

THE MIRRORS  
OF  
1932

ANONYMOUS

*With 10 Cartoons*  
*by Cesare*

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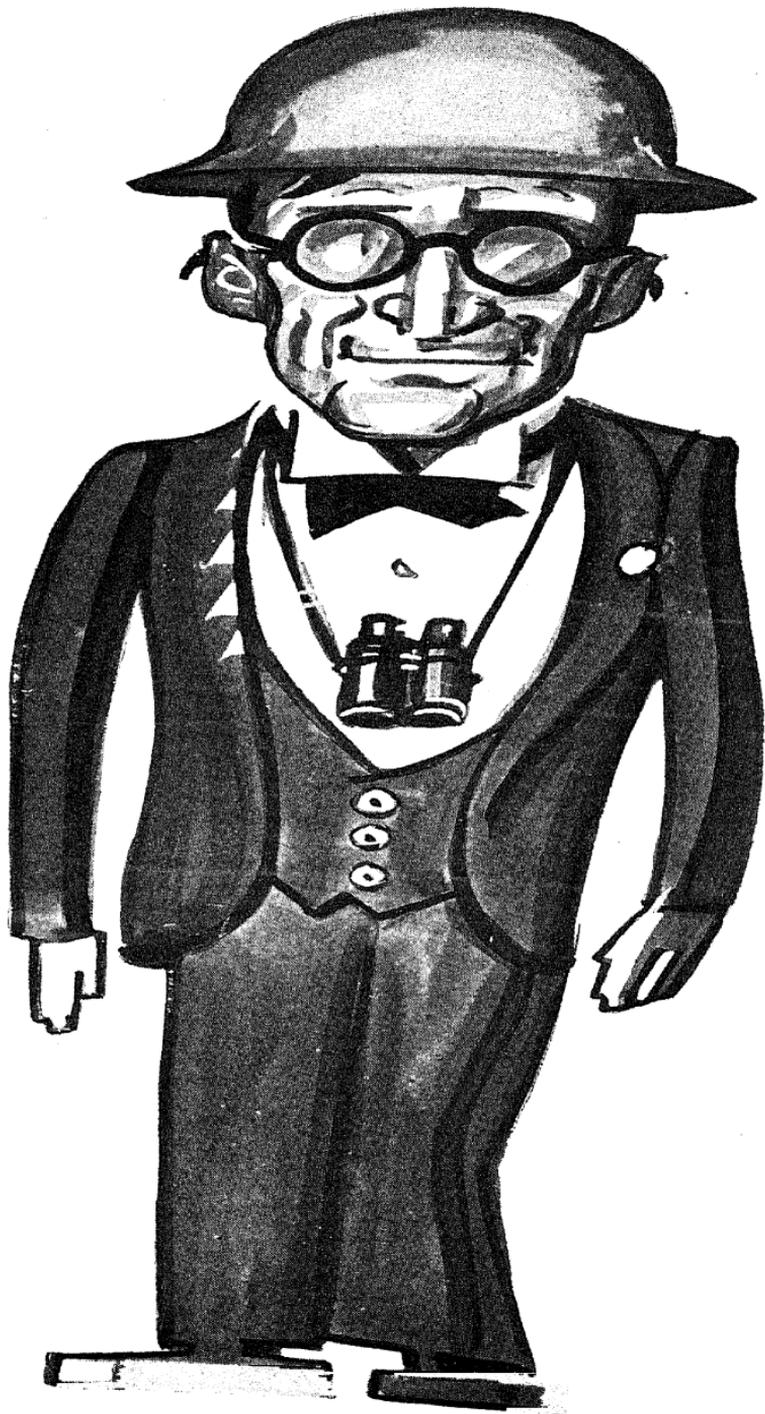
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NEWTON DIEHL BAKER



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ALL that Newton D. Baker needs to make him of presidential stature is a few more inches in height.

It is ironic that one of the best minds of the generation—culturally, legally, socially, economically—should be housed in so unimpressive a body. He has the head of a George Bernard Shaw—his favorite modern writer—and the physique of an undersized undergraduate; it gives him the appearance of topheaviness. He still seems more of an “angel child”—the nickname of his boyhood—than a statesman.

“Pansy Baker” the Washington correspondents dubbed him on the day he took office as Secretary of War. Despite gradual recognition of his great ability and his even greater potentialities, “Pansy Baker” he remains to Capital circles.

“Pansied idealism” was his foes’ sneering characterization of his administration as reform Mayor

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of Cleveland in his younger days, and Theodore Roosevelt translated this description into that of "exquisitely unfit" during the stormy days of 1918. He has been unable to escape these sobriquets, largely because he lacks those few extra inches.

Many years ago, when he went along with a group of college students to seek assignment as supers in a Shakesperean production, the stage manager shoved him roughly aside.

"There are no Cupids in this show," remarked the showman.

Politics is like the theater. A false and tinselled scale of values prevails.

The American people, I imagine, still regard Mr. Baker as a "Cupid"—who sought to win the World War with darts—as a pacifist who headed the greatest war machine in history—as a most excellent person but hardly the sort to choose as Chief Executive.

This is an entirely erroneous impression. He is, by far, the ablest candidate for the presidency in the two major parties. The most brilliant member of the official family Woodrow Wilson assembled, he is, in many respects, better equipped for the White House than the Princeton professor was in 1912.

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He might be the product of the schooling which Plato prescribes for the rulers of the Republic. He is steeped in the classics, economics, history; he enjoys a historical perspective rare in our Presidents; he has a social conscience so keen that it led him to enrol in the ranks of that prince of politicians, the late Tom Johnson of Cleveland; he translated his social creed into reality as Mayor of Cleveland; though a professing pacifist, he ranks among our greatest Secretaries of War.

He is humble and honest.

"I will do my best," he smiled wistfully when he was named Secretary of War, "but I have much to learn; for, even as a child, I did not play with lead soldiers."

He is practical, even hard-boiled, yet he says of himself:

"I am a dreamer of dreams."

His very strength is his weakness. A man of prodigious intellect and learning, it is impossible for him to realize that the aged food upon which he has been raised is too strong for the stomachs of hustling America. His readiness to discuss present-day problems in their proper perspective subjects him to severe attacks. Although he does not look down condescendingly upon the American

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scene, he cannot conceal his impersonal and historical viewpoint.

He has, for instance, dedicated himself to advance of his dead leader's cause—the League of Nations. He rarely delivers a speech, no matter how trivial the subject, without eulogizing the international ideal. At the Madison Square Garden convention he stirred the delegates to frenzy with his appeal for a pro-League plank.

It was as if Mr. Baker, gazing down into the grave, were keeping a pledge and a troth with Woodrow Wilson. Even the newspaper correspondents brushed the tears from their eyes and leaped to their feet.

If he were told that he might have the Democratic presidential nomination, provided he abandoned this crusade, he would refuse the offer. There is little of selfish ambition in him—so little that it is difficult to understand the man.

He assumes this same objective attitude toward himself. Perhaps no man is so self-critical, so intensely introspective.

He “could not face a casualty list,” they said, yet he forced himself to. Whereas Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, Calvin Coolidge even, with honest heroics, would have mounted the

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White House roof in such moments, if only to clench their fists and shout their emotions to the skies, the boyish figure in the War Department simply sat back limply, grasped the sides of his chair so hard the blood showed in his fingers and bit his thin lips.

He can be as emotional as he is intellectual—but his emotions, with the exception of that time in Madison Square Garden, are ever under control.

Many a time, before dawn, when called to his telephone by members of the General Staff, excited correspondents, by Wilson, to listen to fateful news from overseas, he displayed a coolness which became the wonder of the Capital.

“Yes,” his quiet voice would answer, “this is Baker. How do you do?”

While the Daughters of the American Revolution, Messrs. Roosevelt and Hughes and half the Congress assailed him as a pacifist, he subjected himself to an even more severe cross-examination. Mid-winter of 1918 found him in the front-line trenches, at advanced hospital stations, upon bleak ground swept by men and munitions he had despatched across the seas.

“Newton D. Baker,” he soliloquized, “what are you doing here? You—a pacifist—taking part in

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a war—this war—sending men to their death—and calling for more men—and munitions.”

And to himself he answered—a justification to which he may have felt those other critics had no right:

“Wherever there is a movement to end war—to hasten the day when war will be no more—Newton D. Baker will be in it.”

At the Capital he was a curious figure—for a Secretary of War. Whenever he had a moment to himself, free from the General Staff, the War Industries Board, foreign military missions, the Cabinet, he became a small figure huddled in some corner with his nose poked into a book. It might be a nonsense book, a Greek tragedy in the original, an early Latin comedy, a new treatise on economics, a novel by George Eliot, a lyric by Robert Browning—his favorite poet.

He was then—and is now—eminently sane. He dwelt in a realm of his own even during the blackest months of the war.

I doubt if the American electorate would appreciate him, even though it might elect him. There have been few men like Newton D. Baker in American history—few men who have been intellectual prodigy and practical politician, a

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strange mingling of Athenian peripatetic and Ohio lawyer.

There are recesses of his mind which he rarely opens—perhaps because there are few to explore them with him. Therefore he creates the impression that he is not always quite frank. Perhaps he is not in the ordinary sense. It may be shyness, or it may be that too much learning has insulated him against friendship with ordinary folk.

What to think of a man who tried so awkwardly—and failed so miserably—to be natural that first day he met newspapermen en bloc in Cleveland. His friends had urged him to be hard-boiled, to put up a stiff, if not stuffed, front, and so his greeting was:

“God damn it, it’s a nice day!”

Even cynical City Hall reporters were shocked to hear these familiar words fall from the lips of the official with the choir-boy manner and cherubic countenance.

Many years later, on the day he walked into the War Department building in 1916, he had a similar encounter with correspondents. There was, obviously, no news, and to make talk a correspondent referred to the bowl of pansies which friends had sent for the occasion of his swearing-in.

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Then it was that Mr. Baker, like a character in a Hardy novel, fashioned his future insofar as the public estimate of it was concerned.

Sitting on one leg, while the other swung and missed the floor by inches, the new Secretary of War spoke eloquently of his passion for pansies. He fondled the flowers as he talked. He is, in a small way, a horticulturist, and pansies were, therefore, a legitimate topic.

As always, he spoke *Atlantic Monthly* English, and in an earnest and compelling manner. The contrast between the subject and style, combined with the circumstances under which he expanded on pansies, could not but stir the satire of his hearers.

"Pansy Baker!", they exclaimed as they left his office.

It is a measure of the man that, despite this inauspicious start and the fierce partisanship which swirled about him during the war, his worth has been recognized. As the years 1916-1919 recede, his ability as an administrator assumes large proportions.

Experienced military men who served under him have always been his admirers; it was only the populace which howled at him. Republican investigations have left him unscathed. America's mili-

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tary annals are emblazoned with no brighter pages than those which he helped to inscribe.

This, however, is undoubtedly a more impartial verdict than Republican publicists, reviving such ancient issues as pacifism, Teutonism and internationalism, would render if Mr. Baker becomes the Democrats' nominee. There are, to be sure, many ghosts to be drafted for service against him by the G.O.P.—memories of his radical municipal theories in Cleveland as well as of the prejudices directed against him in war days.

He has often been called upon to face such handicaps, however. He does not seem to mind them. He is too earnest, too immersed in the immediate job, to let them bother him.

There is an awful air of detachment about him. From a volume of Browning's sonnets he can leap into a political convention to still and subdue low-brow politicians, as he once did in Ohio, and then return to his carefully marked page. He can suppress his shyness and sensitiveness, and even deeper feelings, if the effort seems worth while.

He is a sentimental Stoic.

His small size hurt him, but did not hinder him for long, in his first appearance upon the political stage. When he was sent to substitute for a popu-

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lar spell-binder at a Cleveland ward meeting, he was mistaken for a messenger boy. When he explained that he was to deliver an address, the chairman looked down at him in amusement. The audience guffawed at the sight of this solemn, dark-haired, brown-eyed youngster.

"Well, come on, boy," commanded the chairman. "Tell us something."

What he told them, and how he told it, made him an immediate power in municipal politics.

It is characteristic of him that he became an admirer of Mayor Johnson, the political pugilist who was denounced as a demagogue and eulogized as a democrat in the early years of the century. Although public office held only small financial reward, Mr. Baker preferred it to lucrative offers from private corporations which competed for his services.

He devoted many years to this pioneer movement in liberal government of a municipality. With Johnson he fought for three-cent trolley fares, three-cent lighting charges, three-cent dance halls, publicly owned utility plants, a new home rule charter, public parks, municipal symphony orchestras.

It was Mr. Baker who enabled Johnson to effect many of these reforms. For years he almost lived

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in the courtrooms of the city, State and nation—the Supreme Court of the United States. He fought fifty-five injunctions brought by the public utilities, and he won most of them. He also bested opponents of Cleveland's civic program in the Ohio Legislature.

He coined a new word—*civitism*—as an expression of the municipal spirit he sought to arouse, and he headed a movement for the coinage of a three-cent piece. He became known as “the three-cent Mayor.” Cleveland, in those years, was his idol and his only interest. He rejected repeated offers to enter private practice, and he turned down Wilson's request that he become Secretary of the Interior in 1913.

“He was the youngest but the wisest member of my family,” said Johnson.

He took time out, however, to champion Wilson's cause at the Baltimore convention in 1912. No more than a local figure then, his oratory led the convention to violate the traditional unit rule so that his twenty-one delegates from Cleveland could be cast for Wilson against Governor Judson Harmon of Ohio. During this same period he served with Justice Louis D. Brandeis as counsel for the National Consumers' League, and defended the

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constitutionality of many laws enacted in the public interest.

He was, through this period, the same shy, strange, intellectual Baker the nation came to know later. He forced the director of municipal music to change his programs from jazz to Wagner, Verdi, Donizetti.

As candidate for Mayor in 1911, he announced his political philosophy in the following words: "Lex citius tolerare vult privatum damnum quam publicum malum." When the street-car company made a seemingly attractive proposal, he replied: "Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes." It is little wonder that Cleveland considered him to be "the most intellectual Mayor in captivity."

Nevertheless, it reelected him in the year that saw Johnson's defeat. In 1911 it gave him the largest majority any candidate for the Mayoralty had ever received. He was as popular on the waterfront as he was on Euclid Avenue—the "Millionaires' Row" through which he built a trolley line in the face of protests from the privileged.

His public utility program, although highly advanced at that period, was not that of a political swashbuckler. He believes that the service of transportation, lighting, etc. constitute public con-

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veniences which should not be conducted for profit. They furnish the basis for a well-ordered and comfortable society, in his opinion, and they should not be abused, although most susceptible to abuse. Yet he did not forget that unoffending stockholders were involved, and a return of 6 per cent. upon a generous estimate of investment was allowed.

Although he has become the attorney for large steel, industrial and railroad corporations since his retirement to private life, his views, as a public official, have changed little. He has in recent years defended the establishment of monopoly upon the basis of patent rights, but, within practical limits, his old philosophy would undoubtedly influence his policies if he should become President. It may be this phase of his career which causes alarm to interests which, in other respects, would be content to see him in the White House.

No cynic, despite some justification, he feels deep concern over recent trends in the social and political life of the United States.

The American people, in his opinion, have few deep roots or permanent relationships. Their contacts with the past and the present are brief and casual. As a solid basis of progress and persistence, there is insufficient education for service,

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insufficient devotion to traditions, insufficient ancestral restraints. The people are inarticulate, unmindful, there is no common impulse, and therefore no real force for improvement of conditions.

His thoughts are of interest not only for the light they throw upon him, but also because of his platonic viewpoint and his personal experiences. Indeed, his conclusion may be regarded as a Wilsonian's comment on the Age of Hoover.

"The consequence of all this is apparent," he says. "We see great and cultured cities captured by demagogues; Mayors and even Governors convicted of corruption in office; great public questions discussed in passion and decided on prejudice, while individual and educated men look on in sorrow—but educated men and women as a class are not drawn together and fail to act.

"Meanwhile, in every reasonable public office in the country sits some lonely public servant bearing his burdens without the comforting consciousness, which he is entitled to have, that if he acts uprightly and as wisely as he can, he will be sustained against unjust criticism or interested obstruction, by the concerted action of good and wise men everywhere."

In the fall of 1918 he ventured upon prophecy,

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and again this disciple of Saint Woodrow predicted precisely what has befallen a people who deserted Wilsonian ideals to worship at the feet of a Baker-Wilson associate—Herbert Hoover.

“Has all this mechanical development of recent years really advanced us?” he asked. “Has this great civilization of ours, built upon machinery, really meant our refinement? . . . Indeed, is it not possible that we shall see, after the war, that machinery was not our servant, but that we were its slaves?”

These are troublous and unwonted thoughts for a candidate for the presidency. They reveal, clearly, that Mr. Baker is no ordinary fellow, no traditional type of office-seeker. So does his denunciation of the dry laws—which has all the greater merit because he made it as a member of the Wickersham Commission.

Should he ask such questions on the stump—and he will, if nominated—he may awe and affright the people. They will not understand him, perhaps, and they will wonder why, unlike lesser men, he does not prate of such sacred issues as party, prosperity, patriotism.

Will not the voters say of this surprising stranger in their midst what the inhabitants of

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Martinsburg, West Va., his birthplace, said upon his return from Johns Hopkins University and Washington and Lee Law School? Back home again, young Baker spent his days in a rural law office, his late afternoons in the library, his early evenings in writing reports for his father, who was the local health officer.

Nights he climbed to his attic study, and there, beneath the one electric light in the town, he buried himself, as he still does, in his books. One night a week he gave to German, one to Italian, one to Greek, one to Spanish, one to French and one to British authors.

Eager to become an orator, he often declaimed in tones which, for all their restraint and modulation, carried a strange message across the roofs and spires of the sleeping village. Whereupon the unimpressed natives would say:

“There’s Doc Baker’s son again. The doc sent him to college and see what a damn fool he’s made of him.”