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THEODORE ROOSEVELT

By HIRAM BINGHAM

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THEODORE ROOSEVELT

MY BROTHER, THEODORE ROOSEVELT, *by* CORINNE ROOSEVELT ROBINSON, *Charles Scribner's Sons.*

THEODORE ROOSEVELT AND HIS TIME, *by* JOSEPH BUCKLIN BISHOP, *2 vols., Charles Scribner's Sons.*

THEODORE ROOSEVELT'S LETTERS TO HIS CHILDREN, *edited by* JOSEPH BUCKLIN BISHOP, *Charles Scribner's Sons.*

IMPRESSIONS OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT, *by* LAWRENCE F. ABBOTT, *Doubleday, Page & Co.*

THE LIFE OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT, *by* WILLIAM DRAPER LEWIS, *John C. Winston Co.*

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, *by* WILLIAM ROSCOE THAYER, *Houghton Mifflin Co.*

TALKS WITH T. R., *by* JOHN J. LEARY, JR., *Houghton Mifflin Co.*

IT will be remembered that the best speech at the Republican Convention of 1920, in Chicago, was made by a woman — somewhat to the surprise of those who had not followed Mrs. Corinne Roosevelt Robinson's career. Her admiration for her great brother led her to make herself thoroughly familiar with American history

and politics. Her own sense of humor and love of the virile virtues enabled her to compel admiration and attention. Her brother greatly trusted her. More than this, he had for her a tremendous affection. He found her to be a good sport and no quitter. Not the least interesting part of her book is the glimpse it gives into the character of the author herself, a very real person. Nevertheless, no other book has given us so much that is new about Theodore Roosevelt. There are many intimate stories of his home life which will be warmly welcomed by those who worship his memory.

One of the traits which has endeared him to America was his whole-hearted devotion to his family. He felt that anything which struck at family life was a blow at the roots of all that is best in our civilization. In the midst of his strenuous life as President, he wrote his sister, "We have been a great deal with the children." He was not one of those fathers who no sooner get their boys back from boarding-school than they send them off for someone else to enjoy in the summer time. His first half hour in the morning "always belonged to the children." "Questions and answers about their school life, their recreation when out of school, etc., were interspersed with various fascinating details told for their special edification." In "My Brother" we have striking evidence of his devotion to his sisters. His thoughtfulness for them in the midst of his strenuous life was extraordinary. Men of genius do not always remember to invite their sisters to share in their triumphs and honors. He apparently never forgot. No wonder they thought him "the great sharer."

Mrs. Robinson is a believer in the importance of inherited traits: "The stability and wisdom of the old Dutch blood, the gaiety and abandon of the Irish strain that came through the female side of his father's people, and on his mother's side the great loyalty of the Scotch and the fiery self-devotion of the French Huguenot martyrs, mixed as it was with the light touch which shows in French blood of whatever strain — all this combined to make of the boy born of so varied an ancestry one who was akin to all human nature." No one, since Jacob Riis published his "Roosevelt, the Citizen," has thrown so much light on Theodore Roosevelt's father, "a man of great persistence and determination of character," with the power of interesting himself in many things outside of his own special interests, "who could, by the most delicate

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JAN 13 1922

and comprehending sympathy, make himself a factor in the lives of any number of other human beings," a father "who never lost a chance of bringing into the lives of his children some worth-while memory."

The more one studies Roosevelt's life the more one is amazed at the number and variety of things which he found time to do and did well. His vitality and energy were enormous, yet they were due largely to his own dogged determination that they should be so. His recreations were strenuous. It did not appear to be necessary for him to relax. The marvel increases every time one reads of the fragile little boy who grew up so handicapped by ill health as to be unable to stand ordinary school life. At eleven his mother said to him: "Theodore, you have the mind but you have not the body, and without the help of the body the mind cannot go as far as it should. You must *make* your body. It is hard drudgery to make one's body, but I know you will do it." In reply he said, "I will make my body," and he became the foremost advocate of the strenuous life. When the boy of eighteen left Oyster Bay in 1876 to enter college, he took with him as his heritage not only keen joy in life but a sense of duty to be performed, of higher resolve "to be squared with practical and effective action, all of which had been part of the teaching of his father." He was "a corking boxer," yet he taught regularly in the Cambridge Sunday School. He wrote many volumes of history. He loved zoölogy and took front rank as an ornithologist. He adored "the wonderful ringing lines of Kipling," and was also familiar with American poetry. In the midst of the war, when invited by Mrs. Robinson to meet some of the members of the Poetry Society of America, he showed a knowledge of modern American verse which amazed even his sister. He quoted with special pleasure a sarcastic squib which Arthur Guiterman had just published on the navy, apropos of Mr. Daniels's attitude — "We are sitting, with our knitting, on the twelve inch guns!" Even in college he had "indulged in a luxury," so he wrote his mother, "in buying *The Library of British Poets*." It was in a letter to a poet, Mistral, that Roosevelt said: ". . . courage and endurance, love of wife and child, love of home and country, love of lover for sweetheart, love of beauty in man's work and in nature, love and emulation of daring and of lofty endeavor, the homely work-a-day virtues and the heroic

virtues, . . . if these are lacking, no piled-up riches, no roaring, clanging industrialism, no feverish and many-sided activity shall avail either the individual or the nation." This letter, as Mrs. Robinson says, truly expresses the spirit which permeated his whole life. No other biographer has given us such a vivid picture of "Theodore Roosevelt, the loving brother, the humorous philosopher, the acute politician."

In the early spring of 1918, Roosevelt turned over to Mr. Joseph Bucklin Bishop, "for exclusive use, all his personal and official correspondence . . . relating to his public career." Copies "have been preserved" of some 150,000 letters that Roosevelt wrote. Surely, no biographer of modern times was ever given such an opportunity. It is unfortunate that Mr. Bishop was not a trained historian. As a New York newspaper man for thirty-five years, and as Secretary of the Isthmian Canal Commission for ten years, his experience had scarcely been of the kind to enable him to digest thoroughly the enormous mass of that precious correspondence, and make of the result a vivid cohesive narrative. Furthermore, such a task would have required far more time than was given to the preparation of these volumes.

The first twenty years of Roosevelt's career, from the time he ran for the New York Legislature in 1881 until he entered the White House in 1901, are allotted one hundred and fifty pages, or less than one-sixth of the whole. More than three hundred pages are assigned to the ten years after he retired from the Presidency. Mr. Bishop has not attempted to illumine, from Roosevelt's letters, his life as state law-maker, ranchman, Civil Service Commissioner, or Police Commissioner. Of all the letters written in those sixteen years, Mr. Bishop has given us extracts from only eight, although he finds space to quote from newspapers more than thirty times. Furthermore, he feels obliged to refer anonymously to some of Roosevelt's most bitter opponents, both political and editorial. To tell a story of "the most pernicious and rascally specimen of his class and time," without indicating who is meant, is unfortunate. And, surely, there can be no valid reason for so frequently failing to give the names of newspapers from which quotations are taken. There are some serious omissions which can be remedied in later editions. No mention is made of the fact that three of John Hay's letters to Theodore Roosevelt, here

given in full, had already been published in Thayer's "Life of Hay." There is no chronology of Theodore Roosevelt's public career. There is no bibliography of his published works.

Nevertheless, one cannot help welcoming much that is in these volumes. The charming letters to Sir George Trevelyan, with whom Roosevelt maintained an intimate correspondence for many years, "From Khartoum to London," and the chapter on the "Russo-Japanese Conference" are of great value. Of particular interest is the quotation from Lord Bryce, who wrote, at the close of the Spanish-American War, "What I hope you will do is to have a healthy despotism governing these tropical semi-savages, and even the Spanish Creoles." It is surely significant to find the distinguished author of "Modern Democracies" saying of the Filipinos, "No talk of suffrage or any such constitutional privileges for them, but steady government by the firmest, most honest man you can find." One is reminded of Roosevelt's own words, many years later, quoted by Mr. Lawrence Abbott: "I will never advocate self-government for a people so long as their self-government means crime, violence, and extortion, corruption within, lawlessness among themselves and toward others." "When a people treat assassination as the corner-stone of self-government, they forfeit all right to be treated as worthy of self-government."

Of the details of Roosevelt's family life the world knew little during his lifetime. No one was better aware than he of the value of publicity; few public men have used it as wisely and skilfully as he did; yet he always endeavored to keep his family doings out of the newspapers. Reporters who broke that rule were likely to receive short shrift at his hands. As Mr. Bishop has well said: "Deep and abiding love of children, of family, of home, was the dominating passion of his life." There is abundant evidence for this in the charming letters which this devoted father and whole-hearted companion found time to send them in the midst of the pressure of great public duties. Even as a college boy he had taken affectionate pains "to keep his mother informed about all his activities, intellectual, physical, and social." The "Letters to his Children" remind one of certain great paintings where the artist gives a glimpse of an ideal home. They are filled with affection, love of animals, love of out-of-doors, love of happy activities. The occasional drawings add zest, just as they do to Thackeray's

letters. Parents who have children at boarding-school will enjoy the letters to his boys at Groton, particularly to one who is anxious to play football: "I do not in the least object to your getting smashed if it is for an object that is worth while. . . . But I think it a little silly to run any imminent risk of a serious smash simply to play on the second squad instead of the third. . . . I want to make the risk to a certain accident commensurate with the object gained."

One is not accustomed to think of Roosevelt as a person who carefully weighed the importance of an object before taking a great risk. Yet Mr. Lawrence Abbott, who knew him intimately for years, was impressed by Roosevelt's attention to "personal preparedness." "He studied, he read, he consulted, he thought, he deliberated, he put himself in the hands of trainers, so to speak — but when the time for action came he was on his toes, ready to jump at the word 'go.'" Theodore Roosevelt certainly was impetuous, yet it was the impetuosity of the trained sprinter, who has been preparing for months to make a sudden and terrific dash. The chief value of Mr. Abbott's book lies in the entertaining account of Roosevelt's African and European tour. Mr. Abbott was Theodore Roosevelt's "secretary" in Egypt and Europe in 1910, and consequently had an unusual opportunity for close observation. He gives many charming little pictures of this trip, such as the dismay of the imperial party at Potsdam when "the Colonel" talked too long with the Kaiser.

After Roosevelt's return from Europe, he became the centre of the protest against conservatism. It is essentially in him as "the Founder of a New Party" that Dean Lewis is interested. He regards Roosevelt's determination to form an independent party as the most important decision of his life, although he admits that this decision was made when "he was mad, mad clean through." The first half of Dean Lewis's book is rather heavy and labored. It becomes more readable towards the end, where the author, an ardent Progressive, undertakes an *ex parte* defense of his chief.

Mr. William Roscoe Thayer has given us a delightful "intimate biography." A college-mate at Harvard, Mr. Thayer knew Theodore Roosevelt for forty years, and, although continually differing with him politically, always maintained for him a warm personal friendship. When a trained biographer, the master of a

delightful English style, sits down to write, *con amore*, the memoir of a friend whom he has known all his life, the result is likely to be satisfactory. There is nothing disappointing about Mr. Thayer's book except that it is not longer. One cannot help wishing that he had been selected to do for the letters of Roosevelt what he did for those of John Hay.

Mr. John J. Leary, Jr. was a member of Roosevelt's "newspaper cabinet" during the last five years of his life. Fortunately it was Mr. Leary's habit to transcribe carefully his "talks with T. R." He has given us a picture of the greatest of our Elder Statesmen at a time when Roosevelt had no official position, was thwarted in his efforts to serve his country, and yet was full of zeal for the cause of the Allies and for the honor of America. Into this modern Boswell one can dip anywhere and be sure of enjoyment. Like Dr. Johnson, Colonel Roosevelt was often pungent in conversation. After his visit to Washington in April, 1917, he came back to Oyster Bay and gave a clear picture of "the kind of man Mr. Wilson wants about him." Secretary Baker "will do exactly what Mr. Wilson tells him to do, he will think exactly as Mr. Wilson wants him to think, and when Mr. Wilson changes his mind, he will change with him." (Was not Secretary Lansing later dismissed because his mind did *not* "willingly go along" with Mr. Wilson's?) The kind of man that Theodore Roosevelt "wanted about him" was Mr. Root, who, as T. R. said, "would give persistent battle for his viewpoint. He was a most dogged fighter. But his frankness, his outspokenness, were of great help in making me see all sides of a question. . . . The honest and intelligent critic I welcome, always welcomed, and always will welcome." In the words of President Harding, Theodore Roosevelt was ever "the patriotic sentinel, pacing the parapet of the Republic, alert to danger and every menace; in love with duty and service, and always unafraid."

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