

## THE LEADER AND THE FOLLOWERS \*

I AM particularly glad to have the chance of speaking to you to-night, because you represent that kind of citizenship which more than any other has weight and influence in shaping the conduct of our social and legislative development. I do not say that to compliment you. I say it because I wish you would realize the responsibility that it puts upon you. Would it were in my power to make each of you feel how dependent the public servant is in the way of doing good work upon popular opinion, which you, and the men like you, must shape. A public man can learn to a certain extent, but he has got to keep in touch with the people whom he represents. If he gets too far away from them, so that he is out of touch with them, then his usefulness is almost as much impaired, as if he were too far behind. All that can be done is this: he can get a certain distance away, and he must take care that that certain distance is in the right direction. It is not possible for any man ever to do or to get all that he would like to do, or all that he would like to get in the way of good government and in the way of striving to see his ideals realized.

Mr. President, you have spoken very kindly of the fact that you believed I would be a good governor. Now I intend to try. But the measure of my success is going to largely depend upon the support that I get from just such men as I see before me to-night. I am

\* Response to the toast "The State of New York," at the State Bar Association Banquet, January 18, 1899. *Public Papers as Governor*, Albany, 1899.

a loyal party man, but I believe very firmly that I can best render aid to my party by doing all that in me lies to make that party responsive to the needs of the State, responsive to the needs of the people, and just so far as I work along those lines I have the right to challenge the support of every decent man, no matter what his party may be. It is not an easy thing, when you come down to the practical realities, to work for the best; it is a good deal easier to sit at home in one's parlor and decide what the best is than to get out in the field and try to win it. When one is in the midst of the strife, with the dust, and the blood and the rough handling, and is receiving blows (and if he is worth anything, is returning them), it is difficult always to see perfectly straight in the direction the right lies. Perhaps we must always advance a little by zigzags; only we must always advance; and the zigzags should go toward the right goal. One thing I believe that we are realizing more and more, and that is the valuelessness of mere virtue that does not take a tangible and efficient shape. I do not give the snap of my finger for a very good man who possesses that peculiar kind of goodness that benefits only himself, in his own home. I think we all understand more and more that the virtue that is worth having is the virtue that can sustain the rough shock of actual living; the virtue that can achieve practical results, that finds expression in actual life. There may be a more objectionable class in the community than the timid good, but I do not know it. I earnestly hope that all of you here will thoroughly appreciate what you now know in the abstract, but what we none of us realize entirely in practice, that here in this government it is not the public officials that really govern, it is the people themselves. It is the people who must make their ideals take

tangible shape. You govern just as much if you decline to let your weight be felt for decency, as if you make it felt outright for what is bad. You are just as responsible. You, the leaders of the people, you, the people, are just as responsible for what goes wrong, whether it is because you actively favor the wrong or because you sit supinely by, and let the wrong triumph, without checking it. Appreciating to the full the heavy weight of responsibility that rests upon me, as it does upon every other servant of the Commonwealth, appreciating the weight of responsibility that rests upon the executive officers of the State, a weight only less heavy than that which rests upon the judges, appreciating all that, I ask you in turn to appreciate that an even heavier load of responsibility rests upon each citizen and all the private citizens of this Commonwealth, to see that decency, that honesty, that righteousness, that courage are triumphant in the government of this State.