Sept. 24, 1924

Mem. of Conversation with Mr. George K. Leet

Secretary of Steel Corporation

The Judge and Sites have repeated suggested that I see Leet, who has been Secretary of the Steel Corporation since April 25, 1922, so I go down on the afternoon of Sept. 24, 1924.

Sites says, "I think you better see him alone though if the Judge were here I am sure he would suggest my going in with you. You will find him a great enthusiast."

Leet is a short, thickset person, perhaps 40, clear serious eyes, round, healthy face. Reminds me of Sid without any of Sid's cynicism - the same absorption in his task. Reminds me that we had met before when I came to see Judge Gary. He was for 11 years the Judge's private secretary - probably it was he who ushered me in on my various visits. He knows what I am after and has evidently been trying to get a speech ready. He begins in a solemn and perfectly sincere voice to tell me that he thinks the Judge is the greatest living man today. He assures me he knows him from top to bottom, practically lived with him 11 years, night and day, and that he has come out of that having the greatest greatest affection and the greatest honor for him. He thinks nobody compares with him as a man, a citizen, an executive. Says he has never seen him excited, never seen him angry, never seen him lose control of himself, that he is always courteous and considerate, always master of himself. He has been trying to think out an analysis. He is very deliberate as he talks, looking out the window and only now and then turning to me.

He says Judge Gary has a passion for exact justice. He said"Lyman Abbott says that the greatest thing in the world is love (I don't correct him.) - I think the greatest thing in the world is exact justice. Judge Gary wants that more than anything else in the world. He shows it in all his dealings with

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his employees. It doesn't make any difference whether it is the president of a company who comes here or a group of working men, he wants that each man or group of men should have exact justice. I remember one time that I was up at his town house when he was settling a dispute between two of his servants. He called them into his bedroom and made each give his side of the thing, then he called in the other servants and held a little court and rendered a decision.

"Then, he has a passion for exact information. You soon learn not to go to him with a half-baked program. And it doesn't take him any time to understand what you present. One of our Presidents went in with a long story that he had worked out carefully. The Judge listened to him two or three minutes and said, 'That is what we will do.' But the President said, "But, Judge, I have not finished my story.' He said, 'You don'tneed to, I know all about it, I have decided.' That is, he was far ahead of anybody else. Our Presidents meet and discuss their problem for a full afternoon and come to their decision. Then they come down to Judge Gary's office and in ten or fifteen minutes he has got the whole thing. I never saw anybody grasp things so quick. But, then, he is the whole thing in the Steel Corporation."

Lett recalls the national Industrial Conference and the little paragraph the Judge read on the last day, recalls Gompers' standing up and answering him and shaking his finger at him, but it did not stop the Judge because he believed what he said was fair. They tried to make him compromise, and he sent out a telegram saying that he could not compromise with principle.

Leet recalls the examination of the Judge by the Senate Committee investigating the steel strike - the way Senator Walsh interrupted him, not letting him answer a question before he had fired another at him. But the Judge was perfectly cool, and

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finally when he got a chance he answered everything and satisfied the Committee. If Walsh was trying to confound the Judge it was a"hopeless proposition."

"He goes right to the point in his addresses and letters. Some people have criticized him to me as being too brief. Well, I always say, he says it all, doesn't he?"

He refers to the cut-throat competition before Gary's time and how he changed all that. The steel business today is conducted on the principles he has laid down. The iron or steel industry would not have anybody else as a president.

Refers to the way technical questions, improvements in business, improvements in industrial relations are discussed at the Institute meetings, and how the Judge sits through all these discussions. I asked him if he understands the technical questions and he says he is interested in everything.

I speak of this later to Sites, and he says, "It is part of the Judge's courtesy. He will listen to everybody whether he is interested or not.

Leet goes on about the Judge's wonderful vision and says"if anybody has a sixth sense he has it. He sees what is coming long before anybody else. He used to get out each year a prospectus for the coming year. It was uncanny how right he was." Recalls that in a speech in Chicago in 1913 he had said, "Business is bad but we are approaching the dawn of prosperity." Six months later business was still poor, and the Judge speaking at the Waldorf said, "Six months ago I said the dawn of prosperity was approaching, - we are six months nearer now to that dawn.' Surprised everybody because the Judge never jokes or tells stories, he is always serious.

Refers to the fact that at the Stanley investigation not a single competitor could be found to testify that the Steel

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Corporation had been unfair in any of its business dealings. Thinks the Judge was hurt by the bringing of the suit, said to him, 'After all I have done to put the steel and iron business on a stable basis to have this come.'

The Judge's power of quick mastery of material amazes Leet. Tells how when Herbert Knox Smith's big report came to the office, Gary spent about four hours of the day over it and in that time there were frequent interruptions and interviews. After he had gone home Leet took up the book and found he had been clear through it, marking pages and frequently scribbling comments on the margin. "It was amazing to me. I asked him how in the world he did it, did the pages photograph themselves on his mind as he looked at them." He didn't seem to think it was anything unusual. He told him he just got the gist of the book. It was his interest in the Corporation that made him read everything that came along, no matter how dry as dust it was.

"He has the confidence of everybody in the steel industry, what he says goes without saying. People don't understand him. There have been so many things said against him, that many people when they hear about him think of the big dollar sign that the Hearst papers used to put on their cartoons. The Judge will meet anybody, there is never any fence built around him. We never try to give the impression to people who come to call on him that we we are ushering them into the presence of God Almighty. People always get what they want when they come to see the Judge. I don't want to blow my own horn but we had fine relations in my time with the newspaper men. They never questioned what we gave them, knew we were telling them the truth. At a meeting of the directors of another corporation across the street, the chairman of the board when the newspaper men came in said, 'These newspaper men are our friends because we always treat them right.' One of the men spoke

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up and said, 'That is not true, Mr. Chairman, you don't give us what we came for or give it to us straight.'

"'Where are you treated better?' the chairman asked; and the whole group of newspaper men broke out with 'Over at the Steel Corporation.' I had three rules in dealing with them: 1) Help them to get their information, 2) Respect the scoop when a man had it, and 3) Never play favorites. They came in and got anything we had. We tried to play the game square in every respect.

"The Judge was criticized for not seeing Gompers and Foster at the time of the last strike. He didn't want to see a committee representing 10% of the employees when the other 90% had no representation. He told them he would see them as individuals but not as a committee. That is where his long head came in. He is obliged to see all sides and to see it before the other fellow does.

"I have long urged him to have his life written. He doesn't realize the position he holds in the world today."

Then half to himself he said, "What a president of the U.S. he would make! I believe he has done more for the working men of the country than any other man that ever lived. but he has not done it in a showey way. He never went on the platform and talked about it, but he went down where the need was and did things. He has sometimes had to put his foot down to get things done. There was the 12-hour day. The Board and the Presidents objected to ending it. He just put his foot down and said, It has got to stop, we will have no more of it. We didn't want the 12-hour day any more than the Interchurch people did but the whole steel industry had to be won over. It was a big jump from 12 to 8 hours, and some of them didn't understand because we were accustomed to working when necessary 12 or 16 hours. I always did it when I

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was a boy trying to make my way and never thought of anything else." I didn't stop to argue with him that the situation was probably different. And here we have a touching digression. He tells me about his boy that they have just taken up to Williams College - a nice boy, a plodder, never took any medals but made his entrance without condition. Three or four times he interrupts to say, "We are awfully lonesome."

Tells of the Judge's talk at the officers' lunch table upstairs - always interested in any information offered by anybody. But be sure it is sound. "He sent me to get something one day, and when I reported he said, 'Are you guessing? If so, I can guess as well as you can.' You learn never to go to him without knowing all you can get about a thing. He senses when a man knows what he is talking about - keeps after him until we all know whether the man knows or not.

"Another thing. He often gives remarkable talks about the Bible, the influence of Christ on a man's life - don't slop over but he encourages a man to study the Bible. I always love his reminiscences and the wisdom that flows from his lips." Leet is very solemn over all this. He went on, "That is the way I see the Judge after being close to him for 11 years. He is the greatest man I have ever seen. I don't know how he does it. You would think with all his trials he would be nervous sometimes, but he never shows it. He doesn't smoke - drinks very little coffee and no wine. He is the biggest man in the industrial world today. I have always felt that and tried to shield him all I could - never took my burdens to him - never let other people bother him uselessly if I could help it."

Goes again into the fact of the Judge's open mind and tells how anybody from president down to officeboy could go into see him if he had something to say. Elaborates on his prompt-

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ness and how he always helped him to be prompt - saw that he got to every luncheon one minute before the hour - got to every meeting before the hour - "The Judge is strong for that."

He always took care of the Judge's comings and goings, got his tickets, relieved him of all responsibility of traveling, generally went to the trainwith him. Says he was too big a man to run around the streets alone - says something always happened if he didn't go with him. He tells of how once when he was very busy and the Judge had only to go to the subway and from there to the station, that he sent a boy with him - they missed the train, and Mrs. Gary was to be on that train. The Judge came back and came in Leet's office where he was very busy. He said, "Well, I missed the train. What am I going to do now?"

"I said, 'You stay right there. Dictate a message for Arthur to Mrs. Gary on the train. Get the station master on the Penn. and make him see that she gets it. You stay there while I go across the street.'

"I went over to railroad headquarters. They are all my friends over there. I said, 'Boys, I'm in trouble. I have to get Judge Gary in Washington in time to catch such and such a train for White Sulphur Springs. When is the next train going?'

"'In 30 minutes on the B. & O.'

"'Good! You see that there are reservations for him and me on that train.

"'How much time between trains?'

"'Ten minutes.

"'Teleghaph to the president of the White Sulphur road that Judge Gary wants to make that train. Mrs. Gary is on the train now, and ask him as a favor to Judge Gary to hold it.'

"Then I go back and get the Judge. We get to the train. And at every station the Judge had his watch out and his time

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table. He seemed to enjoy it. He seemed to think it was great fun?

Of course what was happening was that the Judge was enjoying Leet!

"We were seven minutes late. I whisked the Judge over to the train. There was the train waiting. "We had order s to wait for you," the train master said. I saw the Judge in beside Mrs. Gary before I left. Then I took the midnight train home."

He tells another story about a mistake being made in reservations that were ordered a month before. When he went for them they had not been made. He went from authority to authority and finally got the president of the road to put on an extra train. Then he went down to meet the Judge and Mrs. Gary at this train, and they didn't come. When it was three minutes before train time and they were not on hand he got hold of the station master and induced him to telephone to the responsible party at the Judge's home. He got the man in the telephone booth - they couldn't get the man at the Judge's home. The train man said, 'It's time and I am going to start my train.' I closed the door of the telephone booth and in three minutes more I saw the Judge and Mrs. Gary. Then I opened the door and I said, 'Now you can start your train - the Judge is here."

"The Judge said, 'How did you do it, Leet?' I told him I shut him in the telephone booth.'"

Nothing could surpass the honesty of this man's admiration--his conviction that the Judge is the greatest man in the world. There is no self-seeking, no hypocrisy, he thinks it. He paid a great tribute at the end to the Judge when he said, "I was up against it when I came in as Judge Gary's secretary. I was not an educated man. I had had a hard struggle, and here I was up against a superman. Now, the average man when he is put into intimacy with greatness is apt to shrink, to lose his identity. I used to shut my eyes and say,

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don't lose you identity, hold on to yourself. I always tried to do that, and the Judge let me do it. He never tries to overrule you. He was always considerate. He treated you as a man, doesn't put you off if you brought something that was worth while. You always got consideration from him on your merits."

You can see that the one thing that makes Leet so reverential is this fact that this superman didn't crush him, and that he helped a naturally unexpressive, diffident boy, overconscious of his handicaps and lack of education and experience to develop into a really unusually definite personality, and also trained him to take larger responsibility. It would have been very easy to have utterly crushed Leet or else when he realized that he was clinging to his own individuality as his only hope in the assodication, to have let him go. I somehow think that in Leet's case I have one of the very interesting lights on Judge Gary. However, whether that could have been done with a person who had less reverence for the Judge I am not sure. but Leet would not have reverenced a man who

I go back to Sites and say I certainly found a hero worshiper there but Sites evidently doesn't think it good form to joke about anything or anybody connected with the Steel Corporation, or perhaps he is a little too diplomatic, maybe that is it. I have a suspicion he is a little jealous of Leet and of the place that he took as a secretary, his reputation in the office must really be very great. I doubt if Sites yet is as perfect a secretary as Leet became. I go over my notes with him.

Apropos of the Judge's ability to quickly digest the points in an elaborate report, he tells of a report of an American engineer on a work in Pekin, China, on which he wanted the Judge's opinion. The Judge had but little time and yet by a few questions got really at the heart of the matter so that the man who felt at the start he must have two hours in little more

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than two minutes felt that the Judge knew what he should about the case.

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