Interview with Mr. Buffington Sept. 12, 1924
President of Illinois Iron & Steel Co.

Buffington is evidently here for the Presidents' meeting with Judge Gary. Sites and I between us tell him what I am doing. At Judge Gary's request evidently Sites sits in. It is a little funny, their sense that a strict supervision is wisest.

Buffington starts out with a more or less prepared but I think quite sincere, presentation of his impression of Judge Gary. Says that there are two outstanding things: first, his innate sense of justice, and, second, his capacity to see both sides. Says that his first meeting (as a matter of fact this was his second - see note later) was when the American Steel & Wire of Ill. was under consideration. This was in '97. He was a wire manufacturer at Anderson, Ind., making rods, wires and wire nails. Several of the leaders in the industry were trying to bring about a consolidation. Among them he mentions Gates, Elwood, Lambert, (John ?) Washburn and Moen. (See discussion in Steel suit for the location of these men, etc.) They made no progress in getting this amalgamation until Gary was called in. In the course of the business Gary came to B, suggesting B says, "that I sell." I believed in the consolidation, thought we could effect economies by it, serve the public better; but I named a price which my competitors thought too high, also they declared my terms unreasonable. When Gary came I found I had anentirely different type of man to agree with. I saw at once that his essential qualities were what I have named above - a sense of justice, and ability and a desire to see both sides. Gary was inclined to believe at the start that I was too high in my terms, but his fairness led me to greater frankness than I was

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accustomed to in my business dealings. As a matter of fact I put all my cards on the table, so great was my confidence in him. I had associated with me in the negotiations a lawyer for whom I had a high regard. I wanted somebody that could protect my interest in technical matters, and Gary was so far that I finally said to him, 'I am going to let my lawyer go home if you will consent to guide me and to safeguard my interests in these negotiations.' Judge Gary questioned me until he was satisfied and finally said, 'I will do it.' My lawyer agreed that that I would be safe in his hands.

There is another record that shows these characteristics which I consider strongest in this man, and that is the building up of the Iron and Steel Institute. The men that have gone into that Institute are strong characters. They don't easily subordinate themselves but Judge Gary has guided them to a distinct advance in their business efforts. I think he was the first man who ever talked to them of a Golden Rule in business, who ever advised them not to forget the other fellow. In our earlier days we used to think we had no call to regard the other fellow. Judge Gary always argued that any injustice done for the sake of immediate gain would react. The trouble with us was that we had no interest in ethics in business, we lacked confidence in one another, and his opinion was that we could not succeed ultimately on any such code.

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He talked from the start of the right of employees and the right of the public. He was the first man in our field to do something to counteract the "public be damned" attitude.

"The meetings of the presidents which are held frequently have always impressed me personally. Judge Gary always gives an inspiring and helpful talk. It is a great satisfaction to be associated with a Company that pays some attention to the higher ideals of life. You see how it has operated from the fact that the Iron and Steel Institute has adopted as a motto 'Right Makes Might.'

"I had no doubt of the wisdom of the forming of the Steel Corporation in 1901. Of course the disposition of the different units was to get all they could. Gary always counseled in forming the Corporation that each unit should have consideration for the others, that it also must have consideration for the investing public, the stockholders that went in - they were our partners.

"It is Gary's leadership that gave me confidence in the future of the Steel Corporation. In all the problems - and there were many that came up - he showed the same characteristics - justice and seeing both sides. When the Federal Steel was formed he asked me to go to Chicago" - I am a little mixed here on the position that Buffington took after the formation of the American Steel & Iron. It is certain that when the Corporation was formed he went to Chicago as President of the Illinois Steel Co. He hesitated when asked to do this because the responsibilities were much greater but agreed at the Judge's request. The Illinois Steel Co. now includes the Joliet, South Chicago, and operates the Gary plant which was built by the Steel Company of Indiana.

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He gives a list of the men who went into the first wire combination, as I understand it - Elwood of Dubuque (barbed wire), the Salem-Ohio Wire Nail Co., Frank Buckus - American Wire Co. of Cleveland.

He then tells me of this first meeting with the Judge at Indianapolis. His company had a lawsuit with a competitor whose counsel was Gary. Gary was able to settle the thing to the satisfaction of both parties. He drops this remark then, "Gary was always more than a lawyer - he was a counselor in more than a legal sense."

I asked him if he has been satisfied with Judge Gary's labor policy. He said, "Absolutely in sympathy with its objective." If he understands Judge Gary's opposition to organized labor it is that the employees are represented by outsiders, not by their own representatives - that he is opposed to this outside representation. I remarked that it is a good deal like outside operation of a business - absentee landlord. He says, "The crux of Gary's labor policy is to cultivate direct relations, that has resulted from the safety work." One of the best things that has come out of that, in his judgment, is that it interests a man not only in his own safety but in his brother worker. He says they have seen in Illinois the effect on the superintendents particularly. Many of them were inclined to look upon workmen as a commodity, - no interest except to get the most possible out of them. But safety work has led them to realize the human responsibilites. One of the outcomes of the safety work with them is the Good Fellow Club, a voluntary organization of employees, helping one another. Says even the foreigners want to belong, that this good fellowship has even affected the Union men, of which

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they have considerable numbers. It reveals a different relation between employer and employees than that to which they have been accustomed.

He says that Judge Gary has for a long time been trying to educate his Presidents to a change of attitude on the 12-hour day; that he (Buffington) was brought up to believe work ~~remorseless~~ wholesome. He was always regardless of hours, says that was true of many of his employees - believed they had a right to work as long as they wanted to in order to have the largerearnings, their idea was that they must strike while the iron is hot, that was always his idea. He said once to Gary, "Your real workman always enjoys his work."

"No, Buffington," Gary replied, "you don't mean that. He enjoys the fruits of his work."

"He has long talked to us in regard to the new idea about working men. 'They need more recreation - they need some cultural interests' he told us time and time again that we must change in deference to public sentiment as well as to the greater good of the workmen. We used to argue that the men would not use their time to good purpose, but the Judge would always shake his head, "Some would not, of course, just as some of you would not but the great majority will employ it properly, giving more time to their families, to outside interests, just as other people would. You must get it out of your heads that the same motives do not actuate them as do you."

"The 8-hour day seems to work - the men seem happy. We of course had many problems at first - they are not all solved yet. Work was plenty when the change was made and the labor supply short."

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I asked him if he thinks they do as much work in 8 as they did in 12 hours. He said, "No, it's impossible."

CABOT

He speaks of the way mechanical devices have lessened heavy labor. Refers to Cabot's first visit to the plant. I find that they all thought this was more or less of a joke and that they are all inclined to make a little fun of Cabot. He arrived late in the evening in Chicago, and Buffington said, "I suppose you will not want to go to the works in the morning." He said "No, I would like to begin at once.' I said 'All right! and we went to the plant. He said, 'I would like to begin with the Open Hearth.' We arrived between pouring times. The men were lying about, some of them smoking" - and probably some playing cards though he did not say so. "Cabot said, 'I see the furnace is not working.' 'Oh, yes,' I said, 'these men are on duty, they are waiting for pouring time.' He had no idea the men didn't work continuously. It was the same with the blast furnaces, we arrived in a rest period. Of course in both of these operations you cannot hasten the metal. Moreover, men could not live and work continuously at these operations."

He says that the housing in South Chicago is very discouraging to him, that when the plants were established by his predecessors no attempt was made to acquire land for buildings. Thinks, however, conditions, particularly among foreigners, are improving., that the Y.M.C.A is responsible for this, also credits the visiting nurses - speaks particularly of the help that they give to the Good Fellow Club, that they say 'Your business is our business.'

Referred again to Judge Gary's principles which

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he seems to think are the chief thing about the Judge. He says "I don't think I can remember a Presidents' meeting in which Judge Gary did not try to emphasize our relations to the public, to our employees. I have often said to my fellow presidents, 'He makes better men of us. We didn't use to think that we could have a duty to the workers, didn't think it was our business, we were engrossed with what we called practicalities. The Judge has made us understand that the worker and his welfare is one of our chief practicalities.

"He is a wonderful leader. When you take a problem to him, he helps you to come to the right solution, and then gives you all the credit. And if it is trouble with somebody he always says at the start, 'Now, what is the other fellow's side, Buffington?'"

One thing is sure, if Mr. Buffington has any reservations about Judge Gary or any other point in view than that he has expressed to me, I will never get it. He is a canny gentleman, and on the watch out.

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Buffington Interview

His chief point is integration. Says that he was brought up in Pittsburgh, went to college, worked in vacations as a roller. Loved mills - always followed the industry, had long ago come to the conclusion that integration was essential. Draws a dramatic picture of the wide flung limits, Says that when he found this suit was to come before him he resolved that that point must be considered and emphasized. Saw that the forces towards combination were too great to be overcome, that they must beproperly directed, handled, and if so would bring great benefit to the country and to the people. He says he followed all the testimony and at the end of the time put aside all work and spent three solid months in writing his opinion. Advised me to go to Trinity College at Hartford where, he says, all his books and notes have been placed for students.

Speaks of Reed's analysis as being masterly. Has the same high opinion of Gary that they all seem to have. Says this was founded in the suit, that he had never seen him before, knew nothing about him, and that it was only some years afterwards that they met. Mrs. Gary emphasized this at the lunch table.

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