

FELLOW-FEELING AS A POLITICAL  
FACTOR

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**F**ELLOW-FEELING, sympathy in the broadest sense, is the most important factor in producing a healthy political and social life. Neither our national nor our local civic life can be what it should be unless it is marked by the fellow-feeling, the mutual kindness, the mutual respect, the sense of common duties and common interests, which arise when men take the trouble to understand one another, and to associate together for a common object. A very large share of the rancor of political and social strife arises either from sheer misunderstanding by one section, or by one class, of another, or else from the fact that the two sections, or two classes, are so cut off from each other that neither appreciates the other's passions, prejudices, and, indeed, point of view, while they are both entirely ignorant of their community of feeling as regards the essentials of manhood and humanity.

This is one reason why the public school is so admirable an institution. To it more

than to any other among the many causes which, in our American life, tell for religious toleration is due the impossibility of persecution of a particular creed. When in their earliest and most impressionable years Protestants, Catholics, and Jews go to the same schools, learn the same lessons, play the same games, and are forced, in the rough-and-ready democracy of boy life, to take each at his true worth, it is impossible later to make the disciples of one creed persecute those of another. From the evils of religious persecution America is safe.

From the evils of sectional hostility we are, at any rate, far safer than we were. The war with Spain was the most absolutely righteous foreign war in which any nation has engaged during the nineteenth century, and not the least of its many good features was the unity it brought about between the sons of the men who wore the blue and of those who wore the gray. This necessarily meant the dying out of the old antipathy. Of course embers smolder here and there; but the country at large is growing more and more to take pride in the valor, the self-devotion, the loyalty to an ideal, displayed alike by the soldiers of both sides in the Civil War. We are all united now. We are all glad that the Union was restored, and are one in our loyalty to it; and hand in hand

with this general recognition of the all-importance of preserving the Union has gone the recognition of the fact that at the outbreak of the Civil War men could not cut loose from the ingrained habits and traditions of generations, and that the man from the North and the man from the South each was loyal to his highest ideal of duty when he drew sword or shouldered rifle to fight to the death for what he believed to be right.

Nor is it only the North and the South that have struck hands. The East and the West are fundamentally closer together than ever before. Using the word "West" in the old sense, as meaning the country west of the Alleghanies, it is of course perfectly obvious that it is the West which will shape the destinies of this nation. The great group of wealthy and powerful States about the Upper Mississippi, the Ohio, the Missouri, and their tributaries, will have far more weight than any other section in deciding the fate of the republic in the centuries that are opening. This is not in the least to be regretted by the East, for the simple and excellent reason that the interests of the West and the East are one. The West will shape our destinies because she will have more people and a greater territory, and because the whole development of the Western country is such as to make it

peculiarly the exponent of all that is most vigorously and characteristically American in our national life.

So it is with the Pacific slope, and the giant young States that are there growing by leaps and bounds. The greater the share they have in directing the national life, the better it will be for all of us.

I do not for a moment mean that mistakes will not be committed in every section of the country; they certainly will be, and in whatever section they are committed it will be our duty to protest against them, and to try to overthrow those who are responsible for them: but I do mean to say that in the long run each section is going to find that its welfare, instead of being antagonistic to, is indissolubly bound up in, the welfare of other sections; and the growth of means of communication, the growth of education in its highest and finest sense, means the growth in the sense of solidarity throughout the country, in the feeling of patriotic pride of each American in the deeds of all other Americans—of pride in the past history and present and future greatness of the whole country.

Nobody is interested in the fact that Dewey comes from Vermont, Hobson from Alabama, or Funston from Kansas. If all three came from the same county it would

make no difference to us. They are Americans, and every American has an equal right to challenge his share of glory in their deeds. As we read of the famous feats of our army in the Philippines, it matters nothing to us whether the regiments come from Oregon, Idaho, California, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, or Tennessee. What does matter is that these splendid soldiers are all Americans; that they are our heroes; that our blood runs in their veins; that the flag under which we live is the flag for which they have fought, for which some of them have died.

Danger from religious antipathy is dead, and from sectional antipathy dying; but there are at times very ugly manifestations of antipathy between class and class. It seems a pity to have to use the word "class," because there are really no classes in our American life in the sense in which the word "class" is used in Europe. Our social and political systems do not admit of them in theory, and in practice they exist only in a very fluid state. In most European countries classes are separated by rigid boundaries, which can be crossed but rarely, and with the utmost difficulty and peril. Here the boundaries cannot properly be said to exist, and are certainly so fluctuating and evasive, so indistinctly marked, that they cannot be appreciated when seen near by. Any

American family which lasts a few generations will be apt to have representatives in all the different classes. The great business men, even the great professional men, and especially the great statesmen and sailors and soldiers, are very apt to spring from among the farmers or wage-workers, and their kinsfolk remain near the old home or at the old trade. If ever there existed in the world a community where the identity of interest, of habit, of principle, and of ideals should be felt as a living force, ours is the one. Speaking generally, it really is felt to a degree quite unknown in other countries of our size. There are, doubtless, portions of Norway and Switzerland where the social and political ideals, and their nearness to realization, are not materially different from those of the most essentially American portions of our own land; but this is not true of any European country of considerable size. It is only in American communities that we see the farmer, the hired man, the lawyer, and the merchant, and possibly even the officer of the army or the navy, all kinsmen, and all accepting their relations as perfectly natural and simple. This is eminently healthy. This is just as it should be in our republic. It represents the ideal toward which it would be a good thing to approximate everywhere. In the great industrial

centers, with their highly complex, highly specialized conditions, it is of course merely an ideal. There are parts even of our oldest States, as, for example, New York, where this ideal is actually realized; there are other parts, particularly the great cities, where the life is so wholly different that the attempt to live up precisely to the country conditions would be artificial and impossible. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the only true solution of our political and social problems lies in cultivating everywhere the spirit of brotherhood, of fellow-feeling and understanding between man and man, and the willingness to treat a man as a man, which are the essential factors in American democracy as we still see it in the country districts.

The chief factor in producing such sympathy is simply association on a plane of equality, and for a common object. Any healthy-minded American is bound to think well of his fellow-Americans if he only gets to know them. The trouble is that he does not know them. If the banker and the farmer never meet, or meet only in the most perfunctory business way, if the banking is not done by men whom the farmer knows as his friends and associates, a spirit of mistrust is almost sure to spring up. If the merchant or the manufacturer, the lawyer or the clerk, never meets the mechanic



or the handicraftsman, save on rare occasions, when the meeting may be of a hostile kind, each side feels that the other is alien and naturally antagonistic. But if any one individual of any group were to be thrown into natural association with another group, the difficulties would be found to disappear so far as he was concerned. Very possibly he would become the ardent champion of the other group.

Perhaps I may be pardoned for quoting my own experience as an instance in point. Outside of college boys and politicians my first intimate associates were ranchmen, cow-punchers, and game-hunters, and I speedily became convinced that there were no other men in the country who were their equals. Then I was thrown much with farmers, and I made up my mind that it was the farmer upon whom the foundations of the commonwealth really rested—that the farmer was the archetypical good American. Then I saw a good deal of railroad men, and after quite an intimate acquaintance with them I grew to feel that, especially in their higher ranks, they typified the very qualities of courage, self-reliance, self-command, hardihood, capacity for work, power of initiative, and power of obedience, which we like most to associate with the American name. Then I happened to have dealings

with certain carpenters' unions, and grew to have a great respect for the carpenter, for the mechanic type. By this time it dawned upon me that they were all pretty good fellows, and that my championship of each set in succession above all other sets had sprung largely from the fact that I was very familiar with the set I championed, and less familiar with the remainder. In other words, I had grown into sympathy with, into understanding of, group after group, with the effect that I invariably found that they and I had common purposes and a common standpoint. We differed among ourselves, or agreed among ourselves, not because we had different occupations or the same occupation, but because of our ways of looking at life.

It is this capacity for sympathy, for fellow-feeling and mutual understanding, which must lie at the basis of all really successful movements for good government and the betterment of social and civic conditions. There is no patent device for bringing about good government. Still less is there any patent device for remedying social evils and doing away with social inequalities. Wise legislation can help in each case, and crude, vicious, or demagogic legislation can do an infinity of harm. But the betterment must come through the slow workings of the same

forces which always have tended for righteousness, and always will.

The prime lesson to be taught is the lesson of treating each man on his worth as a man, and of remembering that while sometimes it is necessary, from both a legislative and social standpoint, to consider men as a class, yet in the long run our safety lies in recognizing the individual's worth or lack of worth as the chief basis of action, and in shaping our whole conduct, and especially our political conduct, accordingly. It is impossible for a democracy to endure if the political lines are drawn to coincide with class lines. The resulting government, whether of the upper or the lower class, is not a government of the whole people, but a government of part of the people at the expense of the rest. Where the lines of political division are vertical, the men of each occupation and of every social standing separating according to their vocations and principles, the result is healthy and normal. Just so far, however, as the lines are drawn horizontally, the result is unhealthy, and in the long run disastrous, for such a division means that men are pitted against one another in accordance with the blind and selfish interests of the moment. Each is thus placed over against his neighbor in an attitude of greedy class hostility,

which becomes the mainspring of his conduct, instead of each basing his political action upon his own convictions as to what is advisable and what inadvisable, and upon his own disinterested sense of devotion to the interests of the whole community as he sees them. Republics have fallen in the past primarily because the parties that controlled them divided along the lines of class, so that inevitably the triumph of one or the other implied the supremacy of a part over the whole. The result might be an oligarchy, or it might be mob rule; it mattered little which, as regards the ultimate effect, for in both cases tyranny and anarchy were sure to alternate. The failure of the Greek and Italian republics was fundamentally due to this cause. Switzerland has flourished because the divisions upon which her political issues have been fought have not been primarily those of mere caste or social class, and America will flourish and will become greater than any empire because, in the long run, in this country, any party which strives to found itself upon sectional or class jealousy and hostility must go down before the good sense of the people.

The only way to provide against the evils of a horizontal cleavage in politics is to encourage the growth of fellow-feeling, of a feeling based on the relations of man to

man, and not of class to class. In the country districts this is not very difficult. In the neighborhood where I live, on the Fourth of July the four Protestant ministers and the Catholic priest speak from the same platform, the children of all of us go to the same district school, and the landowner and the hired man take the same views, not merely of politics, but of duck-shooting and of international yacht races. Naturally in such a community there is small chance for class division. There is a slight feeling against the mere summer residents, precisely because there is not much sympathy with them, and because they do not share in our local interests; but otherwise there are enough objects in common to put all much on the same plane of interest in various important particulars, and each man has too much self-respect to feel particularly jealous of any other man. Moreover, as the community is small and consists for the most part of persons who have dwelt long in the land, while those of foreign ancestry, instead of keeping by themselves, have intermarried with the natives, there is still a realizing sense of kinship among the men who follow the different occupations. The characteristic family names are often borne by men of widely different fortunes, ranging from the local bayman through the captain

of the oyster-sloop, the sail-maker, or the wheelwright, to the owner of what the countryside may know as the manor-house—which probably contains one of the innumerable rooms in which Washington is said to have slept. We have sharp rivalries, and our politics are by no means always what they should be, but at least we do not divide on class lines, for the very good reason that there has been no crystallization into classes.

This condition prevails in essentials throughout the country districts of New York, which are politically very much the healthiest districts. Any man who has served in the legislature realizes that the country members form, on the whole, a very sound and healthy body of legislators. Any man who has gone about much to the county fairs in New York—almost the only place where the farm folks gather in large numbers—cannot but have been struck by the high character of the average countryman. He is a fine fellow, rugged, hard-working, shrewd, and keenly alive to the fundamental virtues. He and his brethren of the smaller towns and villages, in ordinary circumstances, take very little account, indeed, of any caste difference; they greet each man strictly on his merits as a man, and therefore form a community in which

there is singularly little caste spirit, and in which men associate on a thoroughly healthy and American ground of common ideals, common convictions, and common sympathies.

Unfortunately, this cannot be said of the larger cities, where the conditions of life are so complicated that there has been an extreme differentiation and specialization in every species of occupation, whether of business or pleasure. The people of a certain degree of wealth and of a certain occupation may never come into any real contact with the people of another occupation, of another social standing. The tendency is for the relations always to be between class and class instead of between individual and individual. This produces the thoroughly unhealthy belief that it is for the interest of one class as against another to have its class representatives dominant in public life. The ills of any such system are obvious. As a matter of fact, the enormous mass of our legislation and administration ought to be concerned with matters that are strictly for the commonweal; and where special legislation or administration is needed, as it often must be, for a certain class, the need can be met primarily by mere honesty and common sense. But if men are elected solely from any caste, or on any caste theory, the voter gradually substitutes the theory of

allegiance to the caste for the theory of allegiance to the commonwealth as a whole, and instead of demanding as fundamental the qualities of probity and broad intelligence—which are the indispensable qualities in securing the welfare of the whole—as the first consideration, he demands, as a substitute, zeal in the service, or apparent service, of the class, which is quite compatible with gross corruption outside. In short, we get back to the conditions which foredoomed democracy to failure in the ancient Greek and medieval republics, where party lines were horizontal and class warred against class, each in consequence necessarily substituting devotion to the interest of a class for devotion to the interest of the state and to the elementary ideas of morality.

The only way to avoid the growth of these evils is, so far as may be, to help in the creation of conditions which will permit mutual understanding and fellow-feeling between the members of different classes. To do this it is absolutely necessary that there should be natural association between the members for a common end or with a common purpose. As long as men are separated by their caste lines, each body having its own amusements, interests, and occupations, they are certain to regard one another with that instinctive distrust which they feel for for



eigners. There are exceptions to the rule, but it is a rule. The average man, when he has no means of being brought into contact with another, or of gaining any insight into that other's ideas and aspirations, either ignores these ideas and aspirations completely, or else feels toward them a more or less tepid dislike. The result is a complete and perhaps fatal misunderstanding, due primarily to the fact that the capacity for fellow-feeling is given no opportunity to flourish. On the other hand, if the men can be mixed together in some way that will loosen the class or caste bonds and put each on his merits as an individual man, there is certain to be a regrouping independent of caste lines. A tie may remain between the members of a caste, based merely upon the similarity of their habits of life; but this will be much less strong than the ties based on identity of passion, of principle, or of ways of looking at life. Any man who has ever, for his good fortune, been obliged to work with men in masses, in some place or under some condition or in some association where the dislocation of caste was complete, must recognize the truth of this as apparent. Every mining-camp, every successful volunteer regiment, proves it. In such cases there is always some object which must be attained, and the men interested in its attain-

ment have to develop their own leaders and their own ties of association, while the would-be leader can succeed only by selecting for assistants the men whose peculiar capacities fit them to do the best work in the various emergencies that arise. Under such circumstances the men who work together for the achievement of a common result in which they are intensely interested are very soon certain to disregard, and, indeed, to forget, the creed or race origin or antecedent social standing or class occupation of the man who is either their friend or their foe. They get down to the naked bed-rock of character and capacity.

This is to a large extent true of the party organizations in a great city, and, indeed, of all serious political organizations. If they are to be successful they must necessarily be democratic, in the sense that each man is treated strictly on his merits as a man. No one can succeed who attempts to go in on any other basis; above all, no one can succeed if he goes in feeling that, instead of merely doing his duty, he is conferring a favor upon the community, and is therefore warranted in adopting an attitude of condescension toward his fellows. It is often quite as irritating to be patronized as to be plundered; as reformers have more than once discovered when the mass of the voters

stolidly voted against them, and in favor of a gang of familiar scoundrels, chiefly because they had no sense of fellow-feeling with their would-be benefactors.

The tendency to patronize is certain to be eradicated as soon as any man goes into politics in a practical and not in a dilettante fashion. He speedily finds that the quality of successful management, the power to handle men and secure results, may exist in seemingly unlikely persons. If he intends to carry a caucus or primary, or elect a given candidate, or secure a certain piece of legislation or administration, he will have to find out and work with innumerable allies, and make use of innumerable subordinates. Given that he and they have a common object, the one test that he must apply to them is as to their ability to help in achieving that object. The result is that in a very short time the men whose purposes are the same forget about all differences, save in capacity to carry out the purpose. The banker who is interested in seeing a certain nomination made or a certain election carried forgets everything but his community of interest with the retail butcher who is a leader along his section of the avenue, or the starter who can control a considerable number of the motormen; and in return the butcher and the starter accept the banker

quite naturally as an ally whom they may follow or lead, as circumstances dictate. In other words, all three grow to feel in common on certain important subjects, and this fellow-feeling has results as far-reaching as they are healthy.

Good thus follows from mere ordinary political affiliation. A man who has taken an active part in the political life of a great city possesses an incalculable advantage over his fellow-citizens who have not so taken part, because normally he has more understanding than they can possibly have of the attitude of mind, the passions, prejudices, hopes, and animosities of his fellow-citizens, with whom he would not ordinarily be brought into business or social contact. Of course there are plenty of exceptions to this rule. A man who is drawn into politics from absolutely selfish reasons, and especially a rich man who merely desires to buy political promotion, may know absolutely nothing that is of value as to any but the basest side of the human nature with which his sphere of contact has been enlarged; and, on the other hand, a wise employer of labor, or a philanthropist in whom zeal and judgment balance each other, may know far more than most politicians. But the fact remains that the effect of political life, and of the associations that it brings, is of very great benefit

in producing a better understanding and a keener fellow-feeling among men who otherwise would know one another not at all, or else as members of alien bodies or classes.

This being the case, how much more is it true if the same habit of association for a common purpose can be applied where the purpose is really of the highest! Much is accomplished in this way by the university settlements and similar associations. Wherever these associations are entered into in a healthy and sane spirit, the good they do is incalculable, from the simple fact that they bring together in pursuit of a worthy common object men of excellent character, who would never otherwise meet. It is of just as much importance to the one as to the other that the man from Hester Street or the Bowery or Avenue B, and the man from the Riverside Drive or Fifth Avenue, should have some meeting-ground where they can grow to understand one another as an incident of working for a common end. Of course if, on the one hand, the work is entered into in a patronizing spirit, no good will result; and, on the other hand, if the zealous enthusiast loses his sanity, only harm will follow. There is much dreadful misery in a great city, and a high-spirited, generous young man, when first brought into contact with it, has his sympathies so

excited that he is very apt to become a socialist, or turn to the advocacy of any wild scheme, courting a plunge from bad to worse, exactly as do too many of the leaders of the discontent around him. His sanity and cool-headedness will be thoroughly tried, and if he loses them his power for good will vanish.

But this is merely to state one form of a general truth. If a man permits largeness of heart to degenerate into softness of head, he inevitably becomes a nuisance in any relation of life. If sympathy becomes distorted and morbid, it hampers instead of helping the effort toward social betterment. Yet without sympathy, without fellow-feeling, no permanent good can be accomplished. In any healthy community there must be a solidarity of sentiment and a knowledge of solidarity of interest among the different members. Where this solidarity ceases to exist, where there is no fellow-feeling, the community is ripe for disaster. Of course the fellow-feeling may be of value much in proportion as it is unconscious. A sentiment that is easy and natural is far better than one which has to be artificially stimulated. But the artificial stimulus is better than none, and with fellow-feeling, as with all other emotions, what is started artificially may become quite natural in its continuance.

With most men courage is largely an acquired habit, and on the first occasions when it is called for it necessitates the exercise of will-power and self-control; but by exercise it gradually becomes almost automatic.

So it is with fellow-feeling. A man who conscientiously endeavors to throw in his lot with those about him, to make his interests theirs, to put himself in a position where he and they have a common object, will at first feel a little self-conscious, will realize too plainly his own aims. But with exercise this will pass off. He will speedily find that the fellow-feeling which at first he had to stimulate was really existent, though latent, and is capable of a very healthy growth. It can, of course, become normal only when the man himself becomes genuinely interested in the object which he and his fellows are striving to attain. It is therefore obviously desirable that this object should possess a real and vital interest for every one. Such is the case with a proper political association.

Much has been done, not merely by the ordinary political associations, but by the city clubs, civic federations, and the like, and very much more can be done. Of course there is danger of any such association being perverted either by knavery or folly. When a partizan political organization becomes merely an association for purposes of plun-

der and patronage, it may be a menace instead of a help to a community; and when a non-partizan political organization falls under the control of the fantastic extremists always attracted to such movements, in its turn it becomes either useless or noxious. But if these organizations, partizan or non-partizan, are conducted along the lines of sanity and honesty, they produce a good more far-reaching than their promoters suppose, and achieve results of greater importance than those immediately aimed at.

It is an excellent thing to win a triumph for good government at a given election; but it is a far better thing gradually to build up that spirit of fellow-feeling among American citizens, which, in the long run, is absolutely necessary if we are to see the principles of virile honesty and robust common sense triumph in our civic life.



**THE  
STRENUOUS LIFE**

**ESSAYS AND  
ADDRESSES**

**BY  
THEODORE ROOSEVELT**



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