

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

THE HOLLANDER AS AN AMERICAN

[Speech of Theodore Roosevelt at the eleventh annual dinner of the Holland Society of New York, January 15, 1896. The President, Dr. D. B. St. John Roosa, said: "The next regular toast is: 'The Hollander as an American,' and I shall have the pleasure of introducing a gentleman who is a member of this Society, and, therefore, descended on the male line [laughter] from some one who came here before 1675, is it not? [A voice—"That is right; 1675."] One of the first Roosevelts came very near outstripping Robert Fulton and inventing the steamboat. He did invent a steamboat, and you know the Roosevelts have had something of a steamboat in them ever since. Now there is another thing I want you Dutchmen to teach the Yankees to do—pronounce his name Rosavelt and not Rusevelt. And, by the way, mine is pronounced Rosa too. Now Mr. Roosevelt is a man, evidently, who has the courage of his convictions [A Voice—"That is right." Applause], and it will be a cold day for the party to which he belongs if they undertake to turn him down. I hoped that you all thought so. There was an old dinky that used to say about the Commandments: 'Yes, preacher, they are all right, but in this here neighborhood the eighth Commandment ought to be taught with some discretions.' [Great laughter.] [A Voice: "Which is the eighth Commandment?"] 'Thou shalt not steal.' Now in New York there are some people who think there are some commandments that ought to be taught with some 'discretions.' But they had better alter their law if they don't like it, and they had better not put a Dutchman in office after an oath to enforce the law and then ask him why he does enforce it. [Great applause.] This gentleman does not need any introduction, evidently—the Hon. Theodore Roosevelt." [Great applause. Three cheers were proposed and given for Mr. Roosevelt. A Voice: "Tiger!"] Mr. Roosevelt: "In the presence of the judiciary, no!" [Laughter.] There was great cheering when Mr. Roosevelt rose to respond.]

MR. PRESIDENT, GENTLEMEN, AND BRETHREN OF THE HOLLAND SOCIETY:—I am more than touched, if you will permit me to begin rather seriously, by the way you have greeted me to-night. When I was in Washington, there

was a story in reference to a certain President, who was not popular with some of his own people in a particular Western State. One of its Senators went to the White House and said he wanted a friend of his appointed postmaster of Topeka. The President's Private Secretary said: "I am very sorry, indeed, sir, but the President wants to appoint a personal friend." Thereupon the Senator said: "Well, for God's sake, if he has one friend in Kansas, let him appoint him!" [Great laughter.]

There have been periods during which the dissembled eulogies of the able press and my relations with about every politician of every party and every faction have made me feel I would like to know whether I had one friend in New York, and here I feel I have many. [Great applause.] And more than that, gentlemen, I should think ill of myself and think that I was a discredit to the stock from which I sprang if I feared to go on along the path that I deemed right, whether I had few friends or many. [Cries of "Good! Good!" and great applause.]

I am glad to answer to the toast, "The Hollander as an American." The Hollander was a good American, because the Hollander was fitted to be a good citizen. There are two branches of government which must be kept on a high plane, if any nation is to be great. A nation must have laws that are honestly and fearlessly administered, and a nation must be ready, in time of need, to fight [applause], and we men of Dutch descent have here to-night these gentlemen of the same blood as ourselves who represent New York so worthily on the bench, and a Major-General of the Army of the United States. [Applause.]

It seems to me, at times, that the Dutch in America have one or two lessons to teach. We want to teach the very refined and very cultivated men who believe it impossible that the United States can ever be right in a quarrel with another nation—a little of the elementary virtue of patriotism. [Cries of "Good! Good!" and applause.] And we also wish to teach our fellow-citizens that laws are put on the statute books to be enforced [cries of "Hear! Hear!" and applause]; and that if it is not intended they shall be enforced, it is a mistake to put a Dutchman in office to enforce them.

The lines put on the programme underneath my toast begin: "America! half-brother of the world!" America, half-brother of the world—and all Americans full brothers one to the other. That is the way that the line should be concluded. The prime virtue of the Hollander here in America and the way in which he has most done credit to his stock as a Hollander, is that he has ceased to be a Hollander and has become an American, absolutely. [Great applause.] We are not Dutch-Americans. We are not "Americans" with a hyphen before it. We are Americans pure and simple, and we have a right to demand that the other people whose stocks go to compose our great nation, like ourselves, shall cease to be aught else and shall become Americans. [Cries of "Hear! Hear!" and applause.]

And further than that, we have another thing to demand, and that is that if they do honestly and in good faith become Americans, those shall be regarded as infamous who dare to discriminate against them because of creed or because of birthplace. When New Amsterdam had but a few hundred souls, among those few hundred souls no less than eighteen different race-stocks were represented, and almost as many creeds as there were race-stocks, and the great contribution that the Hollander gave to the American people was, as your President has so ably said, the inestimable lesson of complete civil and religious liberty. It would be honor enough for this stock to have been the first to put on American soil the public school, the great engine for grinding out American citizens, the one institution for which Americans should stand more stiffly than for aught other. [Great applause.]

Whenever America has demanded of her sons that they should come to her aid, whether in time of peace or in time of war, the Americans of Dutch stock have been among the first to spring to the aid of the country. We earnestly hope that there will not in the future be any war with any power, but assuredly if there should be such a war one thing may be taken for certain, and that is that every American of Dutch descent will be found on the side of the United States. We give the amplest credit, that some people now, to their shame, grudge to the profession of arms, which we have here to-night represented by a man, who, when he has

the title of a Major-General of the Army of the United States [Thomas H. Ruger], has a title as honorable as any that there is on the wide earth. [Applause.] We also need to teach the lesson, that the Hollander taught, of not refusing to do the small things because the day of large things had not yet come or was in the past; of not waiting until the chance may come to distinguish ourselves in arms, and meanwhile neglecting the plain, prosaic duties of citizenship which call upon us every hour, every day of our lives.

The Dutch kept their freedom in the great contest with Spain, not merely because they warred valiantly, but because they did their duty as burghers in their cities, because they strove according to the light that was in them to be good citizens and to act as such. And we all here to-night should strive so to live that we Americans of Dutch descent shall not seem to have shrunk in this respect, compared to our fathers who spoke another tongue and lived under other laws beyond the ocean; so that it shall be acknowledged in the end to be what it is, a discredit to a man if he does not in times of peace do all that in him lies to make the government of the city, the government of the country, better and cleaner by his efforts. [Great applause.]

I spoke of the militant spirit as if it may only be shown in time of war. I think that if any of you gentlemen, no matter how peaceful you may naturally be, and I am very peaceful naturally [laughter], if you would undertake the administration of the Police Department you would have plenty of fighting on hand before you would get through [renewed laughter]; and if you are true to your blood you will try to do the best you can, fighting or not fighting. You will make up your mind that you will make mistakes, because you won't make anything if you don't make some mistakes, and you will go forward according to your lights, utterly heedless of what either politicians or newspapers may say, knowing that if you act as you feel bound according to your conscience to act, you will then at least have the right when you go out of office, however soon [laughter], to feel that you go out without any regret, and to feel that you have, according to your capacity, warred valiantly for what you deemed to be the right. [Great applause.]

These, then, are the qualities that I should claim for the

Hollander as an American: In the first place, that he has cast himself without reservation into the current of American life; that he is an American, pure and simple, and nothing else. In the next place, that he works hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder with his fellow Americans, without any regard to differences of creed or to differences of race and religion, if only they are good Americans. [Great applause.] In the third place, that he is willing, when the need shall arise, to fight for his country; and in the fourth place, and finally, that he recognizes that this is a country of laws and not men, that it is his duty as an honest citizen to uphold the laws, to strive for honesty, to strive for a decent administration, and to do all that in him lies, by incessant, patient work in our government, municipal or national, to bring about the day when it shall be taken as a matter of course that every public official is to execute a law honestly, and that no capacity in a public officer shall atone if he is personally dishonest. [Tremendous applause.]

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