

GOVERNOR WILLIAM H. TAFT

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

President of the United States

Written for The Outlook by Colonel Roosevelt in August, 1901.

A year ago a man of wide acquaintance, both with American public life and American public men, remarked that the first Governor of the Philippines ought to combine the qualities which would make a first-class President of the United States with the qualities which would make a first-class Chief-Justice of the United States, and that the only man he knew who possessed all these qualities was Judge William H. Taft, of Ohio. The statement was entirely correct. A few more difficult tasks have devolved upon any man of our nationality during our century and a quarter of public life than the handling of the Philippine Islands just at this time; and it may be doubted, whether among men now living, another could be found as well fitted as Judge Taft to do this incredibly difficult work. Judge Taft be-

longs to a family which has always done valuable public service. He graduated from Yale in 1878; and a few years later, when Yale gave him the honorary degree of LL. D., he was the youngest of her graduates upon whom she had ever conferred this honor. On graduation he took up the study of the law, and also entered actively into public life. In both careers he rose steadily and rapidly. Under President Harrison he was made Solicitor-General of the United States, and he left this place to become a Judge of the United States District Court.

But his weight in public life was something entirely apart from the office he at any time happened to hold. I dislike speaking in hyperbole; but I think that almost all men who have been brought in close contact, personally and officially, with Judge Taft are agreed that he combines, as very, very few men ever can combine, a standard of absolutely unflinching rectitude on every point of public duty, and a literally dauntless courage and willingness to bear responsibility, with a knowledge of men, and a far-reaching tact and kindness, which enable his great abilities and high principles to be of use in a way that would be impossible were he not thus gifted with the capacity to work hand in hand with his fel-

lows. President McKinley has rendered many great services to his country; and not the least has been the clear-sightedness with which he has chosen the best possible public servants to perform the very difficult tasks of acting as the first administrators in the islands which came into our hands as a result of the Spanish war. Such was the service he rendered when he chose Assistant Secretary of the Navy Allen and afterwards Judge Hunt as Governors of Porto Rico; when he chose General Leonard Wood as Governor-General of Cuba; and finally when he made Judge Taft the first Governor of the Philippines.

When Judge Taft was sent out as the head of the Commission appointed by the President to inaugurate civil rule in the Philippines, he was in a position not only of great difficulty, but of great delicacy. He had to show inflexible strength, and yet capacity to work heartily with other men and get the best results out of conflicting ideas and interests. The Tagalog insurrection was still under full headway, being kept alive largely by the moral aid it received from certain sources in this country. Any action of the Commission, no matter how wise and just, was certain to be misrepresented and bitterly attacked

here at home by those who, from whatever reasons, desired the success of the insurgents. On the other hand, the regular army, which had done and was doing its work admirably—and which is entitled to the heartiest regard and respect from every true American, alive, as he should be, to its literally inestimable services—was yet, from its very nature, not an instrument fitted for the further development of civil liberty in the islands. Under ordinary circumstances there would have been imminent danger of friction between the military and civil authorities. Fortunately, we had at the head of the War Department in Secretary Elihu Root a man as thoroughly fit for his post as Governor Taft was for his. Secretary Root was administering his department with an eye single to the public interests, his sole desire being to get the best possible results for the country. Where these results could be obtained by the use of the army, he used it in the most efficient possible manner—and month by month, almost day by day, its efficiency increased under his hands. Where he thought the best results could be obtained by the gradual elimination of the army and the substitution of civil government, his sole concern was to see that the substitution was made in the most advan-

tageous manner possible. Neither the Secretary nor the Governor was capable of so much as understanding the pettiness which makes a certain type of official, even in high office, desire to keep official control of some province of public work, not for the sake of the public work, but for the sake of the office. No better object-lesson could be given than has thus been given by Secretary Root and Governor Taft of the immense public benefit resulting, under circumstances of great difficulty and delicacy, from the cordial co-operation of two public servants, who combine entire disinterestedness with the highest standard of capacity.

Governor Taft thus set to work with the two great advantages of the hearty and generous support of his superior, the President, and the ungrudging co-operation of the War Department. The difficulties he had to combat were infinite. In the Philippines we were heirs to all the troubles of Spain, and above all to the inveterate distrust and suspicion which Spanish rule had left in the native mind. The army alone could put down the insurrection, and yet, once the insurrection had been put down, every consideration of humanity and policy required that the function of the army should be minimized as much as

possible. Until after the Presidential election in November last peace could not come, because both the insurgent leaders and their supporters on this side of the water were under the mistaken impression that a continuance of the bloodshed and struggle in the Philippines would be politically disadvantageous to the party in power in the United States. Soon after the results of the election became known in the Philippines, however, armed resistance collapsed. The small bands now in the field are not, properly speaking, insurgents at all, but "ladrones," robbers whose operations are no more political than those of bandits in Calabria or Greece.

The way has thus been cleared for civil rule; and astonishing progress has been made. Wherever possible, Governor Taft has been employing natives in the public service. Being a man of the soundest common sense, however, he has not hesitated to refuse to employ natives, where, after careful investigation, his deliberate judgment is that, for the time being, it is to the advantage of the natives themselves that Americans should administer the position, notably in certain of the judgeships and high offices. For the last few months the Filipinos have known a degree of peace, justice, and prosperity to which they

have never attained in their whole previous history, and to which they could not have approximated in the remotest degree had it not been for the American stay in the islands. Under Judge Taft they are gradually learning what it means to keep faith, what it means to have public officials of unbending rectitude. Under him the islands have seen the beginnings of a system of good roads, good schools, upright judges, and honest public servants. His administration throughout has been designed primarily for the benefit of the islanders themselves, and has therefore in the truest and most effective way been in the interest also of the American Republic. Under him the islanders are now taking the first steps along the hard path which ultimately leads to self-respect and self-government. That they will travel this road with success to the ultimate goal there can be but little doubt, if only our people will make it absolutely certain that the policies inaugurated under President McKinley by Governor Taft shall be continued in the future by just such men as Governor Taft. There will be occasional failures, occasional shortcomings; and then we shall hear the familiar wail of the men of little faith, of little courage. Here and there the smouldering embers

of insurrection will burst again into brief flame; here and there the measure of self-government granted to a given locality will have to be withdrawn or diminished because on trial the people do not show themselves fit for it; and now and then we shall meet the sudden and unexpected difficulties which are inevitably incident to any effort to do good to peoples containing some savage and half-civilized elements. Governor Taft will have to meet crisis after crisis; he will meet each with courage, coolness, strength, and judgment.

It is highly important that we have good laws for the islands. It is highly important that these laws permit of the great material development of the islands. Governor Taft has most wisely insisted that it is to the immense benefit of the islanders that great industrial enterprises spring up in the Philippines, and of course such industrial enterprises can only spring up if profit comes to those who undertake them. The material uplifting of the people must go together with their moral uplifting. But though it is important to have wise laws, it is more important that there should be a wise and honest administration of the laws. The statesmen at home, in Congress and out of Congress, can do their best work by fol-

lowing the advice and the lead of the man who is actually on the ground. It is therefore essential that this man should be of the very highest stamp. If inferior men are appointed, and, above all, if the curse of spoils politics ever fastens itself upon the administration of our insular dependencies, widespread disaster is sure to follow. Every American worthy of the name, every American who is proud of his country and jealous of her honor, should uphold the hands of Governor Taft, and by the heartiness of his support should give an earnest of his intention to insist that the high standard set by Governor Taft shall be accepted for all time hereafter as the standard by which we intend to judge whoever, under or after Governor Taft, may carry forward the work he has so strikingly begun.

Governor Taft left a high office of honor and of comparative ease to undertake his present work. As soon as he became convinced where his duty lay he did not hesitate a moment, though he clearly foresaw the infinite labor, the crushing responsibility, the certainty of recurring disappointments, and all the grinding wear and tear which such a task implies. But he gladly undertook it; and he is to be considered thrice fortunate! For in this world the

one thing supremely worth having is the opportunity, coupled with the capacity, to do well and worthily a piece of work, the doing of which is of vital consequence to the welfare of mankind.

T. Roosevelt

*Extract from letter written by the President in July, 1907,
to a Western friend:*

“ In point of courage, capacity, inflexible uprightness, and disinterestedness, wide acquaintance with governmental problems and identification of himself with the urgent needs of the social and governmental work of the day, it seems to me Taft stands preëminent. He does not think of himself. He never considers how an act or an utterance will affect him personally save in so far as he must consider how it will affect his power for usefulness. His great ambition when in office is to do the job in the best way that it can possibly be done, and he neither thinks as to whether he is under obligations to anyone or as to whether anyone else is under obligations to him. A number of years ago I wrote my estimate of Taft in the Outlook. Since then I have been President and I have been very intimately associated with him in handling many great and difficult governmental problems, and my feeling as to his preëminent fitness for the Presidency has steadily grown.”

WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT

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Including a chapter by
Theodore Roosevelt
President of the United States

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