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THEODORE ROOSEVELT

BY ELIHU ROOT



A speech delivered before the Rocky Mountain Club on October 27.

WHEN Colonel Thompson asked me to come here and say a few words, a very few words, about Theodore Roosevelt upon his birthday, it seemed to me very appropriate, for the great mountains from which you draw your inspiration as a society were to him, next to his home, the dearest place in the world. Like Antaeus of the Greek fable, there he renewed his matchless energy by the touch of Mother Earth. He loved every peak and plain and valley from the Bad Lands to the Flat Tops. He loved the brave and simple people of the mountains, he knew them, he respected them, and he prized the influence of their lives upon his.

So many of us loved him! The mystic chords of memory draw the hearts of so many of us back to that life so magnanimous, so kindly, so affectionate, so appealing to the best in all our natures, so full of genuine interest in our fortunes, so appreciative of what was good in us, so kindly and considerate of our failings! We love him! We could not celebrate his birthday as we do were it not for our deep affection. But, that is not the cause of our gathering. He rendered great service, he did great deeds for us and for our country. With the swift intuitions in which he surpassed all men of his time, he pierced through the complications and uncertainties of political and economic life to the fundamental principles upon which rest our whole political and social system, the fundamental truths which underlie American institutions and which underlie all government of Justice and of Liberty. He saw that in the marvelous development of human wealth and human power to produce wealth, we had gradually slipped away from the old, simple relations of equality among our people, that a crust was forming of power and privilege and superiority based upon wealth, and a steadily, certainly growing discontent was making its way among the people of our country. And he undertook, though there was no crisis, to make one, and to bring the people of America back to the supremacy of law for liberty. The millions who were beginning to feel that

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our free institutions were failing he taught to understand that there was a remedy by law, and he forced a passage through the difficulties, doubts and obstacles, for law and for the application of the great principles of free government through law; and in order to prevent revolution, he went up and down the land, preaching the principles of justice and freedom, not merely solving particular questions of corporations and trusts and the use of capital, but laying down the rules by which all questions for all time must be solved in a free, democratic government. With unthinking and instant courage, he declared in clear tones heard throughout the land, "All must obey the law. Wealth must obey the law. Labor must obey the law." He flinched from no power, from no political power, from no social power, in the just and equal and uncompromising assertion of the principles of American liberty and justice for rich and poor, for capital and labor, for the great and for the weak.

Where would we be now, called upon as we are to deal with the grave and terrible questions that are before us, if Theodore Roosevelt had not restored to the plain people of the United States, the men and women of small means, of simple lives, confidence in our institutions, an abiding faith in the capacity of our democracy to maintain the equality of independent manhood among rich and poor alike?

Where would we have been in those fateful days when the people of the United States were called upon to gird themselves anew and offer their fortunes, their lives, their dearest affections, in terrible war for the preservation of our liberty, if Theodore Roosevelt had not been able to appeal to the affection and the confidence and the trust of the American people for a system of free institutions in which he had taught them to believe?

But as it is not for our affection, so it is not for his deeds that we are now met to honor him. He did more than to solve the questions of his time. He presented to our country and to the world a great and inspiring example to enforce his teaching; it is not what he did, but what he became. The man was the spirit he worked in.

Sermons are forgotten; men are remembered. Truths are told in ten thousand volumes and pamphlets, from a thousand pulpits and rostrums. They are forgotten. For a moment they enter the mind, and in a moment they are displaced. But the perpetual lesson of a great example, inseparably united to a great truth, carries on the work of a lifetime through generations and ages to come.

And this example is one which appeals so readily to all. Every American boy can be Theodore Roosevelt's follower. He was not different, not some strange phenomenon unlike the rest of us. He was like us all, only more so. There was, as the French Ambassador has said, radium in the clay of which he was fashioned, that carried to the nth power every great purpose, every noble conception, every deep truth that possessed him.

Every Boy Scout may imitate him. He was strong, powerful, but he began weak and puny. He trained himself to strength and power. So can all American boys. He was born and bred under the disadvantages of wealth and fashion, with the paving stones of a city between him and the earth. He broke over the barriers and became the friend of every farmer, of every ranchman, of every huntsman, of every laborer, of every good and true man and woman in this great land. No pent-up city, no learned institution, no

social convention restrained his universal and mighty sympathy. He trained himself to the habit of courage. So can every American boy. From the habit of courage came the natural reaction of truth. That is within the grasp of every American boy. He was sincere and simple, not ornate and florid. He spoke not the tongue of the poet or the philosopher. He had not what Macaulay credited to Gladstone, "a command of a kind of language, grave and majestic, but of vague and doubtful import." No one ever misunderstood what Theodore Roosevelt said. No one ever doubted what Theodore Roosevelt meant. No one ever doubted that what he said he believed, he intended and he would do. He was a man not of sentiment or expression but of feeling and of action. His proposals were always tied to action. He uttered no fine sentence, satisfied that that was the end, the thing to be accomplished. His words were always the precursors of effective action. He cultivated promptness in action until it became his natural reaction and made him an almost perfect executive—not an administrator, but an executive gifted with the power of swift and unerring decision. Yet he was as free from self-conceit as any man I ever knew. His consciousness of strength was in the strength of his purpose, in the cause he advocated, and not at all in his own merits. He was as modest as a girl about himself. He was the most hospitable to advice of any man I ever knew. He was eager for knowledge. He thirsted for knowledge, and in the performance of his public duties he sought everywhere from all manner of men, to know their thought, their contribution of information. He talked little about common counsel, but he practised it universally and always, and he did come to know the very heart of the American people by actual contact. He was no unapproachable genius unlike everyone else. He did not originate great new truths but he drove old fundamental truths into the minds and the hearts of his people so that they stuck and dominated. Old truths he insisted upon, enlarged upon, repeated over and over in many ways with quaint and interesting and attractive forms of expression, never straining for novelty or for originality, but always driving, driving home the deep fundamental truths of public life, of a great self-governing democracy, the eternal truths upon which justice and liberty must depend among men. Savonarola originated no new truths, nor Luther, nor Wesley, nor any of those flaming swords that have cut into the consciousness of mankind with the old truths that had been overlooked through indifference and error, wrong-heartedness and wrong-headedness. Review the roster of the few great men of history, our own history, the history of the world; and when you have finished the review, you will find that Theodore Roosevelt was the greatest teacher of the essentials of popular self-government the world has ever known.

What we are here for is to perpetuate that teaching, lift it up, striking the imagination, enlisting the interest, of the country and the world, by signally perpetuating the memory of our friend, the great teacher.

The future of our country will depend upon having men, real men of sincerity and truth, of unshakable conviction, of power, of personality, with the spirit of Justice and the fighting spirit through all the generations; and the mightiest service that can be seen today to accomplish that for our country is to make it impossible that Theodore Roosevelt, his teaching and his personality shall be forgot-

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ten. Oh, that we might have him with us now!

Be it our duty and our privilege, in our weak and humble way, to keep him with us, to keep him with our country in all the trials before it, and so pay to him the honor that he coveted most, the highest accomplishment of his noble and patriotic purpose.

