

THE FIRST ROOSEVELT

BY GEORGE E. MOWRY

IN BOTH years and spirit Theodore Roosevelt was America's youngest President. Successively as young naturalist, cowboy, soldier and President he remained something of an adolescent throughout his life. But perhaps no other President has better reflected the spirit of his times. For America in 1901, measured by the yardstick of international power, was passing through its own period of adolescence as a nation. Like Roosevelt's, its virtues were those of high-minded, confident youth endowed with enormous energy and a will to power, but lacking perspective and experience. So were its faults.

Henry Adams characterized Roosevelt as "pure act." He was referring both to Roosevelt's tremendous personal vitality and to a certain youthful quality of brashness, which Adams felt did not quite become a statesman. In fact, Adams, along with many other cautious Americans, was always fearful of the President's tendency to act without apparent reflection. But such sentiments had little effect on the buoyant Roosevelt. As a boy he al-

ways felt, according to his sister, that he could do everything better than any of his fellows. That certainty increased with age. Measured against the average statesman, Roosevelt was certainly long on confidence and short on the caution that usually comes with maturity. And so was America during those years.

For the first 125 years of its independence this nation had lived in the house of its fathers, relatively free from the affairs and the responsibilities of the rest of the world. Protected by two oceans and by the existing balance of power in Europe, it had lived a sheltered life up to 1898, engrossed in its own continental development. Following one of the precepts of the Monroe Doctrine, it had shied away from imperialism and attended strictly to its own domestic knitting with huge success. Then in 1898, with little or no debate, and seemingly less thought, it had launched out in the Caribbean and across the Pacific to create an American Empire. Perhaps that was inevitable. But the suddenness of this depar-

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ture from an old American policy and the lack of preparation was characteristic of this age. In 1900 this nation dimly saw only a few of the problems connected with ruling millions of peoples of diverse races. It understood even less the responsibilities and the dangers in becoming an Asiatic power.

Theodore Roosevelt's youthfulness showed itself also in his sharply dualistic concept of morality. He had the sophomoric trait of dividing most issues and persons into sharp categories of right and wrong. With monotonous regularity he judged himself morally right and his opponents infamously wrong. That too was America in 1900. Concerned almost entirely with developing an abundantly rich and protected continent, the United States before 1900 had rarely been required to play the game of international power. Consequently it had built up a set of moralistic attitudes about international politics. The average American had long since concluded that power politics, imperialism and the balance of power were devices exclusively of the devil and Europe. No chance was therefore lost to castigate such an international sinner as the British Empire.

Europeans sensitive to American criticism must have breathed a sigh of relief in 1898. By making a virtual protectorate of Cuba, annexing the Hawaiian Islands, and seizing Puerto Rico and the Philippines, we suddenly reserved for ourselves a seat at the counter of imperialism. Despite the

fact that the Americans were following an old pattern, they did not learn then, nor would they for many years, that those who make international mud pies have to dirty their hands. To the amazement of Europeans, we would not admit to ourselves that ours was an ordinary war for empire. A few men like Senator Beveridge of Indiana talked of naval bases and of Asiatic markets, but to the man on the street this was a war for the *Maine* and for Cuban freedom.

II

Even if Theodore Roosevelt had not been President an American surge to world power would have been in the cards. But it was peculiarly appropriate that he was one of the chief actors in the drama. Long before 1898 he had bluntly written to his friend Henry Cabot Lodge, "This country needs a war." As Assistant Secretary of the Navy he had planned for that war against Spain, and without authority from his superiors had ordered Dewey, if war broke out, to start "defensive operations" in the Philippines. After the declaration of war Roosevelt resigned his position to become a frontline soldier. At the same time he was feverishly urging his friends in Congress to seize and hold as much of the Spanish Empire as possible. It was not until many years later that he wrote in his autobiography, "I abhor an unjust war."

During Roosevelt's seven years as President the great departure from

old American traditions was accelerated. A canal through Panama had been in men's dreams for years, but until we had acquired an empire it had never been an urgent problem for us. Roosevelt was in so much haste to dig the canal that international niceties and theoretical justice were swept aside. "I took Panama," he later declared, and historians have subsequently agreed that his boast was not without some truth. Simultaneously Roosevelt and his Secretary of War, Elihu Root, reorganized the Army and improved the Navy. With the canal assured, American diplomacy could be extended to both the Orient and Europe. And it was not long until the President had plunged this nation into the heart of European and Asiatic affairs.

By invitation in 1904, emissaries of Japan and Russia met in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to settle an Asiatic war. Roosevelt was impartial arbiter. Two years later the United States sat in international conference at Algeciras, where the great alliances of Europe came to loggerheads over the control of Morocco. Roosevelt admitted that the interests of the United States at Algeciras were infinitesimally small. Nevertheless American diplomacy helped to win a victory for France and England and to create in Germany's mind a growing fear of encirclement that helped to bring on World War I.

At Portsmouth Roosevelt talked of a just and lasting peace. During the first part of negotiations he was ad-

mittedly friendly to the Japanese, and only when he felt that they were asking too much did he swing his support to Russia. But wherever the dictates of an impartial arbiter's sense of justice might have led, it was obvious afterward that the President had done an excellent job of balancing Russian and Japanese power in the Orient, where the supremacy of either constituted a threat to growing American interests.

Just ten years separated the diplomacy of Grover Cleveland from Theodore Roosevelt's at Portsmouth and Algeciras. But in their conception of America's place in the world order and in their significance for the future the two were as different as cider and ale. Somewhere between the two the United States had turned a corner from which there was no turning back. Cleveland's America was the little America, a continental America self-centered, belligerent only in its defense of the Western Hemisphere, with its main interest focused on the northernmost portion of that Hemisphere. Roosevelt's America stretched south to the Panama Canal and beyond, west to the Orient and east to the heart of Europe. The one looked back to the days of America's infancy, the other straight ahead to the power of an adult nation burdened with world problems. Under Theodore Roosevelt the United States had come of age in the world family of nations; time was soon to present to the country its bill of responsibilities and the costs of adulthood.

III

To a great extent the evolution of the United States from a mere strippling of a nation to a world power was a reflection of its internal development. When Roosevelt was born in 1858 this country was still essentially agricultural. The majority of its citizens were farmers, and the government had for years been run in their interests. The Civil War disrupted that political pattern completely. By the time Roosevelt became President, the United States, measured in terms of production, was already one of the great industrial nations of the world. The rapid growth was not without its cost. So intent was America on its material progress in these years that everything else seemed to be sacrificed in favor of industrialization and its profits. Never before had the United States developed so quickly. And never before had this nation created more internal problems and solved so few of them.

The years from 1865 to 1900 witnessed the making of most of the great American fortunes. They were also years of woe for the farmer and the laborer. Trusts and monopolies threatened the existence of the small businessman, and most of the great natural resources of the nation were controlled by a very few. As capital was concentrated, so was political power. In 1912 at the Progressive convention, Senator Beveridge inveighed against the "invisible government" of this nation. He referred to the

indirect but effective political and economic control that the few possessors of great wealth and the equally few managers of great industrial and financial firms exercised over millions of Americans. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, government from the city council to the Supreme Court more or less consistently appeared to reflect and protect the interests of the few as against the welfare of the majority. Coming from a diplomat, Lord Bryce's comment that the American city was one of the worst governed units in the world was fairly strong. And had Bryce not belonged to that guild of professional dissemblers he might have been almost as blunt in his descriptions of our state and national governments.

Those years did not pass without forceful protest. Third parties, bloody strikes and great books full of strident criticism were thrown against the politics of the status quo. Finally William Jennings Bryan, in the waning years of the century, led a major revolt under the banner of free silver. Until 1900 all such protests failed. From that time on, however, the pendulum swung rapidly. Starting in the Middle Western states, a sweeping reform movement to limit corporate privileges and to make government more responsive to the masses spread rapidly. By 1910 the so-called Progressive movement was nationwide.

Elevated to the Presidency by the death of McKinley in the autumn of 1901, Theodore Roosevelt had the option of following in the ways of his

conservative predecessors or of heading this new movement. That he chose to head the movement and yet curb it was thoroughly characteristic. And that in the end Roosevelt was mainly responsible for the stamping out of any effective progressivism in the Republican party for a generation was perhaps also characteristic. During the seven years of his Presidency, however, there is no doubt that he contributed much to the rise of progressive political action in the United States. For one thing, he imparted to the office power and prestige lacking since the days of Lincoln, in part by his own tremendous energy and in part by re-establishing over the head of Congress a direct connection between the Presidency and the people. This was a step that has always seemed necessary for successful liberal action in America, for in general the impulse for broad reform movements in this country has come from the President and not Congress. Furthermore, Roosevelt was in the great tradition of American liberal leadership in supporting direct primaries and other devices to "let the people rule."

Wearied of listening to Roosevelt's incessant strictures on public and private morality, Thomas B. Reed once remarked that he was glad to see that Theodore had rediscovered the Ten Commandments. But Roosevelt did more than talk morality; he reinvigorated the national government and, in fact, the whole nation with it. Certainly during the Roosevelt years the corrupt in public office, from

wardheelers to congressmen, were on the defensive.

As Assistant Secretary of the Navy before the Spanish War, Roosevelt made a speech in which he cautioned the nation not to put too much trust in its bankers and industrialists. One thousand successful financiers, he remarked, cannot leave the heritage that Farragut left. In part that was the jingo speaking. In part it was the voice of an uncommon American who did not share with his successful friends their reverence for wealth. As President he elaborated on this theme. For a decade the Sherman Anti-Trust Act had gone unenforced by Harrison, Cleveland and McKinley. In less than six months after assuming office Roosevelt started a suit against the Northern Securities Company, a railroad combine supported by Morgan, Rockefeller, Harriman and Hill. Thereafter suits were instituted against some of America's greatest industrial combinations. Since the Civil War the center of power in this country had been not in the government but in the hands of the masters of capital. Roosevelt made the opening moves in redressing that balance. He kept on in the same direction during the rest of his administration. With and without congressional approval he took the first decisive steps to conserve what remained of the nation's basic resources. And the Hepburn Rate Bill, whatever its deficiencies, gave to an impotent Interstate Commerce Commission a sizable grant of regulatory power.

It was in the anthracite coal strike of 1902 that Roosevelt most clearly revealed his departure from the old concepts of the proper relationship between government and business. Here was a familiar pattern of drawn-out conflict between capital and labor, causing long public sufferance. Roosevelt had good precedent for doing nothing even when schools and homes were freezing cold. From Van Buren to McKinley a succession of American Presidents had refused to act in times of economic crisis or labor conflict on the grounds that such things were none of the government's concern. Roosevelt not only forced the coal operators to meet with union representatives in the White House, but he threatened to use the Army to dig coal unless the operators backed down on their refusal to grant pay raises. This Presidential threat won coal production for the nation and a moderate raise for the laborers. It also carried with it the assumption that the public had rights in labor disputes and that the government might act to enforce those rights. By placing the Federal government in the business of labor mediation Roosevelt was dimly foreshadowing the future. It was a long road from the anthracite coal strike to the Wagner Act, but in 1902 the journey was started.

IV

Despite his solid contributions to reform, many progressives were never entirely happy with Theodore Roo-

sevelt. He was too much of a Republican partisan to attract Democratic liberals. Besides, he usually promised a great deal more than he performed. The advanced wing of the reform movement, whether Democratic or Republican, never could be sure that Roosevelt would not belabor it in a speech as thoroughly as the reactionaries. Roosevelt was after all a middle-of-the-roader. Like most progressive politicians of his day he was not too happy with the labor movement and instinctively disliked its more class-conscious elements. Instead of viewing the state as a cockpit where policy was determined from the sharp clash of economic groups, Roosevelt saw it as an ethical agent above such mundane battles. His ideal statesman — someone cut close to the Roosevelt pattern, of course — was not a jobber between economic groups but a dispenser of public morality.

It was in part this desire to place the power of government far above that of either labor or capital that led him to espouse the New Nationalism. Certainly his formulation of these doctrines in 1910 and again in the Progressive party's platform constituted an important step in the long-term evolution of American liberal principles. Since the days of Jackson every great liberal leader had followed the classic liberal doctrine of Jefferson. One of the fundamental tenets of that doctrine was a fear of bigness in either private or public business. Just as Jefferson had opposed Hamilton's powerful state, the majority of twentieth-

century progressives sought the solution to the problems of monopoly capitalism not in state regulation but in anti-trust laws and competition. Roosevelt also tried this remedy, but by the end of his second term he knew he was fighting against an inevitable tide. In 1910 he publicly recognized that the only solution to the problems of big capital and big labor was to be found in big government. In urging the regulation of private property "to whatever degree the public welfare might require it," he revealed that he felt that a potent bureaucracy and an enormous increase in the power of the Federal government were unavoidable. If the doctrinal roots of the New Deal lead back anywhere in American history, they lead back not to Woodrow Wilson's New Freedom but to the Progressive party and the New Nationalism.

In forming the Progressive party in 1912 on a platform which incorpo-

rated the principles of the New Nationalism, Theodore Roosevelt made one other lasting contribution to American political history. For ten years progressivism in the Republican party had been growing. By 1911 it threatened to control the party, and perhaps would have succeeded, had not many of its powerful leaders followed Roosevelt into his new Progressive party. But when they were forced back to Republicanism in 1916 by Roosevelt's abrupt killing of the Progressive party, they came back a dispirited and powerless group. More than any other single man Theodore Roosevelt was responsible for the conservative bent of the Republican party in the next generation. Twenty years after 1912, Harold Ickes, Bronson Cutting, and many another old Bull Mooser had to support the Democratic party in order to give renewed life to Theodore Roosevelt's New Nationalism.



Phrase Origins — 8

RED-LETTER DAY: The printers of early prayer books and calendars marked festivals, holy days and saints' days in red to distinguish them from ordinary days. Our calendars continue this practice for Sundays and holidays, which are of course days on which no work is done.

A "red-letter day" is now one that is special for some reason: because it is workfree, or a day of celebration, or in any way memorable.

— DAVID T. ARMSTRONG

WHAT DOCTORS KNOW ABOUT GLAUCOMA

BY LOUISE CROSS

GLAUCOMA has totally blinded at least 20,000 people in this country and left another 150,000 with sight in only one eye. Between three and five thousand more have lost enough vision to be seriously handicapped. Some leading medical authorities believe that 90 per cent of all this tragedy is absolutely unnecessary. Then why is the record so bad? Glaucoma can't be prevented because its cause is still unknown, but if it is discovered early and carefully treated there is usually no danger of serious loss of eyesight. Indeed, to many of those afflicted with glaucoma it need mean only the slight inconvenience of using eye-drops regularly and paying regular visits to an eye physician. The root of the trouble is that probably only 20 per cent of all the population — including those who visit a physician and dentist regularly — ever consult an eye specialist. And those who do frequently fail to realize that glaucoma must be meticulously and continuously treated.

The Greeks gave the disease its name from their word meaning green, because during an acute attack of

glaucoma, or in an eye which is blind or nearly blind as a result of glaucoma, the pupil reflects a dull, greenish light. Now it is known that glaucoma may run a long course — often without causing any noticeable change in the eye — before it reaches this stage.

What is glaucoma? The basic characteristic is a hardening of the eyeball. What causes it? Germs apparently have nothing to do with it, except that sometimes a germ disease in the eye may lead to glaucoma as a complication.

Glaucoma appears to be a functional disturbance in the eyeball. The eyeball is best described as a hollow sphere containing the various organs of vision. Filling all the spaces between these organs are transparent substances, one of them jelly-like and one a fluid. In a healthy eye there is just enough fluid to keep the eyeball in shape. The fluid is constantly being manufactured and a surplus just as constantly being disposed of. In glaucoma supply gets ahead of disposal, and the minute drainage canals that carry off the surplus gradually become narrower

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