

# COL. THEODORE ROOSEVELT WRITES ON WHAT AMERICA SHOULD LEARN FROM THE WAR

In the First of a Series of Articles in The Sunday Times the Former President of the United States Points Out the Need That Uncle Sam Should Be Able to Defend Himself.

IN this country we are both shocked and stunned by the awful cataclysm which has engulfed civilized Europe. By only a few men was the possibility of such a widespread and hideous disaster even admitted. Most persons, even after it occurred, felt as if it was unbelievable. They felt that in what it pleased enthusiasts to speak of as "this age of enlightenment" it was impossible that primal passion, working hand in hand with the most modern scientific organizations, should loose upon the world these forces of dread destruction.

In the last week in July the men and women of the populous civilized countries of Europe were leading their usual ordered lives, busy and yet soft, lives carried on with comfort and luxury, with appliances for ease and pleasure such as never before were known. Lives led in a routine which to most people seemed part of the natural order of things, something which could not be disturbed by shocks such as the world knew of old. A fortnight later hell yawned under the feet of these hard-working or pleasure-seeking men and women, and we smote them as it smote the peoples we read of in the Old Testament or in the histories of the Middle Ages. Through the rents in our smiling surface of civilization the volcanic fires beneath gleamed red in the gloom.

## Our Twofold Duty.

What occurred in Europe is on a giant scale like the disaster to the Titanic. One moment the great ship was speeding across the ocean, equipped with every device for comfort, safety, and luxury. The men in her stokehold and steerage were more comfortable than the most luxurious travelers of a century ago. The people in her first-class cabins enjoyed every luxury that a luxurious city life could demand and were screened not only from danger but from the least discomfort or annoyance. Suddenly, in one awful and shattering moment death smote the floating host, so busy with work and play. They were in that moment shot back through immeasurable ages. At one stroke they were hurled from a life of effortless ease back into elemental disaster; to disaster in which baseness showed naked, and heroism burned like a flame of light.

In the face of a calamity so world-wide as the present war, it behooves us all to keep our heads clear and to read aright the lessons taught us; for we ourselves may suffer dreadful penalties if we read these lessons wrong. The temptation always is only to half-learn such a lesson, for a half truth is always simple, whereas the whole truth is very, very difficult. Unfortunately a half truth, if applied, may turn out to be the most dangerous type of falsehood.

Now, our business here in America in the face of this cataclysm is twofold. In the first place it is imperative that we shall take the steps necessary in order, by our own strength and wisdom, to safeguard ourselves against such disaster as has occurred in Europe. Events have shown that peace treaties, arbitration treaties, neutrality treaties, Hague treaties and the like as at present existing offer not even the smallest protection against such disasters. The prime duty of the moment is therefore to keep Uncle Sam in such a position that by his own stout heart and ready

hand he can defend the vital honor and vital interest of the American people.

But this is not our only duty, even although it is the only duty we can immediately perform. The horror of what has occurred in Europe, and which has drawn into the maelstrom of war large parts of Asia, Africa, Australasia and even America, is altogether too great to permit us to rest supine without endeavoring to prevent its repetition. We are not to be excused if we do not make a resolute and intelligent effort to devise some scheme which will minimize the chance for a recurrence of such horror in the future and which will at least limit and alleviate it if it should occur. In other words, it is our duty to try to devise some efficient plan for securing the peace of righteousness throughout the world.

That any plan will surely and automatically bring peace we cannot promise. Nevertheless, I think a plan can be devised which will render it far more difficult than at present for a world-war and far more easy than at present to find workable and practical substitutes even for ordinary war.

In order to do this, however, it is necessary that we shall fearlessly look facts in the face. We cannot devise methods for securing peace which will actually work unless we are in good faith willing to face the fact that the present all-inclusive arbitration treaties, peace conferences and the like, upon which our well-meaning pacifists have pinned so much hope, have proved utterly worthless under serious strain. We must face this fact and clearly understand the reason for it before we can advance an adequate remedy.

It is even more important not to pay heed to the pathetic infatuation of the well-meaning persons who declare that this is "the last great war." During the last century such assertions have been made again and again after the close of every great war. They represent nothing but an amiable fatuity. The strong men of the United States must protect the feeble; but they must not trust for guidance to the feeble.

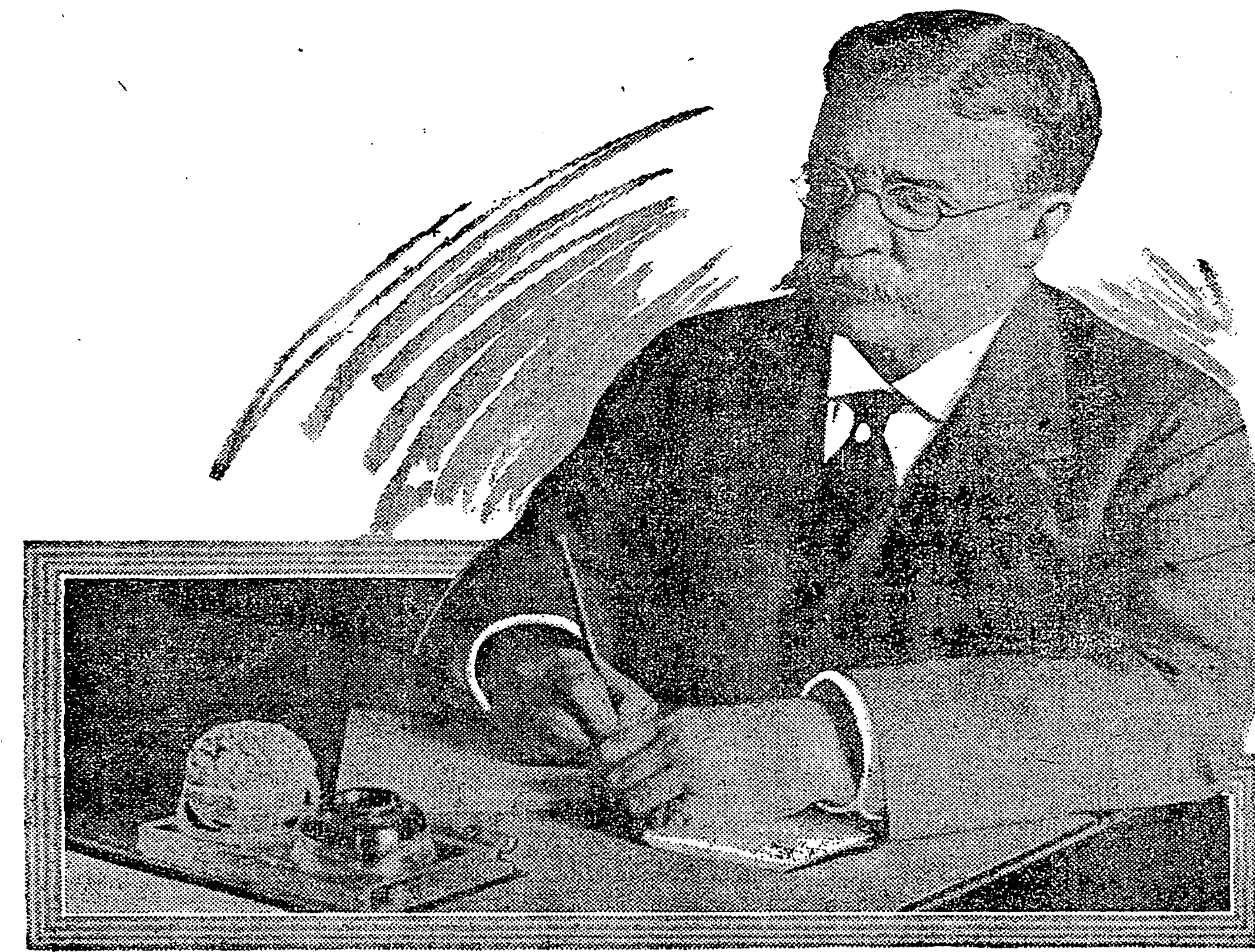
## Letters in Blood and Steel.

In these articles I desire to ask my fellow-countrymen and countrywomen to consider the various lessons which are being writ in letters of blood and steel before our eyes.

I wish to ask their consideration, first, of the immediate need that we shall realize the utter hopelessness under actually existing conditions of our trusting for our safety merely to the good-will of other powers or to treaties or other bits of paper or to anything except our own steadfast courage and preparedness.

Second, I wish to point out what a complicated and difficult thing it is to work for peace and how difficult it may be to combine one's duty in the endeavor to bring peace for others without failing in one's duty to secure peace for one's self; and therefore, I wish to point out how unwise it is to make foolish promises which under great strain it would be impossible to keep.

Third, I wish to try to give



A Recent Photograph of Col. Theodore Roosevelt.

practical expression to what I know is the hope of the great body of our people. We should endeavor to devise some method of action, in common with other nations, whereby there shall be at least a reasonable chance of securing world-peace and in any event of narrowing the sphere of possible war and its horrors.

To do this it is equally necessary unflinchingly to antagonize the position of the men who believe in nothing but brute force exercised without regard to the rights of other nations, and unhesitatingly to condemn the well-meaning but unwise persons who seek to mislead our peoples into the belief that treaties, mere bits of paper, when unbacked by force and when there is no one responsible for their enforcement, can be of the slightest use in a serious crisis. Force unbacked by righteousness is abhorrent. The effort to substitute for it vague declamation for righteousness unbacked by force is silly. The policeman must be put back of the Judge in international law just as he is back of the Judge in municipal law. The effective power of civilization must be put back of civilization's collective purpose to secure reasonable justice between nation and nation.

First, consider the lessons taught by this war as to the absolute need under existing conditions of our being willing, ready and able to defend ourselves from unjust attack. What has befallen Belgium and Luxemburg—not to speak of China—during the past six weeks shows the utter hopelessness of trusting to any treaties, no matter how well-meant, unless back of them lies power sufficient to secure their enforcement.

At the outset let me explain with all possible emphasis that in what I am about to say at this time I am not criticising nor taking sides with any one of the chief combatants in either group of warring powers.

The causes for the present contest stretch into the immortal past. As far as the present generations of Germans, Frenchmen, Russians, Austrians and Servians are concerned,

their actions have been given a certain fatalistic impulse because of deeds done and left undone by many generations in the past.

Not only the sovereigns, but the peoples engaged on each side believe sincerely in the justice of their several causes. This is convincingly shown by the action of the Socialists in Germany, France, and Belgium. Of all latter day political parties the Socialist is the one in which international brotherhood is most dwelt upon, while international obligations are placed on a par with national obligations. Yet the Socialists in Germany and the Socialists in France and Belgium have all alike thrown themselves into this contest with the same enthusiasm and indeed the same bitterness as the rest of their countrymen.

## The Lesson of Belgium.

I am not at this time passing judgment one way or the other upon any of the powers. I am merely instancing certain things that have occurred, because of the vital importance that we as a people should take to heart the lessons taught by these occurrences.

At the end of July Belgium and Luxemburg were independent nations. By treaties executed in 1832 and 1867 their neutrality had been guaranteed by the great nations roundabout them, Germany, France and England. Their neutrality was thus guaranteed with the express purpose of keeping them at peace and preventing any invasion of their territory during war. Luxemburg built no fortifications and raised no army, trusting entirely to the pledged faith of her neighbors. Belgium, an extremely thrifty, progressive and prosperous industrial country, whose people are exceptionally hard-working and law-abiding, raised an army and built forts for purely defensive purposes. Neither nation committed the smallest act of hostility or aggression against any one of its neighbors. Each behaved with absolute propriety. Each was absolutely innocent of the slightest wrongdoing. Neither has the very smallest responsibility for

the disaster that has overwhelmed her. Nevertheless as soon as the war broke out the territories of both were overrun.

Luxemburg made no resistance. It is now practically incorporated in Germany. Other nations have almost forgotten its existence and not the slightest attention has been paid to its fate simply because it did not fight, simply because it trusted solely to peaceful measures and to the treaties which were supposed to guarantee it against harm.

The eyes of the world, however, are on Belgium because the Belgians have fought hard and gallantly for all that makes life best worth having to honorable men and women. In consequence, Belgium has been trampled under foot. At this moment not only her men, but her women and children, are enduring misery so dreadful that it is hard for us who live at peace to visualize it to ourselves.

The fate of Luxemburg and of Belgium offers an instructive commentary on the folly of the well-meaning people who a few years ago insisted that the Panama Canal should not be fortified and that we should trust to international treaties to protect it. After what has occurred in Europe no sane man has any excuse for believing that such treaties would avail us in our hour of need any more than they have availed Belgium and Luxemburg—and for that matter Korea and China—in their hour of need.

If a great world war should arise or if a great world power were at war with us under conditions that made it desirable for other nations not to be drawn into the quarrel, any step that the hostile nation's real or fancied need demanded would unquestionably be taken, and any treaty that stood in the way would be treated as so much waste paper except so far as we could back it by force.

If under such circumstances Panama is retained and controlled by us, it will be because our forts and garrison and our fleets on the ocean make it unsafe to meddle with the canal and the Canal Zone. Were it

only protected by a treaty—that is, unless behind the treaty lay both force and the readiness to use force—the canal would not be safe for twenty-four hours.

Moreover, in such case, the real blame would lie at our own doors. We would not be helped at all, we would merely make ourselves objects of derision if under these circumstances we screamed and clamored about the iniquity of those who violated the treaty and took possession of Panama. The blame would rightly be placed by the world upon our own supine folly, upon our own timidity and weakness, and we would be adjudged unfit to hold what we had shown ourselves too soft and too shortsighted to retain.

The first and most obvious lesson taught by what has occurred is the utter worthlessness of treaties unless backed by force. It is evident that as things are now, all-inclusive arbitration treaties, neutrality treaties, treaties of alliance and the like do not serve one particle of good in protecting a peaceful nation when some great military power deems its vital needs at stake, unless the rights of this peaceful nation are backed by force.

The devastation of Belgium, the burning of Louvain, the holding of Brussels to heavy ransom, the killing of women and children, the wrecking of houses in Antwerp by bombs from airships have excited genuine sympathy among neutral nations, but no neutral nation has protested, and it would be worse than useless to protest unless back of the protest lay force.

Let our people remember that what has been done to Belgium would unquestionably be done to us by any great military power with which we were drawn into war, no matter how just our cause. Moreover, it would be done without any more protest on the part of neutral nations than we have ourselves made in the case of Belgium.

If, as an aftermath of this war, some great Old World power or combination of powers made war on us because we objected to their taking and fortifying Magdalena Bay or St. Thomas, our chance of securing justice would rest exclusively on the efficiency of our fleet and army, especially the fleet.

## The Price to Pay.

No arbitration treaties, or peace treaties, of the kind recently negotiated at Washington by the bushful, and no tepid good-will of neutral powers would help us in even the smallest degree. If our fleet were conquered, New York and San Francisco would be seized and probably each would be destroyed as Louvain was destroyed unless it were put to ransom as Brussels has been put to ransom. Under such circumstances outside powers would undoubtedly remain neutral exactly as we have remained neutral as regards Belgium.

Under such conditions my own view is very strongly that the national interest would be best served by refusing the payment of all ransom and accepting the destruction of the cities and then continuing the war until by our own strength

and indomitable will we had exacted ample atonement from our foes.

This would be a terrible proved price to pay for unpreparedness; and those responsible for the unpreparedness would be guilty of a crime against the nation. Upon them would rest the guilt of all the blood and misery. The innocent would have to atone for their folly, and strong men would have to undo and offset it by submitting to the destruction of our cities rather than consent to save them by paying money which would be used to prosecute the war against the rest of the country.

If our people are wise and farsighted, and if they still have in their blood the iron of the men who fought under Grant and Lee, they will, in the event of such a war, insist upon this price being paid, upon this course being followed. They will then in the end exact, from the nation which assails us, atonement for the misery and redress for the wrong done. They will not rely upon the ineffective goodwill of neutral outsiders. They will show a temper that will make our foes think twice before meddling with us again.

## Peace's Great Danger.

The great danger to peace so far as this country is concerned arises from such pacifists as those who have made and applauded our recent all-inclusive arbitration treaties, who advocate the abandonment of our policy of building battleships and the refusal to fortify the Panama Canal. It is always possible that these persons may succeed in impressing foreign nations with the belief that they represent our people. If they ever do succeed in creating this conviction in the minds of other nations, the fate of the United States will speedily be that of China and Luxemburg, or else it will be saved therefrom only by long-drawn war, accompanied by incredible bloodshed and disaster.

It is we who would go to the front in such a way—as I and my four sons would go—who are the really farsighted and earnest friends of peace. We desire measures taken in the real interest of peace because we, who at need would fight, but who earnestly hope never to be forced to fight, have most at stake in keeping peace.

We object to the actions of those who do most talking about the necessity of peace because we think they are really a menace to the just and honorable peace which alone this country will in the long run support. We object to their actions because we believe they represent a course of conduct which may at any time produce a war in which we and not they would labor and suffer.

In such a war the prime fact to be remembered is that the men really responsible for it would not be those who would pay the penalty. The ultra-pacifists are rarely men who go to battle. Their fault or their folly would be expiated by the blood of countless thousands of plain and decent American citizens of the stamp of those, North and South alike, who in the civil war laid down all they had, including life itself, in battling for the right as it was given to them to see the right.

*Theodore Roosevelt*  
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