

SKETCHES OF BIG MEN IN INDUSTRIAL LIFE

A. B. Cass Is Calm Executive in Busy Telephone Plant

Quiet Reigns in Office of Phone Firm

BY KATHERINE LIPKE

One office in the city where telephones do not ring, where bells do not buzz, and where quiet reigns, is the office of A. B. Cass, president of the Southern California Telephone Company. He is one of the quietest men I have ever met, even if he does have in his employ 1 per cent of the total population of the city of Los Angeles, and even if the company is having a mad scramble to keep up with the growth of the city in the supply of telephones.

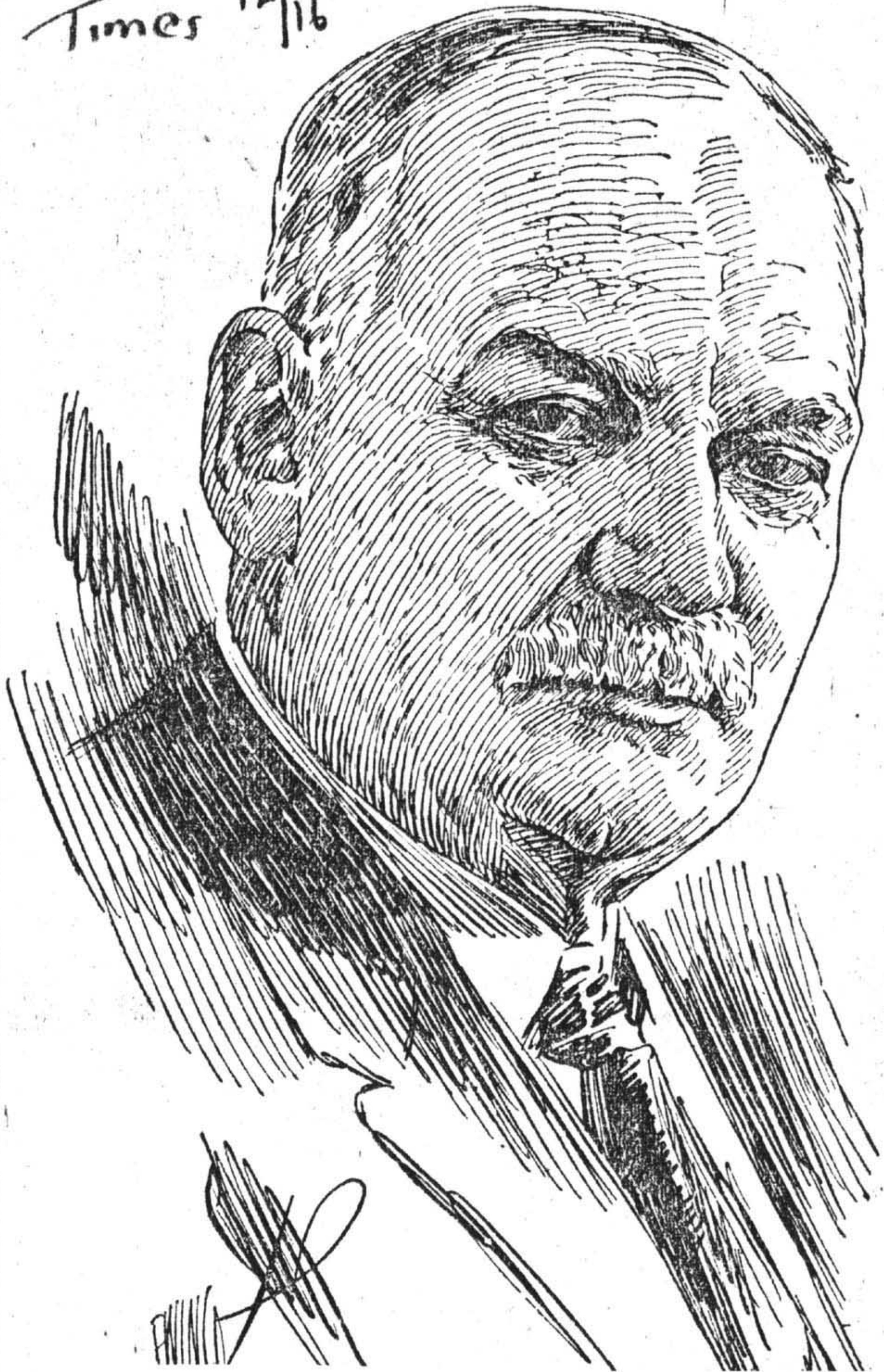
Mr. Cass thinks that Los Angeles is a difficult place in which to conduct a telephone business. Just as the company races its telephones to meet the demand created by the rapid construction of homes there is an expansion some place else. The growth of a city may very easily be judged by the telephone demand, and so Mr. Cass has discovered that Los Angeles is growing more rapidly in the industrial section than in the Wilshire district or Hollywood. He feels that the Los Angeles of tourists and climate, is now the Los Angeles of stable industrial activity.

QUIET DIGNITY

But neither the rush of the telephone company nor the expansion of Los Angeles ruffles the quiet of Mr. Cass. If only the complaining telephone patrons could be taken in to see Mr. Cass! They would immediately wonder what on earth they had to fret about. He would look at them with quiet dignity, and there it would be good-by grievance. A system like that, however, undoubtedly would do away with the quiet dignity of Mr. Cass.

There couldn't be a greater contrast than Mr. Cass and the lines of business he has chosen. For a quiet man he has chosen three very obstreperous activities. Back in Oklahoma, he was a licensed trader with the Creek and Choctaw Indians, until in 1888, when he came on a sightseeing trip to Southern California. It was good-by Indians, hello California then, for out here he came to stay.

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FORMED COMPANY

He and his brother then started the firm of Cass Brothers Stove Company, which branched out into a hardware store, and then into Cass-Smurr Company, and then Cass - Smurr - Damerel Company. However, by this time Mr. Cass was interested in the thought of starting a telephone company and sold out. So in 1897 with Senator John D. Works and three others he applied for a franchise and in 1901 the Home Telephone and Telegraph Company was organized.

Mr. Cass gave me the lurid details, with a date or two, and that was all. He was sure business history wouldn't interest me, and he appeared to me as not being over-interested in it himself. This seems indicative of Mr. Cass, himself. He was quietly set himself a moderate pace through life, and has kept it up. I couldn't imagine him dashing wildly into reckless endeavors, and I doubt if he would take a chance. But like the track runner - he is good for the long stretch.

In 1906, Mr. Cass became president of the Home Telephone Company. Then in 1917 the two local telephone systems were consolidated under the name of Southern California Telephone Company and he became president of the new corporation.

ORGANIZATION FACTOR

I asked Mr. Cass for the qualities which he thought had made for his success. But I didn't find out. He didn't assure me that he didn't want to talk about himself, he simply turned the question around and before I knew it he was telling of the organization. "Success," said Mr. Cass, "consists of an organization which is harmonious within itself, and which has the good will of the public. A lot depends also on the character of the people at the head of the different departments."

"But, Mr. Cass," I questioned, "surely some credit should be given to the man at the head of it all who is able to build up such an organization?" "Not at all," he answered, "a man has no right to be at the head of any business if he is not able to gather together and keep himself surrounded with effi-

cient and successful men and women. It is the organization that counts, for on that organization the responsibility of the entire concern rests. Get a fine harmonious organization together and you can be a success."

NO PERSONAL SUCCESS

Did Mr. Cass give me any maxims for a personal success? Absolutely not. In fact it wasn't until I had left the office that I discovered that he had turned the question from himself. He hadn't argued with me, he hadn't told me that he didn't want to talk about himself, he just didn't talk about himself. No wasted time, no wasted energy and no wasted explanations. He just went ahead and did things in his own way, quietly and pleasantly, but firmly.

If there was ever a quality which has made for success down through the ages, it is just that quality of an unswerving determination, which quietly carries a man through any amount of difficulties, without knowing that the difficulties are there. It isn't the sort of determination which makes hard work of the fighting either. Simply through the years that moderate pace I have spoken about, has kept Mr. Cass trotting right along without fuss or feathers, looking neither to the intriguing right or the tempting left, but "tending right to business" in the old-fashioned phrase of the school-room.

QUIET EXECUTIVE

And so, while his 8000 employees are saying "number please," or are laying telephone wires, or mending phones, rushing at a fast pace, Mr. Cass, the president of the company, sits quietly up in his quiet office, figuring things out at a moderate pace, and stepping right ahead. He is just another of the prominent men in industrial life here who have built themselves around the need and growth of the city. So the man who might literally be called the mouthpiece of the city, is without a doubt the quietest of them all.