





Yours Truly
Wm. Packard

An Outline

OF

THE CAREER

OF

The Hon. Asa Packer,

OF

PENNSYLVANIA.

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1867.



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THE HONORABLE ASA PACKER,

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Among the countless blessings of free institutions, one should be particularized which is found in no degree under the world-worn systems of exclusive privilege. Governments of force hedge in the favorites of power to their sole enjoyment of all the fruits of ambitious enterprise, hedging out all others, however endowed by God's gifts, as hewers of wood and drawers of water to the favored few. In contrast with the petty great by birth or by the caprice of arbitrary power, we offer one example among many of our men great by merit, who, elsewhere than under American institutions, would have been more than successful to have attained respectable mediocrity, but who more likely, whatever their merit, would have been kept down in dependent poverty to the end. Let this and all like examples be an incentive to Americans all, and specially to American youth, to guard well the tree of Liberty and Constitutional Law, praying Heaven that it may be watered by the dews of the morning and of the evening, and by the showers of the noon-day.

Our example is the Honorable Asa Packer, of Pennsylvania.

He was born in the township of Groton, New London County, Connecticut, near the beginning of the year 1806. At that early period, opportunities of education were rare to people of small means. Yet the winter district school, industrious application and an active, discerning mind did not fail to give Asa Packer the ground-work of a good business education, growing with his growth and expanding to his wants in the career to which, in the free scope of our institutions, he chose to apply himself. Even such slender early attainments, joined to heroic will and indomitable

perseverance, to unswerving integrity and Christian principle, have given direction and success to that career and crowned his years with blessings greatly beyond the usual lot—blessings received and blessings bestowed, beyond the lot of any but of those made great by merit and by the favor of Heaven.

“Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.” Just at the period when parental solicitude and protection seemed indispensable to shape the future life and character of the child, his loving and devoted mother was taken hence; and, soon after, the cup of sorrow was more than full by the decease likewise of his estimable father, Elisha Packer. With the orphan’s loneliness and sorrow came the struggle with life’s wants and from that, self-reliance; and the untold relief of a helping-hand in trouble and toil, developed strongly in him the qualities of manly sympathy which mark the well-poised, kind-hearted, generous gentleman of to-day.

The subsequent life of Asa Packer illustrates the power of unaided Mind, when free to choose its own career—as no where but in America could it do;—and it equally illustrates the more than royal dignity of Labor when free to gather its own fruits to its own use or bestowal—as it also could no where else do. The foundation of his ample fortune was laid literally with the labor of his hand. The labor of his hand and head has completed the structure, competing, painfully for a while, but successfully at last, with the only limitation in this land upon the freedom of toil—associated capital. Asa Packer began life with only the capital he carried in his head, and heart, and hand. They were all his capital then; they have made all his capital now. No stain spots the fair record of his life: he has gathered the honest earnings of his labors,—and no more. And, while gathering the rewards of his toil, his pursuits and enterprises have been most useful in their character to the mass of his countrymen, and specially encouraging to the young, enterprising and worthy. The fortune thus worthily won is enjoyed without luxury and display, and bestowed munificently but without ostentation in charities fostered under his personal oversight, and on foundations laid for all time.

Such noble management and benevolent use of large accumulations, so pure and upright a life and example, distinguish Asa Packer as a fit pattern for imitation by the present generation, and succeeding ones. He is an admirable sample of the plain, republican habits and

unostentatious usefulness which characterized the early founders of the Republic. Leading incidents in such a career ought to encourage those who find themselves now or hereafter with similar surroundings; and they are given, briefly, with a view to stimulate a noble emulation of a truly noble model.

It was in the year 1822, when hardly seventeen, that the poor orphan-boy left the home of his youth, the pioneer of his surviving family, to seek a new home in Western wilds. His knapsack contained his sole outfit: with that on his back and few coins in his purse, he bravely journeyed on foot to the township of Brooklyn, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, where he apprenticed himself to a carpenter and joiner. While an apprentice, he went to work on the dwelling of William Drinker, Esq., at Springville, which led to his making Springville his residence.

When his labor became his own, with its first fruits he bought a small lot of wild land and entered upon the stern toil of the hardy pioneers on the upper waters of the Susquehanna.

It was not there, as in the bare prairies of the West, where the land invites the plough. Few can now have any conception of the work done in those days when "a man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees." The portions of Pennsylvania now among the most productive were forty-five years ago a wilderness waste, whose great trees (they would be invaluable now,) were cut down and burned as cumbering the ground. The bold pioneers of those days were the men to meet the defiant question, shall the bristling forest give way and these hills and valleys be the gardens of our future home? There could be no evasion, there: "In the sweat of thy face shall thou eat bread." Labor, manual labor, the work of strong hands and willing hearts, and a faith refreshing its courage in the deep shadows of the mighty forest,—these alone, under the blessing of Providence, could meet the occasion. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose." And already those wilds are indeed the gardens of our land.

Eleven years of hard work were performed in that new section by Asa Packer without dampening his ardor, or breaking down his good iron will. As the primitive woods receded before his

sturdy blows, a frugal home was soon prepared to which he brought in marriage Sarah, the daughter of Zopher Blakslee, Esq., who presides so gracefully in their household. She had become proficient in the useful employments of her sex from the same necessity that made her husband a model of manly strength and skill in his. Let the young ladies of this day remember,—and those who have the honor to know the charitable, kind-hearted lady who presides over that hospitable home in Mauch Chunk, can not but remember, that *her* industry and household-skill, the labors of her honored hands, were largely instrumental in acquiring their solid wealth. While his stout arm and axe bared the woodland to culture, her nimble fingers and spinning-wheel prepared every garment of the usual wear of their household, for the first ten years of their married life.

Such a woman, such a wife and mother, may deservedly rank as "*The first lady of America!*"

The circumstance that led to a change in their field of labor was a necessity common to the more enterprising pioneer settlers,—that of seeking employment elsewhere a portion of the year, in order to provide ready money for taxes and out-side supplies, while awaiting such proceeds from their own soil when it should have become capable of a better tilth. The nearest point where labor could then command cash in hand was a hundred miles away, in the Lehigh Valley. The journey was by foot-paths, through rough mountain-passes, in the almost continuous forests which stretched between the upper waters of the Susquehanna and the Lehigh.

In the valley of the Lehigh, Josiah White and Erskine Hazard, representatives of the associated capital of Philadelphia, had projected and executed improvements to develop the mineral resources of that rich but rugged region. The genius of one man, Josiah White, aided in execution afterwards by the Company's engineers, Canvas White and Edwin A. Douglass, almost as fertile in resources as he, accomplished results of engineering, the most stupendous of their day, and opened to market the coal, timber, iron, lime, cement and slate of the treasure-laden valley and hills of the Lehigh.

Thither came another man of genius as great and far-seeing, perhaps greater than all,—came there to labor as an artisan with his own hands. Unnoticed and unknown, beyond the comrades of

similar employment, Asa Packer made then the close observation which gave him that remarkable foresight and correct appreciation of the far greater future in the development of collieries, coal transportation, &c., which led to his very notable, subsequent career.

At length he had found his true field; and he concluded, finally, to make this the theatre of his future enterprise. Accordingly, in the spring of 1833, he left his farm in Susquehenna County to labor in this more hopeful locality. This representative man of labor, after the toil of years, was yet poor, save in those qualities of mind and skill which characterize the well-gifted of all ages. His small accumulation, even if success were the touch-stone of desert, as it is not, reflects no way on the sterling worth of the young settler: he cleared his title as he cleared his land, which is rarely the lot of even the old settler fully to accomplish.

In the hum and hurry of a mining region, his advent was that of one more of the thousands who preceded or followed him, an event only to himself and his. His first and second summers were employed in boating coal from Mauch Chunk to Philadelphia, in which he himself acted "master" of his own boat.

The energy, fidelity, and capacity displayed in this new occupation could not fail to bring him to the notice of the worthy Managers of the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company. Thenceforward his commanding talents and enterprise in business, made him prominent, even beyond the region of the Lehigh. He associated with himself a younger and only brother; and the firm became well and widely known, conducting to a favorable close large operations, both on the Lehigh and the Schuylkill. The high character of the house of "A. and R. W. Packer" is to this day proverbial in those valleys, and in Philadelphia and New York. Their operations on the Lehigh embraced a large mercantile business in Mauch Chunk, building dams and locks on the upper navigation—those locks of unparalleled lift,—working mines on lease from the Company, and afterwards their own mines near Hazleton, and shipping coal by the Navigation Company's line and its connections, both to Philadelphia and New York. A similar shipping business was done by them on the Schuylkill. They were the first *through* transporters of coal to the New York market; and it is a truly fitting return that that business should be the largest item in the income of its projector. From this also sprang up the close busi-

ness relation, which ripened into firm, enduring friendship, between the Messrs. Packer and Commodore Stockton.

The time at length came when, in the wise forecast of Judge Packer, the full development of the region of the Lehigh required a railroad along its banks. Accordingly, for years, he urged on the Navigation Company the policy of the Company's building such road as part of their system of works for taking to market the products of their mining and other operations. Even when this project, under his own guidance and control, had nearly reached completion, he offered the road, most favorably, to the Company for a long term of years. But it was answered that a whole generation's experience, that is, the then life-time of railways, showed that articles heavy and bulky for their worth, like coal, and iron, and lumber, could only pay water-freights. Even the Reading Railroad, that marvellous combination of economies in working a mine railway, it was urged, only clinched the argument. There were there three exceptional advantages, all capital; the converging of the branches from the mines themselves onto the trunk, with their coal loaded as it was mined; a grade so uniformly descending that the locomotive could haul down as many loaded cars as it could take empty back; and, at port, a system of pocket-schutes by which the first loadings in the mines were dumped without handling into the hold of the freight-vessels. If, with these unparalleled facilities for a railway's competition with navigation, that road was yet not a stock-paying enterprise, the demonstration was held complete that no railway could profitably transport heavy and bulky freights by the side of water-carriage.

The project of a railway on the Lehigh was the result of the foresight of a man far in advance of the experience and wisdom of his time: yet he soon brought it to pass! The Lehigh Valley Railroad is now among the best-paying of all railroad enterprises, here or elsewhere.

The ground occupied by the Lehigh Valley Railroad had been embraced in a charter covering a much greater extent, projected by a gentleman to whom Pennsylvania is indebted for many great enterprises, Edward R. Biddle. It was the charter of the Delaware, Lehigh, Schuylkill and Susquehanna Railroad Company, incorporated by act of Assembly, passed April 21st, 1846, and by letters patent, issued September 20th, 1847. The first survey was

made in the fall of 1850. Not until the 4th of April, 1851, seventeen days before the charter would have expired by its own limitation, does the name of Asa Packer appear as one of the Board of Managers. On that day the Board sanctioned the grading of a mile of railroad near Allentown, previously begun; and, thereby, the limitation was voided. On the 30th of October, 1851, Judge Packer became owner of a controlling portion of the stock; and he subsequently submitted a proposition to build the road from Mauch Chunk to Easton, forty-six miles, for a consideration to be paid in stock and bonds of the Company. The proposition was accepted, the work commenced November, 1852, and the name of the Company changed to suit its true field of operation, January 7th, 1853. It was thenceforth known as "The Lehigh Valley Railroad Company," leaving to the other three valleys their own appropriate improvements.

The execution of the work proceeded with great vigor under the personal supervision and direction of Judge Packer. By receiving only stock and bonds, whose value depended on faith in remunerative returns—and that faith, we have seen, wanting in those who were thought the best judges of the situation,—by thus taking up both the burden of the project (being himself the largest stockholder,) and the burden of its credit, Judge Packer virtually undertook to build the work by his own means and credit; and thus he made himself, as he has ever since continued to be, the Atlas of an enterprise now yearly growing more and more into colossal proportions.

It was a heavy load; and many embarrassments had to be met and overcome. The year 1854, when the line suffered under a severe visitation of cholera, when also the increased outlay from rise of prices, and from pay delayed by the difficulty of realizing in a stringent money market, greatly crippled his resources,—that year was specially embarrassing. But it brought to him the aid of his generous friend, the late lamented Commodore Stockton, who knew how to sympathize to some purpose with a great mind struggling with difficulties.

The New Jersey Central and other railroads to whose business the Lehigh road must become tributary, also came in aid by advances on its stock and bonds.

It is to the credit of all parties to these transactions that no special

advantages by way of preference in freight connections, were bargained for or promised. It has been part of Judge Packer's just and wise foresight to keep the future of the road untrammelled by private interests and special arrangements.

The Lehigh Valley Railroad was delivered to the company, September 24th, 1855, accepted, and put at once in operation. Its coal tonnage went up, in about two years, to half a million; and, in eleven years, it exceeded two millions.

It is among the great marvels of these times of enterprise, that in the year 1866 the Lehigh Valley Railroad delivered along its line from Mauch Chunk to Easton 635,000 tons of coal, and, in great part, to works which have grown up as its own offspring.

Within three years after the opening of the railroad from Mauch Chunk to Easton, whose connections made it equally a rail-route to Philadelphia and to New York, Judge Packer gave expression, in the confidence of private friendship, to what he had probably grasped in his hopes from the first,—the extension of a trunk line into the valley of the Susquehanna and up that valley onto the great table-land of the State of New York, connecting there with the New York and Erie Railroad and with the whole system of roads leading West and North, both to Lake Erie and Lake Ontario: striking off also into a direct route to the great West, by connection with the Catawissa and the Erie roads, through the West Branch of the Susquehanna.

The whole of this stupendous enterprise, resulting from the head-planning and hand-labor of one man, is now *within a year* of entire completion.

There will then be under the control of the Lehigh Valley Railroad Company about two hundred and fifty miles of trunk railway, branching one way, by its connections, to Philadelphia and New York, and the other, to the great West and to the less spoken of, but hardly less important great North. The apparent dwarfing of the *Delaware*, *Lehigh*, *Schuylkill* and *Susquehanna* Company into the modest LEHIGH Company, has resulted in gigantic extensions which have raised the work to the first class of trunk lines, not to be surpassed in business or in beauty by any of its noble rivals.

The public is not probably yet wakened to the reality which a year more will surely bring to pass;—when the Lehigh Valley

Railroad Company will, as now, be carrying iron and coal from both the Wyoming and the Lehigh anthracite fields to tide-water, at both Philadelphia and New York; when coal from the Bradford bituminous field and from the Sullivan semi-anthracite field, together with flour, provisions, salt, plaster, lumber, and especially the timber of Canada, will be added, in the same direction; when the coal, iron, and slate of Pennsylvania will, with city merchandize, in its return-trips, be seeking the great North and the great West, soon to task the road to its utmost capacity, *both ways*. Such a combination of business resources and facilities it would be hard to parallel.

With all this wonderful abundance of staple riches, the tourist to the fresh river valleys or to the mountains, or the tourist on his way to the Lakes, to Niagara, to the North or to the West, will find at every step mountain and valley scenery, such as can be found no where else,—so unique in its own peculiar beauty and grandeur.

During the year 1865, Judge Packer announced, unsolicited, his intention to appropriate five hundred thousand dollars and an eligible woodland park of about sixty acres, on the borders of South Bethlehem, to the purpose of founding an educational institution under the title of "The Lehigh University." The purpose of the founder of this munificent endowment was to provide for imparting to young men of the valley, of the State, and of the country, and, above all, to bring within the reach of young men of limited means, a complete education, not only as to general wants, but fitting them further for practical and professional duties.

It was specially intended to provide for the wishes and needs of all, poor and rich alike; to meet a want which the founder himself felt as one of his greatest needs in his time of need; to provide the best and most varied practical education, and to bring it within reach of all, by offering free scholarships as marks of honor, so that the beneficiaries should not be repelled by seeming ostentation of charity.

The system determined on discards, in a degree, what has been found least useful, and introduces important branches heretofore more or less neglected in what yet purported to be a liberal education, especially those industrial pursuits which tend to develop the

resources of the country,—pursuits whose paramount claims and relations science is daily displaying,—such as Engineering, civil, mechanical, and mining ; Chemistry, general and analytical ; Mineralogy and Metallurgy ; Architecture and Construction ; Analysis of soils and Agriculture.

The Bishop of Pennsylvania, or of the diocese in which it may be, is made President of the Board of Trustees, in order to secure a perpetual and safe succession of the very responsible office, which must give character to the Institution ; but it is not a sectarian University—a contradiction in terms,—for it is open alike to all, and is intended to be, equally, a beneficence to all.

The University buildings were begun in the spring of 1866, on a scale commensurate with the great enterprise ; but, meanwhile, its immediate wants were provided for by re-fitting a church, purchased of the Moravian Brethren, and some private dwellings, rented for that use.

This temporary arrangement was the result of the founder's purpose to see his plan put in execution as far as possible according to the views with which he made the foundation.

The Lehigh University was formally opened September 1st, 1866, and it has made the successful debut of its first year. Another year it is hoped may see it in the occupancy of its permanent Halls and other buildings ; and with all its classes and Schools in full operation.

Then will be realized the cherished project of the founder to place within the reach of every enterprising youth the means of education, and just the kind of education to suit his chosen employment.

Judge Packer has given liberally to many educational, religious, and charitable endowments ; but this single foundation, for a specific purpose whose attainment he aims personally to see insured, so as best to supply a need in the region illustrated by his enterprise, may well crown his life as a philanthropist and public benefactor.

In private alms he is of those who let not their right hand know what the left hand doeth ; but it can not remain unknown that many have had experience of his benevolent heart and beneficent hand.

A single circumstance serves as a key to Judge Packer's character for not only uprightness, but for the purity that is above

suspicion. It was after the division of business between himself and his brother—in which they generously offered to give or take Lehigh or Schuylkill, and the Lehigh business had by mutual consent become his,—after this he became a controlling power in the transportation of coal in the Lehigh Valley, while he was still a leading operator in the mining interest. That he might not come in suspicious competition with miners for whom he freighted, being himself also a miner and his own freighter, he sold out his mining interests utterly, though at a sacrifice of great prospective profits.

A fair, just man is Judge Packer, always.

It could hardly fail that a man of such qualities, abilities, and associations should be invited to public life, however ill one of his activity and breadth of enterprise could afford to give his time to public affairs. Without ever seeking preferment, or desiring office, he has shown himself unselfish by yielding to the demands of his fellow-citizens for his public services. These he has sometimes rendered when it seemed that his attention could scarce be in any degree withdrawn from his affairs without perilling his private interests. But Judge Packer always acted on the maxim that a commonwealth has a right to command the service of its citizens.

The community in which he has so long dwelt repose unbounded confidence in him; and they have given repeated evidence of it by electing him to representative offices, and asking for his appointment to others. He served them several years in the General Assembly of the State, ending with the year 1843, when he was appointed Judge of his County Court. His judicial service was five years, during which he had frequently to hold court and try the causes, in the absence of the President Judge. Subsequently, he served his district four years in the national Legislature during the Thirty-fourth and Thirty-fifth Congresses of the United States. His friends were of the opinion that, if they could have obtained his consent to present his name, they would have nominated and elected him, at the last gubernatorial election, Governor of Pennsylvania.

Well indeed would it be for the people to secure such services as this gentleman always brings to any undertaking. If more men of labor were in the public councils we might expect our public business to be as prosperous as their individual enterprises. Such men are needed to allay, not aggravate the

rancours of civil war. Those who have waged a victorious conflict with the stern realities of life can not become the puppets of circumstance: they are men who have learned to control circumstances which are within control, and to make the best of those which are not. They can neither be the mad-caps of party zeal, who find in politics nothing politic, nor the trimmers to party breezes, to whom anything is politic which may succeed.

The financial experience of such men is specially needed. All wars supported by paper issues have been followed by commercial revulsions. If an "era of good feeling" after the war of 1812 could only mitigate, not keep off a collapse of credit, what may this era of ill-feeling bring us? It is well to be warned by that sequence of the French Revolution when assignats became so worthless as not to buy a loaf of bread, weight for weight. We, who have the virgin soil of half a continent for capital, are able to take care of our credit; but it must be by cherishing social trust as an element of commercial confidence, and by bringing into public counsels the precepts of private prudence.

Constitutional limitations now sit loosely on a people whose party issues, for three quarters of a century, were restricted to mere differences of construction, without lessening the reverence felt by all for constitutional law. Liberty regulated by law is liberty for all: liberty ruled only by majorities is liberty for the majority only. Fears are reluctantly entertained by not a few, that we are in peril of passing from a government of consent into a government of force.

Hence we repeat, as we began, that, to keep open the way to the success of merit instead of hedging a way for only favorites of power, we must hold fast to the institutions of the fathers of the Republic.

Personal liberty is essential to each one's gathering the fruit of his own industry; for labor can not contend with the rivalry of fortified privilege.

We must not forget that the only good which governments can do is to secure freedom of exertion, and security in the enjoyment of the fruits of exertion: all else is only hurtful meddling.

Biographers of the great in history, after the manner of Plutarch, deal us out parallels: they are parallels of the well-born with the well-born,—the pets of rank, and wealth, and power, compared or contrasted with each other. The man of labor, the self-made man as we rather presumptuously term it, finds parallels only here in America, where one may achieve greatness without having it thrust upon him, or having been born to it. It is the broad distinction between governments of force and governments of consent.

With but a just homage to straight-forward worth we have presented one of America's truly great men; great by the merit of worth, industry and talents well-used, not by the accidents of rank, fortune and inheritance to opportunity. Artificers of their own fortunes, they could only be the out-growth of free institutions, whose setting the fathers framed in the constitution bequeathed to us.

The Honorable Asa Packer is known in all his relations as a true man, whom nobility could not ennoble,—a man of Labor, Liberty, and Law.

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The progress of the great industrial revolution of the nineteenth century has not been without its share of suffering. The great cities of the East and West are now crowded with a vast and wretched population, who are the victims of the same system of competition which has enriched the few. The same system which has made the rich richer, has made the poor poorer. The same system which has created a vast and wretched population, has also created a vast and wretched system of competition. The same system which has made the rich richer, has made the poor poorer. The same system which has created a vast and wretched population, has also created a vast and wretched system of competition.

The illustrious Mr. Tooke is known to all his readers as a man whose nobility could not be made a man of letters.

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