



**BY ARTHUR M.
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Eight years on Capitol Hill have shown that, if faced with enough facts, Robert A. Taft is capable of changing his mind. The young man who lived in the White House is today neither archreactionary nor New Deal liberal, but simply an able man with memories and dreams

CONSERVATIVES look on him as the man who will restore big business to power over the prostrate forms of government and labor. Liberals look on him as the man who will lead a vengeful and reactionary assault on the New Deal and all its works. It seems possible that both are going to be disappointed in Robert Alphonso Taft. For, underneath the Ohio senator's hide-bound traditions there is a willingness to face facts, even at the expense of dearly beloved prejudices. Once a politician starts facing facts, there is no telling where he will end up.

Fifty-seven years old, shy, straightforward and colorless, neatly dressed, with rimless glasses and receding hair line, Bob Taft looks like a sober and prosperous Middle-Western lawyer. Determination, stubbornness and a sense of rectitude which succeeds in stopping just short of self-righteousness are stamped on his face. His manner in conversation is without guile. He jingles coins or keys in his hand, smiles in an oddly boyish way and says what he thinks.

His eight years on the Hill have established him as the top Congressional leader of the Republican party. He is its dominant intelligence on questions of domestic policy and its leading senatorial contender for the 1948 Presidential nomination.

Some public figures live in an atmosphere of excitement or caprice which produces a flow of good stories like beer from a keg. But Taft hews to his chosen road, moves along it at a steady pace and, when he does the unexpected (which he sometimes does), it is in the prosiest possible way. Picking up a newspaper clipping describing him as "independent and unpredictable," Taft snorts with indignation, "What nonsense! I am not in the slightest unpredictable." His old friends cudgel their brains to think up anecdotes about him; but the two or three stories which survive have been worn to a frazzle by his publicity men and will not be repeated here.

Publicity That Backfired

When he does occasionally succumb to high-pressure advertising methods, the results are apt to be ludicrous. Some people believe that the photograph in a national picture magazine of Taft in a business suit holding a dead fish was a big factor in licking him for the 1940 Republican nomination (though the Taft forces still insist that it all began as a deliberate gag, and the press crossed them up).

He reached his dominant position

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in the Senate chiefly because he takes his job more seriously, works harder and has more organized ambition and native intelligence than most of his colleagues. No senator, for example, knows more about pending legislation than Taft. He has no pride about admitting ignorance in hearings and will ask a thousand questions till the problem is clear. He has a lawyer's mind, tough and logical, and a lawyer's facility at constructing or tearing down a case. Nothing can wear him out physically—all-night sessions, filibusters, enemies or even friends.

Many senators, Democrats as well as Republicans, wait to see what Bob Taft is going to do before launching into debate themselves. Few will tangle with him, particularly over questions of detail. Some resent his constant flow of unsolicited advice.

As leader of the opposition, Taft believed that his duty was to oppose, and he worked at it day and night, often disagreeably and without scruple. The most dangerous enemy of the New Deal, he became the favorite target of the New Dealers, who made him the symbol of archreaction throughout the country. President Truman has singled him out for querulous and disparaging mention on a number of occasions.

The senator inclines to think that his reputation for indiscriminate obstructionism is exclusively the result of what he calls darkly a New Deal smear conspiracy; and he has hired a full-time press agent to conduct the counterattack. But the promiscuous relish with which he sailed into Administration measures has convinced a good many other people that his only principle is opposition for opposition's sake. "He is probably more responsible than any other single man," Walter Lippmann has written, "for leading the Republican party into blind alleys of dumb obstruction on the vital issues of our times."

"Taft," said one prominent Eastern Republican, "is nothing more than a common scold."

His own somewhat dogmatic and testy manner often makes him seem like a chronic obstructionist. He blows up too easily and, being a lawyer, blows up in loud and resounding finalities which seem to mean that, so far as he is concerned, the subject is closed and he will shoot anyone who brings it up again. Particularly in his early years in the Senate, he was given to ill-tempered outbursts at people perverse enough to differ with him over matters on which he had come to firm conclusions. "Dumb" and "stupid" are still two of his favorite adjectives. But through the years he has painfully schooled himself to listen—on the whole, with fair politeness—to people he privately considers fools about ideas he privately considers nonsense.

His saving grace is a clear-cut logical intelligence and a basic respect for fact, which undercut his own impulses toward dogmatism. Even his enemies respect his intellectual honesty and his reasoning powers if not his conclusions. "He has the best mind in Washington," remarked Paul Porter, former head of OPA, "until he makes it up." You can ask Taft about any issue, and he will answer straight from the shoulder, without the soft equivocations or the off-the-record reminders which adorn the conversation of most Presidential aspirants these days.

These intellectual qualities make him willing to modify his original position if someone can prove to him that his views do not square with the

actualities. The extent of his evolution must not be overestimated. "Sure, Taft has progressed," observed one waspish Washingtonian, "but the progress is only from James A. Garfield to William McKinley." The cost of educating Taft has undoubtedly been considerable in terms of the delay of measures he himself now considers necessary. But there is no question any more as to whether he is educable.

For all the deceptive coloration of his rhetoric, with its weary complaints about "regimentation" and "bureaucracy," Taft can no longer be regarded as the archreactionary. There are many Republicans who stand to the right of him. Indeed, it seems safe to predict that far from heading the wrecking crew in the present Congress, Taft will play a restraining role in domestic policy.

Follows His Father's Views

Taft comes by this middle-of-the-road position honestly. William Howard Taft was no reactionary, and Bob still places great store on his father's fundamental views. William Howard was still a lawyer in Cincinnati when Bob was born in 1889. Bob takes after his mother, a keen, determined and ambitious woman, while his younger brother Charles has his father's warmth and geniality; but with the Tafts all individual differences are subordinated to an overpowering sense of family. To be a Taft in Cincinnati is like being a Biddle in Philadelphia or a Lowell in Boston.

Though Taft's vivid boyhood memories are from the Philippines, where his father went as governor general, though he summered in Quebec and went to preparatory school and college in Connecticut, Cincinnati remained his spiritual home. It was inevitable that after heading his class at the Harvard Law School he should have ignored tempting bids from Eastern firms and returned to Cincinnati to become a local landmark, like the Taft Theater and Museum.

When William Howard Taft was elected President in 1908, Bob was a junior at Yale. His father's prominence probably made the already shy boy draw even more into himself. Debating was his great college passion, and he has never quite recovered from it. In the heat of discussion he still tends to regard winning an argument as more important than discovering the truth.

He came into his own at the Harvard Law School and ended as editor of the Law Review.

Taft barely had time to go back to Cincinnati, get married and begin law practice before the United States was involved in the first World War. Turned down by the Army because of nearsightedness, he became Herbert Hoover's assistant general counsel in the United States Food Corporation. After the armistice Hoover took him to Europe, and Taft was in Paris during Versailles, a suspicious observer on the outskirts of peacemaking. He remarked of Wilson in a letter to his father, "The nebulous character of his League of Nations does not gain it any advocates," but nevertheless followed his father's lead in supporting American participation in the League.

Bob had married Martha Bowers, daughter of an old friend and political associate of his father. Martha Taft is a plump, bouncy, cheerful woman, abounding in vitality and affability. When her children began to grow up,

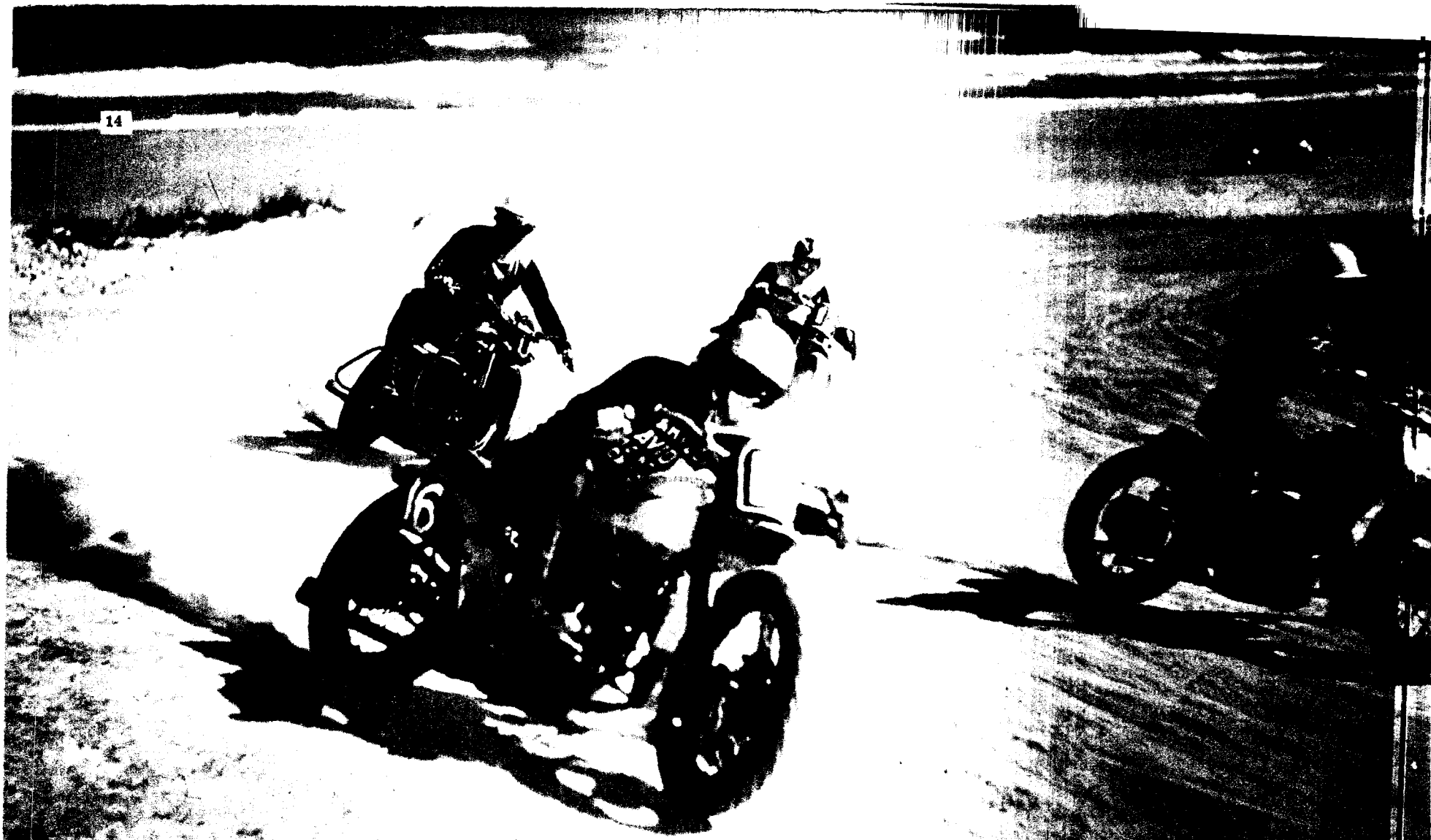
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EUROPEAN

Bouncy, cheerful Mrs. Robert A. Taft, shown above with her husband in their Cincinnati home, was a pacifist and member of the America First Committee. Lately her publicly expressed views have been modified. But her personality goes over better at homespun political gatherings than her husband's. Which is odd because Taft is essentially a hometown boy who doesn't hesitate to do homely things like filling his car's radiator (below)





Four riders come off the straightaway into the north turn of the Daytona Beach track in a rip-roaring broadside. Johnny Butterfield (16) is the Florida state tourist trophy champ. Wally Akins (68) copped second place in the 1940 200. Jimmy Aldous (12) boasts a new bike that will tick off 115 miles an hour

HANDLE-BAR DERBY

BY FRANK L. HARVEY

IN MID-FEBRUARY, Daytona Beach, Florida, sounds like an English air field on D-Day morning. Motorcycles boom into town from such widely spaced points as Woonsocket, Rhode Island; Toronto, Canada; and Seattle, Washington—about 5,000 of them; and 300 of these are the hottest racing bikes in North America, operated by 300 of the zaniest young men ever to twist a throttle in two-wheeled competition.

Daytona Beach—after a few feeble efforts at business as usual—rolls up the sidewalks and digs in. Citizens scuttle warily across the streets, little

children are fastened securely in their play pens, and the local police and fire departments prepare to man their battle stations at the drop of a gasoline tin.

The reason for all this hullabaloo is the annual 200-mile national championship motorcycle race at Daytona on Sunday afternoon, February 23d. In racing circles this event is known as "The Indianapolis of the South." It offers a cool \$1,000 to the winner, \$500 to the Number Two man, and \$1,075 in assorted lower-bracket prizes. To dispense with a lot of words, it's the top.

Colon Jones, "The Jacksonville Madman," lays his Harley down into a small sandstorm tossed in his face by another Hot Shoe Boy, who beat him to the turn

The human-bullet technique, as demonstrated by Wally Akins. It's a good way to reduce wind resistance, but it's not so hot if you have to stop in a hurry

