

A DISAGREEABLE DUTY

Any man familiar with public life realizes the foul gossip which ripples just under the surface about almost every public man, and especially about every President. It is only occasionally printed in reputable papers and set forth in explicit form; but it is hinted at in the press and set forth with circumstantial mendacity in private; and if left unrefuted until after the man's death it lasts as a stain which it is then too late to remove. From Lincoln and Garfield to Cleveland and McKinley this gossip has circulated and still circulates. In the case of Mr. Cleveland, for instance, it took the form of accusing him of actions so atrocious that even to think of them makes one feel indignant, and in this case I happened to know personally that there was not the smallest shadow of foundation for the charges. Yet it is such an unpleasant task to call the slanderers to account that any man tends to shrink from it.

Ever since the panic of 1907 the stories attacking my own character, which originated in financial centers that were hostile to me, have been circulated in ever-widening circles and with ever-increasing virulence; and I made up my mind some time ago that on the first occasion when they were published by a paper of sufficient standing to warrant my taking action I would do so. Two or three papers published them, but at once retracted them. One paper which published them and did not retract them I found on inquiry was edited by an ex-United States Senator, who during my Administration had been indicted, convicted, and sent to prison for a criminal offense; and two other newspapers proved on inquiry to be sheets of such low character that a prosecution would probably have been

beneficial to them: I took action against the first newspaper that published the charge which was of sufficient responsibility and previous respectability to warrant the proceedings.

The jury was composed of workingmen—miners, lumbermen, farmers, teamsters, railway men; and they possessed the prime virtues of honesty and common sense. In Judge Flannigan we found a man of high dignity and force, not only learned in the law, but resolute to make law the handmaiden of justice, and gifted both with the power to decide aright and the power to set forth the reasons for his decisions so plainly that even a layman could follow him with understanding and conviction.

The suit was ended by the defendant stating in open court that he had made the charges in good faith on information furnished him, but that his investigations had shown him that the charge was without any foundation, and that he and his counsel had searched the United States through in the effort to find responsible men who would testify under oath to facts substantiating the charges, and had failed to find them. The defendant thus became the strongest witness in my favor; he testified that although my suit had been an invitation to all my foes in the country to advance testimony against me, yet that none had been able to do so. I then made the following statement in court:

"In view of the statement of the defendant, I shall ask the Court to instruct the jury that I desire only nominal damages. I did not go into this suit for money. I did not go into it with any vindictive purpose. I went into it, and, as the Court has said, made my reputation an issue, because I wish, once for all, during my lifetime, to deal with these slanders, thoroughly and comprehensively, so that never again will it be possible for any man, in good faith, to repeat them. I have achieved my purpose, and I am content."

The verdict, under direction of the Judge, was immediately given in my favor, and the defendant was declared guilty.

The witnesses who testified (at Marquette or by deposition) covered my entire life since I was twenty-one years old, and more particularly they covered the last fifteen years. It is almost literally true that for those fifteen years the witnesses produced testified as to almost every hour of my waking life, save only the times when I was alone with my family or alone in the wilderness.

These witnesses include personal friends like Jacob Riis, Albert Shaw, Silas McBee, Admiral Dewey; personal friends with whom I served in the army, like General Leonard Wood; the doctors who had attended me, and who include some of the highest men in the entire profession; personal friends who were business associates on intimate terms with me, such as Dr. Lyman Abbott; my close kinsfolk who knew me in all the intimacy of home life; the naturalists who were with me in Africa; close friends who had served under me in office, like William Loeb, Jr., Gifford Pinchot, James R. Garfield, Robert Bacon, J. C. O'Laughlin, and Truman H. Newberry; Frank Tyree and Jimmy Sloan, the Secret Service men who were with me in Washington; men who were members of my own household; Judge Blair, who cleansed Adams County in Ohio; Mr. Abele, who helped initiate me as an honorary member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Enginemen and Firemen; and, finally, the correspondents of various newspapers—Gilson Gardner, Curtis, Charley Thompson, O. K. Davis—who had been in close touch with me both in the Presidency and throughout my campaign trips, and on many or all public occasions ever since.

I am very, very grateful to all of these men; and the testimony which they gave about me made me feel both very humble and very proud. Many of them are men with whom I have worked in the closest and most intimate relations, relations so close and so intimate as to make it impossible that there should be anything hidden between us. Others were men with whom my relations were friendly but intimate, only in the sense that they, in the course of their professional duty, followed me closely, and knew exactly what I did and how I acted. This latter group included especially the newspaper men. They owed me nothing. So far as there had been any favor shown on either side, it had been shown by them to me. I had merely treated them fairly and courteously. They had nothing to gain by testifying for me, and in two or three instances I was uneasy at their doing so, because I feared that they might be damaged thereby. But they came forward eagerly, and because of the training they had had in accurate observation and statement, they made invaluable witnesses.

It is not a pleasant thing to undertake a suit of the character which I undertook. A man feels indignant at being called upon

even to notice infamous charges which can be supported only by testimony that represents either downright perjury or else a malevolence so great as to make men who are ordinarily honest unable either to see or to state the truth. Yet in this case the duty to undertake the suit was clear. The success of the suit depended mainly upon the willingness of many men to spend time, trouble, and expense in the effort to see that the truth was fully and accurately set forth. I can give no acknowledgment to these men except the assurance that I am profoundly grateful.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.