pennsylvania courts and the New York Legislature were inquiring into the management of the anthracite trade, and it was thought inadvisable to invite further investigation by renewing the compact. Moreover, the Interstate Commerce Act had gone into effect January 1; and under that law combination was thought to be illegal." There is every reason to suppose, however, that such a combination still exists, and this is certainly the popular belief. Although this is emphatically denied by the railroad officials and coal operators, the sales agents of the companies still hold meetings and "discuss the state of the market." Whether there is a formal agreement or not, there is no doubt that production is restricted and prices are maintained by a "friendly agreement" of the anthracite producers. Though usually spoken of as a "trust," the industry is probably no more nearly on a trust basis than it has been for years.

It is not our intention here to vilify or to defend this combination; it is enough to point out its existence. Given the conditions of the anthracite industry—a high degree of centralization, rendering combination comparatively easy, and absolutely destructive competition if no agreement were effected—and it is difficult to see how it could have been otherwise. Probably too the danger of such a combination to the consuming public has been exaggerated; there is a very strict limit to the price which they may exact, in the competition of bituminous or soft coal, which constantly threatens to displace anthracite for smelting and other purposes. The advantage which such a compact organization gives the employers in a struggle with their men is, however, undoubted, and it is this point which directly concerns us now. To understand how the

men were able to wring concessions from them we must accordingly turn to a consideration of the other party to the struggle—the miners.

The first impression is of an unorganized, heterogeneous mob, separated by almost impassable barriers of race and language, and helplessly fettered by ignorance and poverty. The majority of the miners are of foreign birth, as many as twenty different languages besides English being spoken; and yet they were organized and held together during a period of over forty days and finally led to victory. The history of the coal-mining industry is full of struggle and conflicts between employers and miners, waged with varying success. Up to 1868 the miners were almost unorganized, but in that year the Workingmen's Benevolent Association was formed and successfully opposed a reduction in wages. Its unreasonable demands, its arrogance in victory, and its generally immoderate policy resulted in its downfall after some seven years of constant conflicts.

Up to this time the mines of Pennsylvania had been worked almost exclusively by Americans, Irish, Scotch, Welsh, English, and German. But after the labor troubles of the early seventies, immigration of another sort began, and the Poles, Hungarians, and Italians first made their appearance. They were brought in as contract labor by the operators, who hoped thereby to obtain a more docile set of laborers, and gradually displaced the other miners. It took a decade of a constantly increasing influx of Hungarians, Slavs, Bohemians, and Russians before an aroused public sentiment secured the passage of the alien contract labor law of 1885. But by that time the mining population had completely changed its character, and to-day probably four-fifths are of foreign parentage.

One of the results of stimulated immigration is a large surplus of laborers in the coal districts, which is in itself one of the crying evils of the situation. While they may

all be given employment under favorable conditions, many of them must necessarily remain unemployed a large part of the time, owing to the seasonal nature of the business. Mr. Brooks quotes a mine owner as follows on this point: "We can't give them work enough even at ninety cents a day because of the ups and downs of business. When things begin to improve, we must have enough on hand to satisfy the demand, and that means, when business slackens up, that many have to be idle."<sup>1</sup> This overabundance of labor and consequent irregularity of employment has resulted in lower annual incomes, which again have partly necessitated and partly followed a lower standard of living. Exaggerated as the newspaper reports have been, there remains the undisputed fact that the Italians, Poles, Huns, etc., are content to live on less, to live in worse houses, and under worse conditions, than the Americans or Germans. Such a lowering of the standard of living is not only fraught with the gravest danger to the whole laboring class, as it threatens to become permanent, but it renders those so living less able to withstand the periods of unemployment.

Much has been written and spoken against the strike as a means of effecting their demands, and labor unions have been condemned because of the disapproval attaching to this method of industrial warfare. And yet, when all is said and done, a strike is merely an incident in the labor movement. It is a violent protest designed to call general attention to the conditions against which the strike is directed, and finds its justification, if at all, in the fact that it does expose to public view conditions which might otherwise have continued unnoticed and uncorrected. But it is at best a crude weapon, and with their growth in power and responsibility the unions are resorting less and less to

<sup>1</sup> John Graham Brooks, art. "An Impression of the Anthracite Coal Troubles," in the *Yale Review*, Vol. vi. p. 307. Cf. also a letter from a A. Pardee & Co., in the *Outlook*, Oct. 13, 1900.

this method. Among the anthracite coal miners, however, such a move seemed necessary, for the double purpose of showing the operators the strength of the union and securing if possible its recognition, and as a means of uniting the miners themselves. The union of the miners—the United Mine Workers of America—was very powerful in the bituminous fields, but had shown almost no strength in the anthracite district. During the past year, however, the work of organization had been energetically carried on; and, in spite of the difficulty of uniting such diverse elements, the union had enrolled about 8,000 members in the anthracite region, though enthusiastic unionists claimed as many as 50,000. It is impossible to say just how many there were, but it was certain that the union miners were greatly in the minority. They hoped, however, in the event of a successful strike, that the non-union men would join the union, as they had done in Virginia in 1897 and in Illinois in 1898.

A convention of the United Mine Workers was held in Hazleton, Pa., on August 13 and the following days, about 300 delegates from the surrounding district being present. At this time a list of grievances was submitted, and it was determined to apply to the executive board for permission to strike on September 10. This proposition was considered by the board at a meeting in Indianapolis, and after some delay, due to the prospect of an outside settlement of the difficulties, the strike order was finally issued on September 13, to take effect on Monday, September 17. After reciting the negotiations which led to the strike, the president of the union concluded as follows:—

“Be law-abiding, self-respecting, and quiet; do not allow any person, whose interest it may be, to provoke you into quarrels and violations of the peace. . . . With a thoroughly aroused public sentiment behind us—a cause the justice of which cannot be successfully questioned—and the mine workers united and determined to stand until their many wrongs have been righted, we have supreme faith in the ultimate success of our

cause. Do not wait for any further notice to strike, but cease work in a body on and after Monday, September 17.

By order of the National Executive Board,  
JOHN MITCHELL, President,  
W. B. WILSON, Secretary-Treasurer."

It is difficult to say exactly how many miners answered the strike call of President Mitchell, but on the evening of September 17, he estimated that the strikers numbered 112,000; a day later it was claimed that 118,000 out of the total number of 142,000 miners had ceased work. Before the settlement of the strike most of the miners had joined the strikers.

Much more difficult than the ascertainment of the number of those involved is the determination of the merits of the questions at issue. That the miners had many real grievances there was, however, no doubt, and to a consideration of these we may now turn. A statement issued from the United Mine Workers' headquarters during the strike summarized their demands as follows:—

"What we want is: 1. A better enforcement of existing mine laws. 2. To obtain that which is fully our own—i. e. the value of labor actually performed and hitherto taken from us. 3. To obtain the right to purchase our implements of labor at a fair market value and escape from the compulsory rule which forces us to pay the operators more than twice what the same material can be purchased for at retail in the open market. 4. To allow a readjustment of the wage scale that will more nearly conform to the normal conditions of the anthracite trade and establish as nearly as practicable a uniform price for each class of work in and around the mines."

In addition to these concessions, the strikers demanded recognition of the union by the operators. There is considerably more in these demands than appears on the surface, and to thoroughly understand them we shall have to investigate the miners' grievances somewhat more in detail. Taking them up in the order indicated above, we find the following:—

(1) The existence of the company store, where the men are expected to trade, expenditures made there being de-



ducted from their pay at the end of the month. The miners claimed that they were charged exorbitant prices for all goods, and one of the operators is reported to have said that he could afford to mine coal without a profit if he could run his company store. One of the strikers furnished the following list of prices charged at such a store: for a 25-pound bag of flour, \$1.85; coffee, 30 cents a pound; tea from 30 to 80 cents; sugar, 7 ½ cents a pound; boots, \$4.75 a pair; a suit of clothes, \$25, etc. The state factory inspector reported in 1894 that the prices charged by company stores were about 20 per cent in excess of those charged by independent stores. It may be said in answer to this, that such stores are in the main confined to small, independent operators; an act of 1891 forbidding mining corporations in Pennsylvania from conducting general supply stores. While some of these stores are honestly conducted, for the benefit of the miners and not the profit of the operators, they are nevertheless a constant source of irritation to the men. These cannot help but feel that to trade elsewhere is to court discharge, though the employers invariably insist that not the slightest compulsion is used to influence them. The unwillingness of the operators to surrender them, and the arguments by which they justify them, both show how little they appreciate the attitude of the miners. Whether it is a belated "*patriarchalische*" view of the relations between employer and employe, or a desire for gain which maintains them, they are in either case equally distasteful to the men, and have for years been a prolific source of trouble.

Of the same nature was the complaint of the miners that they were compelled to pay 50 cents a month to the company doctor, whether they were ill or not. As a matter of fact the company doctor is charged for only by individual operators, and not by all of these. But while the company store may be condemned, the company doctor should

as certainly be upheld. Without such compulsory payment most of the workers would not receive proper medical treatment. It may be regarded as a system of mutual medical insurance, impossible without the compulsory feature.

(2) In apparent violation of the laws of Pennsylvania was the practically universal custom of monthly payments of wages, which the miners demanded should be made bi-weekly. A public statement made by John B. Garrett, Vice-President of the Lehigh Valley Coal Company, may be quoted in this connection:—

“Semi-monthly pay is observed by us in few cases, being all in which the men have demanded it. It would be observed everywhere were the demand made as required by law. I may frankly state, however, that in my judgment more frequent payment is undesirable for both the employer and the employe, as pay days, whenever and as often as they occur, are followed by decreased efficiency on the part of the men, resulting in reduced time, lessened output, and consequently increased cost.”

(3) One of the fruitful sources of complaint lies in the system of “dockage” which prevails in the anthracite region. Each colliery has its “check-docking boss,” who is paid by the company, and whose duty it is to inspect the coal as it comes from the mines and deduct any excess of slate and dirt over a certain amount. It is obvious that such a check is necessary, for the operator can neither afford to pay the miner for slate as coal, nor to have it hoisted out of the mine. It is equally clear that an opportunity is thereby given the employers of unfairly reducing the men’s wages; and even when administered with perfect fairness by the employer the system may result in arbitrary or spiteful treatment by the docking boss. The miners claim that they are docked excessively, and that from 10 to 12 per cent of their earnings are so withheld from them. At best they look with suspicion on the administration of the system, and demand that a representative of their own be appointed to act as inspector, in addition to the employer’s representative. A better under-

standing and greater confidence in each other would go far toward remedying this evil, which is one of practice rather than of principle.

(4) Another grievance related to the size of the car and the amount of coal included in a ton. This was formulated as follows in a statement of the executive board of the United Mine Workers:—

“The laws of the State of Pennsylvania make 2,400 pounds a ton of anthracite coal, yet anthracite coal miners are compelled to mine from 2,700 to 4,000 pounds for a ton. . . . Where they are paid by the car, instead of being required to furnish a well-rounded heap on the car at the breakers, as was originally agreed to, they have gradually been compelled to increase the amount of coal in each car by building the same perpendicularly from six to eighteen inches above the edge.”

The two counts in this indictment are really one, the claim being that the workers are made to mine a greater amount than they are paid for. At first sight this looks like the gravest injustice, and has been generally so construed by the public, and yet it seems to rest largely upon a misapprehension. A prominent railway official volunteered the following explanation:—

“The use of the word ton as applied to 3,360 pounds (or other number) is a misnomer; it is simply a unit of measurement which might be called a car or a cart-load or by any other name, and is the quantity of actual coal plus bone, slate, or other foreign material, for the removal of which a certain payment is made under the agreed scale of wages. It was probably originally adopted as representing approximately the amount of crude material from which a ton of prepared coal could be expected, but the amount would necessarily vary at the several mines and from the same mine at the hands of different workmen.”

(5) The grievance upon which the greatest emphasis was laid throughout the strike as evidence of unfair treatment of the miners by the operators was the exorbitant price charged for powder. The miners were compelled to purchase the powder used in mining from their employers, paying \$2.75 per keg for a grade of powder that could be purchased elsewhere for \$1.50 per keg. The powder charge of \$2.75 a keg had been first established by the agreement

of 1874, and represented the market value of powder at that time; although the price of powder had fallen almost half since then, the miner was still charged the old figure, the difference representing the amount of his alleged exploitation by the employer. In answer to this charge the operators asserted that the compensation of the miners was not decreased by the high price of powder, as his net earnings were always considered in fixing his wages. Another quotation from the statement by Mr. Garrett will perhaps render this clear:—

“If a man is employed for a special piece of work in which powder must be used, the superintendent agrees with him as to the amount which he should earn with industry and with care of the materials entrusted to him; then the value of the powder required in a day's work is added to the intended daily wage, and the sum of the two is agreed upon as the pay of that man for the work in question. Thus, if a man were valued at \$2.50 a day, and with due care would use a keg of powder valued at \$2.75 in five days, the day's consumption of powder, 55 cents, would be added to \$2.50, and he would be paid on a basis of \$3.05 per day, and charged with powder used at the price agreed upon. . . . It is well that the public should understand that there would be no occasion for the price of powder to enter into the pay of the miners were it not that safety of person and property absolutely requires that the operator should keep a firm hand upon both the quality and quantity of powder taken into the mines.”

In spite of this plausible explanation—the fact was not denied—the public was inclined to believe that the grievance was a real one, and indicated unfair treatment of the miners. If it made no difference whether the price of powder were high or low, it is difficult to see why the operators should have been so reluctant to concede this point. Certainly in the hands of unfair employers it afforded an opportunity for extortion of much the same nature as excessive docking for impurities. It has for years been a source of irritation and criticism on the part of the miners.

(6) Under the question of wages there are two separate points to be considered—the absolute amount of the wage and the manner of its determination. Leaving the former

of these questions for a moment, let us inquire first as to the method of remuneration. We may pass by those cases where time wages are paid, and confine our attention to the earnings of the miners themselves, which are determined by piece work. The grievance here consisted in the use of a sliding scale, according to which the wages of the miners were regulated. To thoroughly understand this we shall have to go back a few years and trace its development. In 1869 an agreement was made between the unions and operators, one of the features of which was the adoption of a sliding scale of wages in the Lehigh and Schuylkill regions, the scale differing in the two districts. In the Lehigh region wages were dependent upon the price of coal at tide-water. When the average price of coal at Elizabethport was \$5 per ton, the "basis" rate of wages was paid; when the price of coal advanced \$1, wages were increased 15 per cent. In the Schuylkill region wages were based upon the price of coal at Port Carbon, then an important shipping point on the Schuylkill, 2 miles above Pottsville. When the average price of coal was \$3 at Port Carbon the basis rate of wages was paid; for each 25 cents advance in the price of coal, wages were increased 5 per cent. This system has been retained to the present, though the rates have varied; and while on the surface it is eminently fair to the men, in practice it has worked out rather harshly. It has been said that a few railroads own three-fourths of the coal fields and are practically the sole carriers for the total product. These roads charge exorbitant freight rates for transporting the coal to tide-water, and the high rates fall most heavily on the miners under the sliding scale. With coal at a given price at tide, the higher the freight charge, the lower the price of coal at Port Carbon; and it is upon this price that the miners' wages depend. Likewise in the Lehigh region there is ground for complaint, for wages there are based upon tide-water prices, and these are uni-

formly lower than prices in the interior, where two-thirds of the product is sold.

(7) More vital, however, than any of these grievances was the demand of the miners for higher wages. This was the real point at issue in the strike, the others being more or less incidental to it, and by the concession of this demand on the part of the operators the strike was brought to an end. It is difficult to ascertain exactly what the earnings of the miners were during the last few years. Figures enough were offered in evidence by both sides, but as they were usually statements of daily or monthly wage rates, with no indication as to how many days the men worked, they had little value. Operators showed pay slips which indicated earnings of \$200 a month and more, while miners opposed to these others showing a net wage of less than \$20 a month. In a statement issued early in the struggle by the United Mine Workers it was claimed that "the average wages of the anthracite coal miner for many years has been less than \$250 annually." The report of the Bureau of Mines and Mining of Pennsylvania for 1899 showed that during that year only 54,000,000 tons of coal were mined; that would mean an average of 385.7 tons for each of the 140,000 persons employed. If they received as much as \$1 for each ton mined that would amount to only \$385 a year. It can be seen how meaningless any statement of the rate of wages is when we read in the same report a few pages further on that the average number of days worked in the mines of the anthracite region was about 180, or just one day in two for the year. Nor is this unusual: for the six years 1885-90 the Reading collieries were operated an average of 219.2 days; and for the years 1890-95, an average of 187.1 days. The conclusion is inevitable, therefore, that, whatever the rate of wages, the net earnings of the miners were wholly insufficient to maintain a worthy standard of living.

(8) A final demand of the strikers, or at least of the union men among them, was that the union be recognized, that is, that negotiations be carried on through the representatives of the union and the final agreement be made with them. This the employers refused to do. "I know it to be a fact," said one of them, "that the operators to a man will never consent to treat with Mitchell, either through arbitration or any other means." It is to the credit of the leaders of the men that they did not insist upon this point, when they saw that such action would jeopardize their real gains. Negotiations were carried on largely by outside parties, and in the final settlement the union as such did not figure.

Mr. Mitchell and the other strike leaders came in for their usual share of abuse at the hands of the operators and a part of the press. There would have been no trouble, was their cry, but for the interference of the professional agitator. But in the anthracite coal strike the agitator was not the cause of the trouble; that had existed long before he appeared on the scene. The discontent and the bad conditions were back of him; he was really only an effect. It is true that the labor leader or the walking delegate is often ignorant, immoderate, and troublesome, as he has shown himself in the Chicago building trade disputes. But to prove the agitator a nuisance is not to prove your case good.

Having set forth the situation in the anthracite coal fields and the causes of the strike, let us now turn to a consideration of its conduct and final settlement. The strike order was to take effect September 17, but before that date many of the miners had laid down their tools. On the 17th work was suspended in practically all of the collieries in the northern region, most of them not even going through the formality of blowing their whistle to summon the men to work. In the middle and southern regions a

few of the mines continued to run as usual, and a number of others with reduced forces. The operators endeavored to belittle the extent of the movement as far as possible by keeping the mines running. They, as well as the friends of the miners, and even the strikers themselves, predicted an early end to the strike and the defeat of the strikers. But as the strike progressed and the number of those who laid down their tools increased, the leaders became more hopeful. Organizers were put in every field to urge the men to quit, and when these methods failed a force of strikers would march upon a colliery and drive the men home. These marches were the occasion of several riots and conflicts between strikers and sheriff's deputies as well as the coal and iron police, who are a body of special guards employed by the operators to protect their mines.

The first few days passed without any serious outbreak, but on September 21 a serious riot occurred, resulting in the killing of three miners and wounding several others. Sheriff Toole and twenty deputies were escorting some non-union miners to their homes when they were attacked by a large number of strikers at Shenandoah, and in defending themselves used their revolvers on the crowd. As a result of this encounter the sheriff appealed to the Governor for aid, and the next morning found General Gobin and a force of 2,200 soldiers encamped around Shenandoah. The second fatal riot of the strike occurred on October 10 at Oneida, where one guard was killed and several men badly wounded, as the result of a march on the collieries by the striking miners. Six days later saw the greatest march of the strike, over 4,000 men invading the Panther Creek Valley in a final effort to close the mines there. A special train, however, brought a regiment to the scene in time to turn back the army of strikers. In these marches the miners were not only encouraged, but often led by the women. In spite of these outbreaks there was compara-



tively little lawlessness, and the men observed in the main their leaders' injunction to be law-abiding. Credit should be given the operators for not bringing outside labor into the district—a move which would certainly have provoked further outbreaks. On the other hand the efforts of the union were directed to preventing any violence, and some thousands of the men signed the pledge to abstain from intoxicating liquors during the strike.

From the very beginning of the struggle the clergy used every means in their power to terminate the strike and to prevent trouble. The Rev. Father Phillips, of St. Gabriel's Church, Hazleton, a prominent figure throughout the struggle, at first advised the men strongly against striking, but a week later issued a public statement in which he announced himself in favor of the movement and arrayed himself on the side of the men. Through his instrumentality Archbishop Ryan of Philadelphia was brought to the anthracite region, who did much to effect a settlement by his influence with the operators. Nor were the Protestant clergy behindhand in urging a settlement of the difficulties by means of arbitration; requests were made from all over the country of the Governor and others in authority to conclude the strike.

The union leaders claimed from the first that they had been willing to submit their demands to arbitration, and that they had only entered upon the strike after the operators and railway presidents had refused to treat with them. The executive board of the United Mine Workers pointed to the preamble of their constitution as evidence of their willingness. This declares that the union "desires to use all honorable means to maintain peace between ourselves and employers; adjusting all differences so far as possible by arbitration and conciliation, that strikes may become unnecessary." This assumption of righteousness was decidedly negated, however, by the treatment accorded the

firm of G. B. Markle & Co., during the strike. This firm had had an agreement with their employes since 1884, one of the features of which was the arbitration of all matters which could not be settled otherwise. As the grievance of the miners in the employ of Mr. Markle differed somewhat from those of the strikers, they decided not to go out with the other miners but to submit them to arbitration, and Archbishop Ryan was agreed upon as arbitrator. Mr. Mitchell, however, decided that no partial agreements could be made with individual operators, but that there must be a uniform agreement for the whole anthracite region. The efforts of both sides were concentrated for a while on the miners at Jeddo—the miners to bring the workmen there out on strike, and the operators to secure a separate adjustment of these difficulties and thus to destroy the unanimity of action. Finally, the men were persuaded to join the strikers and break their agreement with Markle & Co. Mr. Mitchell expressed regret at the necessity for such action and declared Mr. Markle a ‘fellow-victim,’ who was sacrificed by the other operators. Public opinion, however, could not justify so easily this distinct repudiation of an admirable agreement with a firm which had distinguished itself for its fair treatment of its employes. It may have been necessary as a strategic measure in this industrial warfare, but if so that fact only strengthens the argument for some other method of settlement than the arbitrament of force.

In spite of the sensational reports in the daily press it cannot be said that the strike caused a great amount of additional suffering. The normal condition of the anthracite miner is, however, bad enough to serve as material for a vivid picture of misery. At most of the collieries September 15 was pay-day, and at the others October 1, so that the miners were tolerably well supplied with funds when they began the strike. No aid was given by the

union until September 28, and then in the form of provisions and clothing rather than cash. Although offers of assistance came from the bituminous coal miners and various other unions, Mr. Mitchell was able to decline them all. Had the strike continued a little longer there is no doubt but that the suffering would have been greater.

The effects of the strike were by no means confined to the strikers, however. Many other lines were forced into idleness as soon as the supply of coal was cut off, notably the railroad men. The Erie & Wyoming Railroad laid off 75 per cent of its men on September 18; a couple of days later the Lehigh Valley laid off 800 men; and similarly on the Delaware & Hudson, the Ontario & Western, the Lackawanna, and the Reading. By October 3 navigation had ceased on the Schuylkill canal, there being no more coal to ship. The effect of the strike was soon felt by the consuming public, as the price of coal was rapidly advanced by the dealers.<sup>1</sup> It was calculated that the supply on hand would last until October 15, and when that date was passed and the strike still remained unsettled, fear was felt that the anthracite trade would be demoralized for years to come or perhaps lost forever. One sales agent wrote to an operator in Wilkes Barre: "One of my largest customers tells me that consumers are getting to like bituminous coal and that they think they will keep on using it."

Hopeless as the strike had appeared at the outset, before the end of September it seemed probable that the men

<sup>1</sup>The following are the retail prices charged for anthracite coal in New York City during the first ten days of the strike. Bituminous or soft coal retails at \$4.50 a ton.

Date.	Red ash.	Pink ash.	White ash.
Sept. 17.....	\$5.75	\$5.50	\$5.25
" 18.....	6.00	5.75	5.50
" 19.....	6.50	6.25	6.00
" 20.....	7.00	6.75	6.50
" 21.....	7.25	7.00	6.75
" 25.....	7.50	7.25	7.00

would gain their demands. On September 27 the operators offered the miners the 10 per cent advance in their wages which was asked for, on condition that they return to work at once. This was regarded by the men, however, as an attempt to break the strike by stampeding a part of the strikers back to work without consideration of their other grievances, and was therefore rejected by them. Mr. Mitchell stated the 10 per cent increase alone was not what the men wanted; "they must be treated with as a body before this strike can end." But he paved the way for a compromise by adding that a 10 per cent advance alone was a great victory. A few days later the following notice to their employes was issued by the Lehigh Valley, Wyoming, and Lackawanna coal companies:—

"We will adjust rates of wages so as to pay our mine employes on and after October 1, and until further notice, a net increase of 10 per cent on the wages heretofore received, and will take up with our employes any grievances which they may have.

"Note.—It is understood that powder will be sold to miners for \$1.50 a keg and that the difference between this rate and the old rate of \$2.75 shall be taken into account in figuring the net advance of 10 per cent for this class of labor."

Other railroad companies followed this move, and on October 5 the Independent Coal Operators' Association of the Wyoming Valley issued a similar notice. As the individual operators had hitherto been uncompromising in their opposition, this action removed one of the chief obstacles to a compromise. The position of the independent operators was a peculiar one. As a result of the complaint over high freight charges, the system had been very largely adopted in 1892 of the railroads buying the coal of the small operators at 60 per cent of the prices obtaining at tide-water. It then made no difference to the independents whether freight charges were high or low. But now they declared that they could not grant the 10 per cent increase in wages unless the coal-carrying companies agreed to re-

duce their tolls, or, to be more exact, to allow them 65 per cent instead of 60 per cent of the tide-water selling prices for their product. As the independent operators granted the wage advance it was generally understood that they had secured the desired concessions from the railroads.

The next step was taken by the miners. A convention was held in Scranton on October 12 and 13 to consider the offer of the operators, and, under the leadership of President Mitchell, it was voted to return to work, provided the operators abolished the sliding scale and promised that the 10 per cent advance would continue six months. The following is the text of the resolutions adopted:—

“Whereas, The anthracite coal operators have posted notices offering an advance of 10 per cent over wages formerly paid and have signified their willingness to adjust their grievances with their employes ;

“Whereas, They have failed to specify the length of time this advance would remain in force, and have also failed to abolish the sliding scale method of determining wages; we would recommend:

“That this convention accept an advance of 10 per cent, providing the operators will continue its payment until April 1, 1901, and will abolish the sliding scale in the Lehigh and Schuylkill regions; the scale of wages in the two last-named districts to remain stationary at 10 per cent above the present basis price; and that the companies will agree to adjust other grievances complained of with committees of their own employes.

“Should this proposition be unacceptable to the operators we recommend that all questions at issue be submitted to a fair and impartial board of arbitration.

“We would further recommend that under no circumstances whatever should there be a resumption of work at any of the collieries until all the operators signify their acceptance of this proposition and official notice is given that the strike is ended, and all return to work in a body on the same day.”

Within less than a week these demands were granted and the strike was practically won by the men. An agreement by the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company and the Lehigh Valley Coal Company to abolish the sliding scale, reached at a conference of operators in Philadelphia on October 17, marked the final stage in the negotiations. All other conditions fixed by the miners'

convention were accepted by the companies. Accordingly they posted notices to that effect, a move which was followed within the next day or two by most of the other companies. Nothing apparently now remained to end the strike and resume work but the formal order from strike headquarters. But a hitch occurred here. The union leaders objected to having the reduction in the price of powder taken into account in calculating the 10 per cent advance in wages; but as the operators were firm on that point and the other demands had been conceded, the order was finally given on October 25 for the miners to resume work on the 29th—just six weeks from the beginning of the strike.

The outcome may be counted as a substantial if not complete victory for the miners. The price of powder was reduced and the sliding scale abolished; a net advance of 10 per cent in wages was also granted, though there was included in this the reduction in the price of powder. Still, Mr. Mitchell declared he was satisfied with the result, as the miners got a 10 per cent increase over their former earnings, with a guarantee that there should be no reduction before April 1, 1901. Calculated in money these gains were purchased at a cost of not less than \$10,000,000. For the period of the strike the men lost in wages about \$4,000,000, while the operators lost the same amount in profits. There was a loss of perhaps half as much in railroad earnings. But in addition to this direct loss to those immediately involved, we should add the loss in wages of \$60,000 for 1,000 idle railroad employes, and \$500,000 in added cost to consumers by reason of the advance in the retail price of coal.

While the strike was ended, it was distinctly stated by the union leaders to have been merely a "preliminary skirmish." Within two weeks the executive board of the United Mine Workers, meeting in Indianapolis on Novem-

ber 12, declared that they should continue their efforts until they induced the operators in the anthracite region to meet their representatives in annual scale conference. Another struggle is therefore probable next April, which will involve the question of the recognition of the union. Aside from trade reasons the settlement in the present case was largely forced upon the conflicting parties by outside pressure, partly as a result of public sympathy for the miners and partly of political considerations due to the affiliation of most of the operators and railway managers with the dominant party. Both sides wished a settlement before election.

There were several reasons why public opinion was largely in sympathy with the miners in their struggle, and which might perhaps encourage them in a future strike. In the first place, in addition to low wages, which has been partially remedied, there are other grievances which have not been corrected. These include the ancient abuse of company stores, the payment of wages at monthly instead of bi-weekly periods—both of which are supposed to be obviated by State law,—the alleged unfairness in the measurement and dockage of cars, the irregularity of employment, and the length of the working day. In spite of the hazardous and disagreeable nature of this underground industry, and the fact that in the neighboring bituminous fields the day is only eight hours, the anthracite miners are compelled to work ten hours a day.

In the second place, the conduct of the strike was such as to deserve commendation. When one considers the number of men and interests involved, the diversity in race and language, and the character of the men, the general freedom from violence was remarkable. The complete confidence of the men in their leaders, the endeavors to secure redress without striking, their moderation, and their abstention from insistence on personal recognition—

all these things distinguished the officers of the United Mine Workers from the professional agitator. Organized labor, as well as the business interests of the employer, have suffered so often from self-seeking, immoderate, and ignorant leadership that it becomes a duty to recognize the capable and earnest conduct of this strike.

In the third place, it is difficult to see how the operators can consistently deny to the miners the right to organize. They themselves are organized, not only as corporations, but by secret combinations and in open associations. "Indeed the organization is so compact and its power so complete," writes a correspondent of the *Outlook*, "that in the past the miner discharged by one operator has found it impossible to secure work from another operator save by the subterfuge of changing his name." Whether this state of affairs still exists or not, there is no doubt but that throughout the strike the employers were bitterly hostile to organized labor and refused to have any dealings with its officials. The men on their part are determined that the union shall be recognized. It is evident that in this particular instance the advance in the wages of the miners, which was generally recognized to have been just, would not have been brought about save through the organized efforts of the United Mine Workers. The settlement of this question is therefore only postponed.

It will be instructive, in conclusion, to glance at the situation in the bituminous coal fields in Western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. The miners in these States had struck in 1897 and had obtained most of their demands—a 10 per cent advance in wages, an eight-hour day, and an annual agreement between representatives of the organizations of both parties. The first such agreement was adopted by a joint convention in January, 1898, and, in addition to fixing wages and conditions of work, arranged a system of arbitration by which strikes were to



be avoided. District boards of conciliation were to be provided for each field for the settlement of local grievances. State boards were to dispose of matters affecting two or more districts within the State, and an interstate board was to adjust differences that might arise between the miners and operators of different States.

This is a good example of "collective bargaining," of which another notable example in the United States is the agreement between the National Metal Trades Association and the International Association of Machinists.<sup>1</sup> In England the Durham and Northumberland coal miners have had collective bargaining for a number of years with marked success. There the Board of Conciliation, composed of operators and coal miners, meets to stipulate general prices and conditions which shall be maintained in the industry. But the special application of these prices to different localities is attended to by "joint committees." This was the method followed in the bituminous States after the Chicago convention of 1898.

It is necessary to the success of such collective bargaining that the agreement be subscribed to by a majority of operators and miners, and for each side to be thoroughly organized. Practically it has meant compulsory membership in the miners' union in the bituminous field; and at the same time the extension of the union has had the hearty support of the operators. The growth of the organizations insures stability and solidarity, and since the adoption of this method both sides declare themselves satisfied with the results.

That some such method of settling industrial disputes should be at least attempted before resort is had to strikes or lockouts needs no argument. In the case of a natural monopoly like the anthracite coal industry, which has

<sup>1</sup> See an article by the writer on "The Machinists' Strike," in the *Yale Review*, Nov., 1900.

passed into the ownership and control of a few men, and which fills a primary want in our civilized life, it should not be at the option of these individuals to say whether the industry shall be stopped. Nor should the miners have it in their power to stop production while their grievances are being redressed. If voluntary arbitration is inadequate, then here, if anywhere, compulsory arbitration should be had. Failing some such peaceful way of securing industrial stability in this field, the arguments for further control or even nationalization of the coal mines gain force.