

THEODORE ROOSEVELT THE CITIZEN¹

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Chapter IX.—The Summons on Mount Marcy

ON that summer day, three years ago, when the Republican party nominated Theodore Roosevelt for Vice-President, I was lying on my back, stricken down by sudden severe illness. My wife had telegraphed to him that I longed to see him; but in the turmoil of the convention the message did not get to him till the morning after the nominations were made. He came at once from Philadelphia, and it was then that I, out of pain and peril, heard from his own lips the story of his acceptance of the new dignity his countrymen had thrust upon him. "Thrust upon" is right. I knew how stoutly he had opposed the offer, how he had met delegation after delegation with the frank avowal that he could serve the party and the country better as Governor of New York, and I knew that that was his ambition; for his work at Albany was but half finished. It was his desire that the people should give him another term in his great office, unasked, upon the record of the two years that were drawing to a close. He had built up no machine of his own. He had used that which he found to the uttermost of its bent, and of his ability—not always with the good will of the managers; but he had used it for the things he had in mind, telling the bosses that for all other legitimate purposes, for organization, for power, they might have it: he should not hinder them. Now, upon this record, with nothing to back him but that, he wished the people to commission him and his party to finish their work. It was thoroughly characteristic of Roosevelt and of his trust in the people as both able and will-

ing to do the right, once it was clearly before them.

He knew well enough what was on foot concerning him. He was fully advised of the plans of his enemies to shelve him in the "harmless office" of Vice-President, and how they were taking advantage of his popularity in the West and with the young men throughout the land to "work up" a strenuous demand for him to fill the second place on the ticket. So, they reasoned, he would be out of the way for four years, and four years might bring many things. As Vice-President he would not be in 1904 anything like the candidate before the people which two years more as Governor of the Empire State would make him. Back of the spoils politicians were the big corporations that had neither forgotten nor forgiven the franchise-tax law that made them pay on their big dividend-earning properties as any poor man was taxed on his home. Anything to beat him for Governor and for the Presidency four years hence! The big traction syndicates in the East made the pace: Roosevelt for Vice-President! He was not deceived; but the plotters were. Their team ran away with them. The demand they desired came from the West and swept him into the office. From perhaps one State in the East and one in the West it was a faked-up call. From the great and bounding prairies, from the rugged mountain sides, and from the sunny western slope of the Rockies, where they knew Roosevelt for what he was, and loved him; from the young men everywhere, from the men with ideals, it was a genuine shout for the leader who spoke with their tongue, to their hearts. Senator Wolcott spoke

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their mind when he brought him the nomination: "You, everywhere and at all times, stood for that which was clean and uplifting, and against everything that was sordid and base. You have shown the people of this country that a political career and good citizenship could go forward hand in hand. . . . There is not a young man in these United States who has not found in your life and influence an incentive to better things and higher ideals." Against such a force traditions went for nothing; it was strong enough to break more stubborn ones than that which made of the Vice-Presidency a political grave. In 1904 it was to be Roosevelt for President.

Roosevelt yielded. His friends were in despair; his enemies triumphed. At last they had him where they wanted him.

Man proposes, but God disposes. Now in joy, and again in tears and sorrow, do we register the decree. One brief year, and the nation wept at the bier of William McKinley. Of his successor the President of Columbia College wrote: "He was not nominated to satisfy or placate, but to succeed. The unspeakably cruel and cowardly assassin has anticipated the slow and orderly processes of law."

He himself, standing within the shadow of the great sorrow—though, light of heart, we knew it not—spoke these brave words to his people: "We gird up our loins as a nation with the stern purpose to play our part manfully in winning the ultimate triumph; and therefore we turn scornfully aside from the paths of mere ease and idleness, and with unfaltering steps tread the rough road of endeavor, smiting down the wrong and battling for the right, as Greatheart smote and battled in Bunyan's immortal story."¹

The campaign of that year none of us has forgotten. An incident of it lives in my memory as typical of the spirit in which the people took his candidacy, and also with a sense of abiding satisfaction that one thing was done right, and at the right moment, in my sight. I was coming

up from Chatham Square one night in the closing days of the canvass, when a torch and a crowd attracted me to a truck at the lower end of the Bowery, from which a man was holding forth on the issues involved in the National election. He was not an effective speaker, and the place needed that, if any place did. The block was "the panhandlers' beat," one of the wickedest spots in the world, I believe. I stood and listened awhile, and the desire to say a word grew in me until I climbed on the wagon and, telling them I was a Roosevelt man, asked for a chance. They were willing enough, and, dropping tariff and the "honest dollar," that had very little to do with that spot, I plunged at once into Roosevelt's career as Governor and Police Commissioner. I thought with grim satisfaction, as I went on, that we were fairly within sight of "Mike" Callahan's saloon, where the fight over the excise law was fought out by Policeman Bourke, who dragged the proprietor, kicking and struggling all the way, to the Elizabeth Street station. He had boasted that he had thrown the keys of the saloon away, and that no one could make him close on Sunday. Bourke was made a sergeant, and Roosevelt and the law won.

But of that I made no boast then. I told the people what Roosevelt had done and had tried to do for them; how we had traveled together by night through all that neighborhood, trying to enter into the life of the people and their needs. As the new note rose, I saw the tenement blocks on the east of the Bowery give up their tenants to swell the crowd, and was glad. Describing a policeman's uniform on its outskirts, I reminded my hearers of how my candidate had stood for an even show, for fair play to the man without a pull, and for an honest police. I had got to that point when the drunken rounder, who by right should have appeared long before, caromed through the crowd and shook an inebriated fist at me.

"T-tin s-soldier!" he hiccoughed. "Teddy Ro-senfled he never went to Cu-u-ba, no more 'n, no more 'n—"

Who else it was that had never been to Cuba fate had decreed that none of us

¹ The concluding words of Vice-President Roosevelt's speech at the Minnesota State Fair, Minneapolis, Sept. 2, 1902.

should know. There came, unheralded, forth from the crowd a vast and horny hand that smote the fellow flat on the mouth with a sound as of a huge soul-satisfying kiss. He went down, out of sight, without a word. The crowd closed in over him; not a head was turned to see what became of him. I do not know. Who struck the blow I did not see. He was gone, that was enough. It *was* enough, and just right.

Which reminds me of another and very different occasion, when I addressed a Sunday-evening audience in the Cooper Institute, at the other end of the Bowery, upon my favorite theme. The Cooper Institute is a great place, a worthy monument to its truly great founder. But its Sunday-evening meetings, when questions are in order, have the faculty of attracting almost as many cranks as did Elijah the Restorer to Madison Square Garden. I had hardly finished when a man arose in the hall and, pointing a menacing finger at me, squeaked out:

"You say Theodore Roosevelt is a brave man. How about his shooting a Spaniard in the back?"

I had been rather slow and dull up till then, in spite of my theme; but the fellow woke me right up. My wife, who had come over with me and sat in the audience, said afterward that she never saw a man bristle so suddenly in her life.

"The man," I cried out, "who says that is either a fool or a scoundrel. Which of the two are you?"

I don't believe he heard. His kind rarely do. They never by any chance get any other side of a subject than their own, for they never can shake themselves off for a moment. He stood pointing at me still:

"Does not Holy Writ say, 'Thou shalt not kill?'" he went on.

"Yes! and on the same page does it not say that 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor,' even if he is the President of the United States?"

The audience by this time was upon its feet, yelling its delight. It was what it wanted. The crank sat down. In the front row a red-faced Irishman jumped up and down like a jack-in-the-box, wildly excited.

"You let him alone," he shouted to

the people, shaking his hat at them; "let Professor Riis alone. He can take care of himself. Teddy Roosevelt is the greatest man in the country;" and, turning half toward me, he shot up a fist like a ham and, grabbing mine, yelled out, "I druv him onces!"

Crank after crank got up with their questions, and as I looked out over them bobbing in the amused crowd like corks on a choppy sea, there came into my head Solomon's precept to answer a fool according to his folly. The President's first message was just out.

"How shall we interpret it?" queried a pedantic spectacled loon, with slow deliberation, checking the points off on his fingers; "shall we class it as an economic effort or as a political discourse, as a literary production or as a—"

"The President's message," I interrupted, "has just been rendered into the language of the blind, and *they* don't have any difficulty in making it out."

The meeting broke up in a great laugh, amid a storm of protests from the cranks, whose fun was spoiled. They were not looking for information. They had come merely to hear themselves talk.

I guess it is no use beating about the bush, telling stories; I have to come to it. But I haven't got over the shock the news from Buffalo gave me up there in the Canadian wilderness. I hate to think of it.

Roosevelt had gone to join his children in the Adirondacks, with the assurance of the doctors that President McKinley was mending, and in no danger. He had come straight to Buffalo at the first news of the murderous attempt upon the President's life, thereby giving great offense to the fault-finders, who could see in the Vice-President's solicitude for his friend and chief only a ghoulish desire to make sure of the job. And now, when he went with lightened heart to tell his own the good news, they cried out in horror that he went hunting while the President lay fighting death. They were as far from the truth then as before. He, knowing little and caring less what was said of him, was resting quietly with his wife and the children, who had been sick, at the Upper Tahawus

Club on Mount Marcy. No one in that party had thought of hunting or play. Their minds were on more serious matters. It was arranged that they were all to go out of the woods on Saturday, September 14, on which day Mr. Roosevelt had summoned his secretary to meet him at his Long Island home. He had come from Buffalo only two days before. Friday found them all upon the mountain: the Vice-President, Mrs. Roosevelt, and their nephews, the two Robinson boys, and Mr. James McNaughton, their host. Ted, the oldest of the Roosevelt boys, had gone fishing. The rest, with two guides, formed the party.

Far up the mountain side there lies a pretty lake, the "Tear in the Clouds," whence the Hudson flows into the lowlands. There the party camped after a long and arduous tramp over the mountain trail. Mrs. Roosevelt had gone back with the children. From his seat on a fallen log Roosevelt followed the gray outline of Mount Marcy's bald peak piercing mist and cloud. Up there might be sunshine. Where they were was wet discomfort. A desire grew in him to climb the peak and see, and he went up. But there was no sunshine there. All the world lay wrapped in a gray, impenetrable mist. It rained, a cold and chilly rain in the clouds.

They went down again, and reached the wood-line tired and hungry. There they spread their lunch on the grass and sat down to it. Upon the quiet talk of the party there broke suddenly an unusual sound in that quiet solitude, the snapping of a twig, a swift step. A man came out of the woods, waving a yellow envelope in his hand.

Silence fell upon them all as they watched Mr. Roosevelt break it and read the message. It was brief: "The President's condition has changed for the worse.—CORTELYOU." That was all. He read it over once, twice, and sat awhile, the message in his hand, grave shadows gathering in his face. Then he arose, the food untouched, and said briefly: "I must go back at once."

They fell in behind him on the homeward trail. Silent and sad, the little procession wound its way through the gloomy forest. Dusk was setting in when

they reached the cottage. No news was there. The Vice-President's secretary, warned in the early morning by despatches from Buffalo, had started for the mountains on a special train, but the road ended at North Creek, more than thirty miles away, and from there he had been telegraphing and telephoning all day that he would wait till Mr. Roosevelt came. Of this nothing was known on the mountain. The telephone line ended at the lower club-house—ten miles farther down—and the messages lay there. No one had thought of sending them up.

Mr. Roosevelt sent runners down at once to find out if there was any summons for him, and made ready for an immediate start before he changed his clothing. He was wet through. The dusk became darkness, and the hours wore far into the evening. He walked up and down alone in front of the cottage, thinking it all over. It could not be. He had arranged to be advised at once of the least change, and no word had come. Up to that morning all the bulletins were hopeful. There must be some awful mistake. Black night sat upon the mountain and no message yet. He went in to snatch such sleep as he could get. Too soon he might need it.

In the midnight hour came the summons. Mr. McNaughton himself brought the message: "Come at once." In ten minutes Mr. Roosevelt threw his grip into the buckboard that was hurriedly driven up, and gave the word to go.

How that wild race with death was run and lost—for before it was half finished President McKinley had breathed his last, and there was no longer any Vice-President hastening to his bedside—will never be told. But for a frightened deer that sprang now and then from the roadside, stopping in the brush to watch wide-eyed the plunging team and the swaying lantern disappear in the gloom, no living thing saw it. The two in the wagon—the man on the driver's seat and the silent shape behind him—had other thoughts: the one for the rough trail which he vainly tried to make out through the mist; at any moment the wheels might leave their rut or crash against a boulder, and team and all be flung a hundred feet down a preci-

pice. As for the other, his thoughts were far away at a bedside from which a dying man was whispering words of comfort to his weeping wife. Mechanically, when the driver turned to him with warning of the risks they were taking, he repeated, as if he had scarcely heard: "Go on—go right ahead!"

The new day was an hour old and over when the vehicle stopped at the lower club-house, mud-splashed from hub to hood. Here Mr. Roosevelt heard for the first time from his secretary, who had watched sleepless at the other end of the wire, the tragedy then passing into history in the city of Buffalo. Secretary Loeb knew the dangers of the mountain roads on a dark and rainy night, and pleaded with him to wait till morning.

"I will come right through, as quick as I can," was the answer he received; and before he could ring the telephone bell, Mr. Roosevelt was in his seat again, and the horses were plunging through the night toward the distant railroad.

Down hill and up, through narrow defiles, over bare hillsides where the wheels scraped and slid upon the hard rock and the horses' hoofs struck fire at every jump; on perilous brinks hidden in the shrouding fog, and tenfold more perilous for that; now and then a bog-hole

through which the wheels of the buckboard sank to the hubs; past a little school-house where a backwoods dance was just breaking up, the women scattering in sudden fright as the traveler drove by. Then the wayside hotel with waiting horses in relay, and two-thirds of the way was covered.

Once more the gloom and the forest; once more the grim traveler gazing ahead, ahead, as if he would pierce the veil of fate and wrest from it its secret, repeating his monotonous "Go on! Keep right ahead!" In the city by the lake William McKinley lay dead. Through the darkness rode the President, clinging obstinately to hope.

So the dawn came. As the first faint tinge of it crept into the night, and trees and rocks whirling past took on dim outlines, the steaming horses drew up at the railroad station at North Creek, where a puffing engine had been in waiting many hours. From the platform Secretary Loeb came down, bareheaded:

"The worst has happened," he said.
"The President is dead."

So, to this man, who had been tried and found faithful in much, came the call to take his place among the rulers of the earth.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

Virgin's Bower

By Mary Thacher Higginson

As still as a cathedral close,
And guarded by a wall of green,
A garden full of lilies grows
Which no man's eye hath ever seen.
Only the fragrance, like a prayer,
Escapes to bless the outer air.

Some time the hidden must be known:
A stranger's step will scale the wall,
And claim the blossoms for his own,
And glean the petals as they fall.
Ah! let him come with careful tread,
With reverent hands, uncovered head!

But should a reckless soul find room
Within this kingdom of delight,
And trample down the lilies' bloom,
And put the singing birds to flight,—
Before such havoc meet my eye,
Be kind, O God! and let me die.