

## VI

### TWO RADICALS

A MAYOR like Tom L. Johnson needed a city solicitor after his own heart. It did not take him long to find one in Mr. Newton D. Baker, a young lawyer from West Virginia, who had come to Cleveland in 1899 at the age of about 28. Mr. Baker was small of stature, smooth-faced, had dreamy eyes, carefully-combed hair, was neat in appearance, and had the aspect of a poet and a scholar. His body slightly bent forward, he moved along with a peculiar gait, seemed always absorbed, and never having much time for anybody. Yet, he was a thorough gentleman, polite and even considerate. There was something soothing in the tone of his voice, which made itself heard in the purest and most select English you could possibly listen to. Everybody praised him

for the fine use of his mother tongue, and it was indeed a treat to listen to the music of his words. Even the coarse and the illiterate were charmed by his language. By and by the flatterers came around and told him of his great gift, as if he were not aware that he possessed it. Yet, he was in danger of being spoiled a little by this hymnus song from all sides.

He was unsurpassed in telling a story, or in addressing the City Council on some special subject which had aroused his interest. But he reached the height of his oratory when eulogising his friend and master, the Mayor. In his great political speeches (and he made many very fine ones) he lacked the inner strength to carry himself up to a real climax.

His flow of language was as clear and smooth as that of a silvery brook running through a meadow full of rare and rich flowers. He was possessed of a quaint humor that ran into a slight sarcasm when the occasion presented itself. It must be consid-

ered a great pity that this master-artist of English chose the profession of a lawyer. His written legal opinions were mostly horrid examples of how one may obscure a meaning by a sea of words. It must also be said in his justification, that he never considered himself a great lawyer, and was always willing to recognise the talent on the opposite side of the trial table from where he, however, carried off many a brilliant victory. That he was drawn into politics is perhaps more lamentable than his becoming a lawyer. His preceptor, it is true, was no common politician, but there are mean tricks in the game that must be played. There can be no doubt, that Mr. Baker felt an aversion for his position after his initiation, but there was no way out of it under the circumstances. In the course of time he proved an apt disciple, yet a true politician he could never be, and did not wish to be. His tendencies were rather of an aristocratic nature; he was more of an observer and listener, than a talker. The society of the cultured suited his tastes

better than intercourse with the ordinary man.

A true estimate of the character of Mr. Baker is a difficult task. Like Hamlet, he was not as easily played as a flute. He felt no desire for an expansion of his feelings, and could not be called communicative. He was careful even to hide the vanity his great gifts might have excused. He tried to suppress the impatience which sometimes showed itself against his will. As a philosopher he was thus constantly disciplining himself, avoiding exposure of weak spots. Always measured and gauged, he was master of himself, and therefore master of his surroundings. Endowed with a good memory, quick perception and a great thirst for knowledge, he was indefatigable in acquiring learning. A despiser of newspapers, he read many books of ancient lore and modern wisdom. Few men possess the vocabulary of which Mr. Baker could boast, few his ability to make use of the knowledge gained by reading.

It always seemed a contradiction that this

lawyer and scholar should espouse the cause of the people and take interest in modern sociology and political affairs. As a student of human nature, of course, he might discuss those things in an academic way, but that he should throw himself, body and soul, into the midst of the daily turmoil of our present struggles, does appear incongruous. The solution of the riddle must be looked for in the influence which Mayor Johnson gained over him. Mr. Johnson loved to surround himself with clever and bright young men, and Mr. Baker was the leader of them. He gained Mr. Johnson's confidence as no other man before him, and, no doubt, no one deserved this confidence more than he. His admiration for Mayor Johnson came dangerously near to adulation.

On one occasion, after a splendid speech of the Mayor to his City Council, Mr. Baker was heard to say, "There must be a special heaven for men like Mayor Johnson."

The feeling honored him, but on the other hand it gave evidence of blind enthusiasm.

Maybe enthusiasm is always blind. His loyalty to Mr. Johnson was admirable to the last, and it cannot be said that Mr. Baker was of an ungrateful nature. It is a question, however, whether he would, standing alone have followed the same course as he has in the last eight years. His inclinations speak against it.

The friendship of Mayor Johnson for his young city solicitor was remarkable. He, at times, needed a man to whom he could confide his troubles and vicissitudes, though it is not likely that he revealed, even to him, his innermost desires and plans. Those, no man knows. It was not an easy matter to be a friend and co-worker of Mayor Johnson. He demanded much of a man's time, energy and ability. The day had often twenty-four hours for both of them. Mr. Baker was a great worker, but his work was always of an exacting nature, and in the course of time his features showed the strain under which he worked. There came a time when the freshness of youth vanished from the hereto-

fore young-looking face. Still the work kept on, and so did Mr. Baker.

Mayor Johnson was no great observer of law, and very apt to stretch a point or two. It was the duty of the City Solicitor to show him his error. Much of reasoning was to be done by him, and he was not always successful. Like all strong men, the Mayor wished his way, and as a consequence many fruitless lawsuits must be fought out. The Street Railway lawsuits were a task to put to the test the best of lawyers, and Mr. Baker had the strongest legal lights against him. For six long years he fought them almost single-handed with the various ups and downs common to warfare, but finally he came out the victor in a glorious struggle with an inglorious end.

From the court room to the political tent was but one step in those days. Solicitor Baker was fully in accord with Mayor Johnson's doctrines. He preached single tax, home rule, free trade, tax reform, direct vote, and death to the special interests. Very se-

rious he was, and with his splendid oratory it was easy for him to sway his audiences at pleasure. But it must not be surmised that he was a cold-blooded orator. He warmed up to his subject, and at times was even a little nervous, like all good speakers. One almost forgot, listening to him, that he was preaching the new Gospel of the Times, that he considered himself a radical. His diction was too beautiful for a revolutionist, his manner too gentle. Yet, there he stood, advocating the destruction of the old political structures and preaching the redemption of the people. They needed the sermon, no doubt. Of course, as a lawyer of good standing, he kept within the law, never criticising a court decision, even if it came from the Supreme Court of the United States. He would, however, collar a justice of the peace, having no use for that kind of renderer of judicial wisdom.

The solicitor claimed no ambitions beyond the fulfilment of his daily duties, but he was



human like the rest of us, and had gotten into politics.

A man who gave a certain distinction, or, if you will, notoriety, to the Johnson administration, was City Clerk Peter Witt. He was of the common people, stood by them, and fought their battles with the "big stick," though he hated Roosevelt. Peter, as they called him, had a common school education, learned the trade of an iron moulder, and became a union man, anarchist, socialist, tax reformer, City Clerk, lecturer on municipal affairs, and a political speaker. His assets were a good intellect, splendid memory, fearlessness, honesty of purpose and an almost uncontrollable tongue. His onslaught was simply terrible, and spared no one, not even Tom L. Johnson.

At one time he began to study law, but being no juggler of words, he found it impossible to continue, and stopped then and there. Peter had to say what he thought of a thing

or a man in plain language, and had no patience with studied effort to hide an opinion. If he believed a man to be a rascal, he told him so, using that expression. He would call a man a thief, if he felt justified in doing so, even if that man was a judge. The representatives of corporations always fared ill with him. As a young man he had felt the pangs of cold and hunger, the hopelessness of the shop worker, and later on the misery of mankind in general. Being optimistic by nature, he was not crushed by wretched experiences, but aroused to opposition and fight.

He saw the gulf between the rich and the poor, and began to study the cause. The selfishness of the human biped dawned upon him, but he saw it first only in those of the possessing class. He found that the laws were made by that class and for it. A young man yet, he could not discover the great principles of nature underlying the struggle of life, and therefore attacked most violently the foe as he saw him. From the rostrum

he addressed the people in his fearless way. He was an uncouth, but forceful and sarcastic speaker, quick at repartee and not without some beautiful sentiments.

After a while he wrote a book flagellating the tax dodgers, and thereby arousing the disgust of many people. He had no reverence for church or preacher, and was therefore held in abhorrence by the best of our citizens. On his side there were the downbeaten, the outcast, and the crowd of godless sinners who despised the laws and institutions of the land, and honored no man on account of his office or his station in life.

"He goes too far," the peace-loving listener to his speeches would say. "Give it to them," cried the man in rags. The prominent citizen would walk away, perhaps with a smile, perhaps with a pious wish in connection with a rope and a lamp post. Peter would go him one better. He did not keep his wish to himself, but expressed it often and in a loud voice. Yet it would be a grievous thing to mention here the many good

law-abiding men who inwardly rejoiced at Peter Witt's strong expostulations and confessed approval to their wicked pleasure in listening to them.

Witt had many open and many silent friends. Those who knew him well, wished him well, for he was a man of good qualities of heart and character, social, bubbling over with the joy of living, and a good spender if he had anything to spend. He was honest and brotherly, but merciless towards cant and hypocrisy. Nothing and nobody could stop him from mentioning names when his ire was aroused. As he was very well informed about men and things he could strike hard and did it. It happened sometimes that he would wrong the best of men on the strength of some doubtful information. He, then, would repent with a curse at his mistake.

This was the man that Tom L. Johnson befriended, though his name had been mentioned in Witt's book about the tax dodgers.

He made him head of his tax school, and the schoolmaster proved a success. Mr. Witt, in the course of a few years had learned some new things, and met the people he used to attack face to face in an official way. Some of them took a fancy to him, but it happened more than once that he would ruthlessly destroy their good opinion of him, if he thought that they were trying to take advantage of the city or the people. One might have taken him for one of the Incorruptibles of the French Revolution. Had he lived then in France, he would have forged his way to the front, and, no doubt, cut off heads and lost his own.

After the famous tax school was closed under a decree of court, Witt became City Clerk, to "draw an income for doing nothing," as he used to say. Nevertheless he attended to his duties and between times went on short lecture tours, spoke in political meetings, showing tax pictures and "getting even" with his foes. He was a disciple of

Izaak Walton, and would often disappear for a few days or a week during the fishing season to woo the finny tribe.

His relations with the different councilmen were very friendly, and he gained the good will of everyone, though he would sometimes lecture them severely if certain of their official actions did not please him. Neither was Mayor Johnson spared the displeasure of Mr. Witt, if that gentleman did not agree with him. Mr. Johnson knew his man, and took no offence.

In the course of time and through the influence of his surroundings, Peter Witt lost some of his ferocity, acquired a little more tact, and became more of a polished speaker. He was really an orator, in his way, natural, forceful and sometimes picturesque. It was useless for him to prepare a speech, for he could not adhere to a preconceived idea, but spoke as he felt, when addressing an audience. Then he "let go," as he has said.

In him one certainly found the man who at all times, and under all circumstances, had

the courage to express his opinion, and express it with vigor. In this respect he was a curiosity in an age when men are masters of the art of dissembling.

Had Mayor Johnson been possessed of the philosophical mind of a Socrates he would have sought the friendship of Peter Witt as a healthful discipline against pride and conceit. But as it was, he saw in him a useful addition to his official household. He was not mistaken, for Peter had a following among the workingmen, who liked him as much as he was detested by the men who had no love for Johnson.