

# CHARACTER AND CIVILIZATION

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

*This, the second of Mr. Roosevelt's more important addresses in South America, was delivered at Sao Paulo, Brazil, on October 27. Sao Paulo, founded by the Jesuits in 1554 as a mission station, is now a fine modern city, the second largest in Brazil, and is both an industrial and an educational center. Mr. Roosevelt's son, Mr. Kermit Roosevelt, is engaged in railway construction work at Sao Paulo. From this place Mr. Roosevelt journeyed to Buenos Aires, where he delivers, on some day of this week, probably November 5, before the Museo Social, an address on "Democratic Ideals." Cable despatches to newspapers state that it is now his intention to cross the Andes from Argentina to Chile by automobile. We may repeat here the statement already made, that Mr. Roosevelt will contribute to The Outlook what we are sure will be a valuable and interesting series of articles on the political, social, and industrial life of the South American countries he is visiting.—THE EDITORS.*

WE citizens of the various commonwealths of the New World are engaged in a double task. We are endeavoring to retain without loss the cultural civilization inherited through our forefathers who came hither from the Old World. We are also endeavoring so to develop and adapt this Old World civilization as to purge it of whatever of evil is mixed with the good therein, to bring forth new good, and to fit and adjust it to the peculiar needs and opportunities yielded by the Western Hemisphere. Both sides of the task present grave difficulties.

The work of conquering a new continent is one of incredible hardship. The men of greatest cultivation are rarely fit for the task. Only men of rugged will and bold and adventurous temper can undertake it. The strain on the pioneers engaged in the feat is such that under it they tend to lose something of the culture their ancestors beyond the seas had through the long ages slowly acquired. It is therefore our duty to exercise an unceasing watchfulness in order not to lose any part of our heritage in world civilization, and, if we do lose anything, promptly to recover it. Furthermore, there is no small amount of wrong which our forefathers in the Old World handed down to us, and for this it is our duty to devise remedies. Moreover, the circumstances of our lives under the new conditions yielded by life on new continents not only offer great opportunities which our Old World kinsmen do not enjoy, but also expose us to temptations which our Old World kinsmen do not share, at least to anything like the same degree.

Finally, there are peculiar needs of our own, which it is necessary that we meet in a new fashion. These needs may often be of

diametrically opposite character. The need of one class, or of one period, may be wholly different from the need of another class, or of all classes at another time. For instance, it is a curious fact that in our New World the strain of over-hard conditions during the pioneer days is apt to be succeeded by the even more dangerous strain of over-easy conditions when once the pioneer days have been passed; the danger to the sons is the opposite of that which menaced the fathers; and yet the one danger is almost as menacing as the other. In the same fashion, in every one of our great modern industrial communities the dangerous strain on the very poor is in large part not merely totally different from, but the exact reverse of, the no less dangerous strain on the very rich; the dangers are the exact opposite one of the other; and nevertheless each is a danger so serious that if not grappled with it may spell national ruin. Again, no Old World communities are immune from all sense of outside danger to anything like the extent that is true here; and what is true of danger from outside sources is true to only a less degree as regards risk and effort and toil within; and no student of history needs to be told that immunity from danger, however desirable, always means that there is need of guarding against the risk of softening of fiber.

In consequence, it is true that, notwithstanding all our advantages and opportunities, there is at least as much danger, not of crushing disaster, but of slow decay or failure to advance, so far as concerns our peoples here in the two Americas, as is the case among the nations of the Old World. We cannot afford in vainglorious spirit to be blind to this patently ominous fact. If we

are true to ourselves, if we possess the wisdom and the virile strength to make the most of our opportunities, we have before us in our several nations a future which cannot be generally paralleled among Old World nations whose opportunities are necessarily less. But if we are untrue to ourselves, if we sink into slothful ease or make our ideals those of vapid or vicious excitement, then there is a chance that we shall make a failure all the more lamentable because of the fact that such great success might have been ours. To avert this failure, and to achieve the success which is ours if we only have the power to grasp it, many things are necessary, but one thing above all others, character.

No other trait, in any nation, can take the place of a high average of personal character among the individuals, the men and women, who make up that nation. I am a firm believer in using the power of the people in their collective capacity—that is, through the government—to the fullest extent to further the common interest; and I hold that the ability thus to co-operate in effective action is one of the greatest tests of the strength of individual character in a nation. But such combined action, such use of the powers of government in the interest of all citizens, can never succeed unless it is based on a high average of character in the individual citizen. Governmental action can supplement, and thereby immensely increase, the productive efficiency of such individual character, but it can never be a substitute for it; and if the average citizen is lacking in character, the governmental system in which he is the predominant unit is certain to break down.

By character I mean the sum of those qualities, distinct from the purely intellectual qualities, which are essential to moral efficiency. Among them are resolution, courage, energy, power of self-control combined with fearlessness in taking the initiative and assuming responsibility, and a just regard for the rights of others together with unflinching determination to one's self succeed no matter what obstacles and barriers have to be beaten down—these qualities, and qualities such as these, are what rise to our minds when we speak of a man or a woman as having character, in contradistinction to one who possesses only intellect. There is, moreover, one quality which perhaps, strictly speaking, is as much intellectual as moral, but which is too often wholly lacking in men of high intellectual ability, and without which real char-

acter cannot exist—namely, the fundamental gift of common sense.

I am far from decrying intellect. I join with the world in admiring it and paying homage to it. Without it—above all, without its highest expression, genius—the world would move forward but slowly, and the purple patches in the gray garment of our actual lives would be sadly shorn of their glory. Nevertheless, exactly as strength comes before beauty, so character must ever stand above intellect, above genius. Intellect is fit to be the most useful of servants; but it is an evil master, unless itself mastered by character. This is true of the individual man. It is far more true of the nation, of the aggregate of individuals.

Yet it is a truth of which men tend constantly to lose sight, and the American republics, north and south, have in the past shown again and again a curious forgetfulness of it. In my own country we tend to lay far too much emphasis on that indispensable but one-sided type of intellectual vigor which shows itself only in commercialism, in business achievement—a kind of intellectual power which is absolutely necessary to either individual or national success under present-day conditions, and indeed under all proper conditions, but which becomes a curse instead of a blessing if treated as in itself an end instead of the carefully regulated means to an end. In some other countries the intellectual manifestations, instead of being subordinated to materialistic achievement, are turned almost wholly into artistic, literary, or philosophical channels. Here again there must be such intellectual development if the nation is to make a high and lasting impress on history, and yet there must also be far more than such development if the nation is to accomplish all that its intellect warrants. From the standpoint of national greatness, neither the intellect which finds its expression in commercialism nor the intellect which finds its expression in artistic achievement can permanently avail unless based on a foundation of character.

This is the lesson taught by the careers of three of the most famous peoples of antiquity. In the third century before our era the civilized world was under the divided sway of the Romans, the Greeks, and the Phœnician dwellers in Carthage. The Greeks were beyond question the most brilliant people that ever lived, and from that day to this all

poets, artists, philosophers, and historians have bowed to them as masters. They developed, to the highest point to which it has ever been developed, the cultural side, of the intellect. On the other hand, the totally different form of intellect which finds its expression in purely commercial success has never been more highly developed than in the rich mercantile oligarchy which ruled Carthage as similar oligarchies had once ruled Sidon and Tyre. Michael Angelo, Raphael, Dante, Cervantes, and Camoëns, and all the scholars and philosophers of the most famous mediæval universities, were the spiritual heirs of the Hellenic republic and Hellenistic kingdoms; and all the achievements of the modern laws of finance and captains of industry, when we consider the relative means with which the ancients worked, do not surpass those of the marvelous masters of commerce whose keels furrowed the waters of unknown oceans in order to swell the princely wealth of the Mediterranean merchant cities. Yet the Greek and the Carthaginian alike were struck down by the iron Roman; because, although the Roman had neither the fine culture of the one nor the commercial genius of the other, he possessed what both of them lacked, the grim strength of character which showed itself in scorn of mere luxury, in sense of duty to the commonwealth, in power to command and to obey, and in the unshaken fortitude and endurance which enabled him to wrest ultimate triumph out of immediate disaster.

Under present-day conditions, character needs to show itself in different fashion. Nevertheless, it is as vitally necessary as ever to the well-being of a nation. If the men of wealth and social standing grow idle and luxurious, if they shirk the performance of the duty to the whole people which their position ought to entail, if they lose their sense of patriotism, and, whether at home or in some alien city, lead lives devoted to soft or vicious self-indulgence—why, if such is the case, no cultivation of mind, no adroitness in financial transactions, will avail to save them from the contempt of all those whose respect is best worth having. Of course corruption in any form, whether in the world of politics or in the world of business, represents an offense against the community of so grave a character that the offender should be hurled down as a criminal; and the greater his ability and success, the greater is the

wrong he has committed, and the heavier should be his punishment. The sneering indifference to, or connivance at, corruption is almost as bad as corruption itself. Honesty, rigid honesty, is a root virtue; and if not present no other virtue can atone for its lack. But we cannot afford to be satisfied with the negative virtue of not being corrupt. We need the virile, positive virtues. These all-essential virtues ought not to be, and in a thoroughly healthy community are not, of exceptional type.

A republic can prosper although the average man is not intellectually brilliant. But it cannot prosper if the average man becomes infirm of mind and soul, if he fears hard work, and cares only for the easy avoidance of whatever is rough or unpleasant; or if, although of masterful temperament, he seeks to rise in ways that represent unscrupulous wrong to his weaker and less fortunate fellows. Only that man is a good citizen who fears no honest labor and who is ashamed not to earn his livelihood in any honorable fashion, who is thoroughly able to guard himself from any wrong-doing by others, but who scorns himself to do wrong to any man, and who realizes that each of us owes a duty to others as well as to himself. These are the ordinary, homely, commonplace, workaday virtues; but they are the all-essential virtues, for they are the virtues that in their sum make character. The state cannot prosper unless the average man can take care of himself; and neither can it prosper unless the average man realizes that, in addition to taking care of himself, he must work with his fellows, with good sense and honesty and practical acknowledgment of obligation to the community as a whole, for the things that are vital to the interests of the community as a whole. There must be idealism; and there must also be practical efficiency, or the idealism will be wasted. We need sound bodies; we need sound minds in our bodies; but more than either mind or body is character—character into which many elements enter, but three above all others—courage, honesty, and common sense. If the ordinary men and women of the republic have character, the future of the republic is assured; and if in its citizenship rugged strength and fealty to the common welfare are lacking, then no brilliancy of intellect and no piled-up material prosperity will avail to save the nation from destruction.