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THEODORE ROOSEVELT

T H E • A M E R I C A N

AN ADDRESS BY
GOVERNOR JOHN J. CORNWELL

AT A JOINT MEMORIAL
SESSION *of the* LEGISLATURE
OF WEST VIRGINIA

BURLEW THEATRE • CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA
FEBRUARY NINE, NINETEEN HUNDRED AND NINETEEN



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THE AMERICAN

AN ADDRESS

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ADDRESS

Death knocks alike upon the door of the palace and of the cottage.

Its summons comes with equal certainty to the statesman and the wealthy on the one hand and to the citizen and the poor man on the other.

Man comes unbidden into this world and is ushered out of it in the same unceremonious fashion.

He has no election as to his coming or his going.

From the very day when he first realized his existence he knows that the sentence of death is upon him and the only uncertainty is as to the exact time when that sentence will be executed. It may come in the heyday of his youth, be postponed until middle life or through Executive clemency put off until he has reached a ripe old age.

The supreme question for him is what will he do with his time and his talents while he is here.

Most men's lives are filled with efforts at self-advancement, self-aggrandizement, to be plain, with self and selfishness, but there is a certain number, a number which I believe, in fact I thank God we know, is growing larger year by year, whose lives are devoted to the public good, to humanity and to service in some form or other.

To-day we have come together to pay tribute to the memory of a man whose life may properly be placed in the latter class.

I would fail of my duty did I not here in this presence express to the members of the Legislature my appreciation of the compliment they have extended to me in allowing me to lay the poor tribute I bring to-day upon the bier of the man whose death the Nation mourns.

I need not review the life history of Theodore Roosevelt. It is well known to every man, woman and child. His

greater activities and deeds are fresh in the minds of all of us. He was still an actor upon the great stage of life, upon the greatest of all governmental stages, when the summons suddenly came to him. His voice was heard in the public press and upon the platform day by day, to the very hour of his death, and it was the voice of courage; the voice of a man who had been a student of affairs, of world politics, and of one whose experience, training and understanding put him in a position where he could speak with authority.

No man could be as active and as aggressive as Theodore Roosevelt; could have convictions as serious and positive as were his, and express them with the courage and virility he did and not have opposition, yes, have enemies.

Only the man who is negative, who remains passive and therefore unimportant and of little use, can escape opposition, criticism, misunderstandings and misrepresentations. But for the man of conscience, of courage and of a wholesome desire to do good, those things are a stimulus rather than a handicap.

Roosevelt came into the world with two great handicaps. One was, he was born of well-to-do, I might say rich, parentage, rich as riches were measured at the time of his birth. His family were distinguished people, something of aristocracy. The men who have that handicap do not as a rule readily overcome it. The history of our country is not replete with instances. There are a few similar cases, but the great majority of the men who have won fame and distinction, who have made enviable records and have rendered great public service, have been of humble parentage. They have mostly been graduates of the university of hard knocks.

The second handicap was that of a weak physical constitution. This he likewise overcame.

A few years in the far West, living in the open air, on a ranch, not playing the cowboy, but actually one of them (for Roosevelt never pretended to do anything, he always did it well), and he built a physique that was the envy of athletes, boxers, wrestlers and prize fighters. I very well remember my impression the first time I ever heard him speak. It was just after he returned from Africa and he

was delivering an address the subject of which was "Wild Men and Wild Animals", under the auspices of the National Geographic Society in Washington. Full five thousand people paid good money to hear this mighty hunter who had just returned from south of the Equator, from the heart of Africa, tell of his experiences and of the wild men and the wilder animals he had encountered. I can see him now, as he strode upon the platform, a most wonderful physical specimen, who gave you the impression of the strong man who comes upon the stage to handle heavy weights or to juggle cannon balls. The same man who, as a youth, was a physical weakling, who had to struggle for his very life against the physical handicap of a weak body.

In these two things there is a splendid example for the American youth similarly situate in the beginning of his career.

How sad and how pitiful it is that the sons of many rich men of this country come into the world weak in body and often weak in intellect and more often still weaker in morals. They feel no responsibility and assume none. Their lives are useless in very many instances. Roosevelt set an example for them. The great war through which we have just passed has emphasized what such young men may accomplish. It brought to many of them an opportunity which some accepted cheerfully and voluntarily, while others had it thrust upon them through the selective service law. We may rejoice that in nearly every case the scions of rich men have made good and there is every prospect that when they return to civil life they will not lapse back into old habits, or return to old walks, but will enter upon a new course and will serve as they would not have served had it not been for the great experience that came into their lives.

An illustration of this was published in a magazine a few weeks ago.

One of our greatest American aviators told the story of a day's experience in the air. He had dropped out of a cloud to attack an enemy airplane, only to find that he had landed amid a flock of them. He was making desperate efforts to extricate himself from his predicament and to make his escape, when suddenly another American aviator who had seen

the straits he was in swung down from above, unseen and unheralded, shot down the enemy that was closest, enabling the first one to make his escape. Both men returned to their camp and at night as they sat around supper the man who had rescued the first-mentioned aviator said: "I thank God for this war." His friend, whom he had saved was startled and did not understand the remark. He inquired what it meant. The man who had made it replied: "You boys may not know it, but I am the son of a rich New York banker. I never did a day's work until I got into this service. I had servants to wait on me and I thought it disgraceful to work. All I knew was to spend money and have a good time. I see things differently now. I am here with you boys and I have come to the conclusion now that I am almost as good as any of you. I have come to the conclusion that I can make a man of myself. In fact, I intend to do it. When I have returned to civil life I shall go to work, not to make money, for I have that and do not need more. But I shall go to work there as here, for my fellowman, hoping to continue to serve and be useful." The aviator who wrote that story still lives, but the rich young man who saved his life "went West" shortly after the incident referred to, but there are thousands of them whose stories have not been told in print that are coming back imbued with the same spirit of service and of sacrifice, and they are going to make the world better because of that experience and that new birth.

It took the great war and the excitement of a combat amidst the clouds to bring out that spirit in the banker's son, but Theodore Roosevelt developed it in the prosaic times of peace without the excitement incident to war. We find him a very young man in the State Legislature of New York, where he was elected because those who supported him regarded him as safe and sane, knowing his antecedents. They thought he would be a guardian of property, the rights of property and vested rights in general. And he was, so far as such guardianship was properly needed and rightly belonged, for Roosevelt knew from the very beginning of his career, and he knew to the day of his death, that without property and industrial and economic prosper-

ity there could be no comfort or human happiness. He knew that the progress of civilization has been governed and guided by the progress of nations and peoples in commerce and trade.

But he knew from the very beginning of his career what he knew at its end, that no man or party had or has the right to subordinate human rights to property rights.

He jarred the nerves of the men who expected to control and use him by devoting his energies in that first public office and by spending his time in an effort to better the living conditions of the humblest men and women and the weakest children of the great city which he in part represented.

His work as police commissioner was of the same character and type.

He was a man who simply could not be overlooked, no matter to what humble position he might be assigned. He towered above his fellows because he had the courage to speak and act aloud where the others spoke in whispers.

Called to Washington as an assistant secretary of the navy, it was he who put Admiral Dewey and the Pacific fleet in a position where the gruff old admiral could cut red tape as well as the Pacific cable and go in and fight a battle on his own initiative and without directions or instructions from Washington, further than that he should find and destroy the Spanish fleet.

We next see him at the head of his volunteer Rough Riders in Cuba. Let us admit that his spectacular career there got the full benefit of "pitiless publicity", but the newspapers and the people gave him full benefit of it all because he had courage and he had initiative. He was a leader and commander of men. He had shown that before, but the country recognized it more clearly and distinctly when he came back home and the governorship of the Empire State was his.

We next find the nomination of his party for Vice President thrust upon him, we are sometimes told by men who wanted to pigeonhole him. They regarded him by this time as radical and as a possible candidate for President

in the future and they would smother him with silence and idleness in the office of Vice President.

An assassin's bullet laid low the suave and mild-mannered gentleman who graced the White House and the Rough Rider suddenly came upon the world's stage as the Chief Executive of the greatest nation of the world. There were shivers in counting houses all over the world, and especially in this country.

His career as President and his unfortunate struggle for a later nomination are too recent to discuss, even though the great man is dead, for the smoke of the controversies that centered around those things has not entirely passed away.

Let this be remarked here and now, for about it there is no controversy: Roosevelt's moral and political courage were as great as his physical courage, and no man but a fool would question the latter. He was not afraid to meet, in the White House, the biggest trust magnate or the wildest-eyed agitator. He knew that the man who had no skeletons in his closet, who was guilty of no act of which he need be ashamed if made known, need have no fear of meeting any man in public or in private. Only those who have done dark deeds fear the light. Only those who are moral or political cowards are afraid to be seen in the presence of or to have conferences with other men, no matter what their occupation or their reputation.

Even the bitterest political opponents of Theodore Roosevelt rejoice that there was a reconciliation between him and that other great living ex-President, Wm. H. Taft, before the former slept himself away into the great unknown.

It will be for the historian of the future to detail the great life work of that ever busy, that ever active man whose whole life was devoted to public service—to that great character whose memory we are attempting in this feeble way to honor here to-day. It would be foolish for me to attempt to discuss it in detail or to recount, measure or discuss any of the details.

There is just one thing I can not pass over, however, without adverting to and that is the patriotism and the Americanism of Roosevelt as manifested from the very beginning of the great war.

He had the foresight to see that it was almost inevitable that we should become embroiled in it from the very beginning. It was his voice that cried out for preparation when Congressmen were making peace speeches and the great majority of the country was singing "I did not raise my boy to be a soldier."

When politicians were pandering to the German vote, Roosevelt was denouncing the hyphenated foreigner in our country who was secretly plotting against us.

If there is or ever was a man one hundred per cent American, ladies and gentlemen, let us write down here and now, in letters of living light, the name of Theodore Roosevelt.

He sincerely desired to fight. The fact that the war was on a different scale and being fought along different lines than the one in which Mr. Roosevelt won renown, requiring long and careful training for officer and soldier alike, made no difference to him. He was willing to offer his life and sacrifice it even needlessly for his country.

He had the gratification of sending four splendid sons to the service, two of whom were wounded, one severely, and one of whom made the supreme sacrifice. The tired body of his youngest son sleeps to-day beneath the troubled soil of France, and it was the wish of the grieved father that the remains should rest where the foe had buried them.

Whose heart was not wrung from reading the story of Colonel Roosevelt being discovered, shortly after hearing of his son's death, in the stable at Oyster Bay with his arms around the neck of the pony which had belonged to the dead boy and which, as a child, he had ridden though the White House a decade before, up to the second floor? There was the father, the strong man, hugging the pony the boy had loved, and weeping like a woman.

Who knows how many days were subtracted from the life of the father by the grief, the unexpressed, the subdued and suppressed grief from the death of the baby boy whom he loved so well? Only those who have suffered a similar loss can understand.

And so there has passed to his eternal rest one of the most virile and aggressive characters this great country has produced.

It is too soon for the world, or even for us, to take the true measure of the man. We have too much admired or been too emphatic in our differences with him to correctly rate him. There are a few things, however, about which there can be no dispute. Some of these I have merely mentioned---his courage, moral, political and physical. No man can question these. His Americanism, his patriotism, who would dare to refuse to say they were one hundred per cent pure, pure and unadulterated?

But there is more upon which there will be no difference of opinion. That Theodore Roosevelt left this world better than he found it and that he was a vital force in the reformation of his time is just as true as the others. He stood for, I might almost say he inaugurated the square deal in public life. He purified the policies of the nation to some extent. I do not claim that his work in that particular was complete or that it was always entirely above criticism. He admitted that he worked with whatever tools he had at hand, and the machine politician and the ringsters were sometimes the only tools at his command. But I stand here to-day firmly possessed of the very sincere belief that even when he consorted with them his motives were pure and his efforts were to get better results than they were willing to give him.

It is no fair estimate of the man to pretend other than that he was human. Indeed he was very much so. It was alike the secret of his political popularity and his political success. He would not have us make any other estimate of him. No human ever lived or ever will live that did not make some mistakes. All humanity is swayed by sympathy and often swept by passion. But Theodore Roosevelt's love of humanity, his love of his fellowman, his desire to better the condition of his kind and to make his country better, were his dominating traits.

Nor has any man, at least of modern times, possessed such versatility. He was a scholar who spoke to foreign diplomats in their own tongue. He was a soldier and a statesman, but he knew the flowers and birds and beasts and he knew the trees and the plants as well as he knew the affairs of state.

And above all he knew men and he could influence and dominate them as could no other man of his time.

We can add nothing to the stature of the man by praising him, for he looms in the shadow of the departed day far above us.

Nor can we do honor to his memory by this meeting or by any of the thousands of similar meetings that are being held throughout this land to-day. We can show our appreciation of his character, of his Americanism, of his patriotism, of his courage and of the many splendid traits which he possessed, and I really think that is what we are here to do.

But, my friends, we can do more, and it is our duty to do more. We can here resolve, all of us, that in the light of his memory and his courageous acts we can strive to initiate those characteristics which made him great and which caused the American people to appreciate him. We can and should resolve, each one of us, to assume our share of the work and the responsibilities which he laid down and work harmoniously and persistently to carry forward the elevation of public thought, the stimulation of high endeavor, to the end that we may have a cleaner, better state, a finer, grander country and a more patriotic and a nobler citizenship.

The duties that devolve upon us as executives, as legislators and as private citizens should be met with the same irresistible courage as Theodore Roosevelt met them. The question of party political advantage, or personal popularity, can be subordinated as he subordinated them. To do so means to bring to us something of the same appreciation of the people that was his heritage. His life and acts have forever demonstrated that the American people will not follow and do not honor the political or the moral coward. May that lesson be learned by us and may it be the guiding thought of every public man of the present day and those who come after.

Roosevelt's fame is secure. No poor words of mine can add one jot or tittle to it. Our words of praise, however strong or exaggerated they may be, will vanish with the

breath that utters them, but his work will live on as will that of every man, however humble, whose life is devoted to the public good.

Were I asked to write his epitaph to-night, I could do it in three words—"Roosevelt, the American."

Or, were he consulted, he might prefer that of Robert Louis Stephenson:

"Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie;
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I lay me down with a will.

"This be the verse you 'grave for me:
'Here he lies where he longed to be—
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter, home from the hill.'"

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