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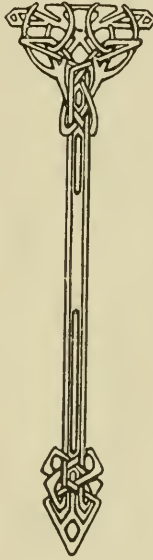


Theodore Roosevelt

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Theodore Roosevelt

By William C. Deming



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Theodore Roosevelt retired from the presidency March 4, 1909. Shortly thereafter he made his great hunting and exploration trip to Africa. Emerging from the jungle he was received and entertained with great honor in Egypt, France, Germany and by Great Britain.

Returning to America early in the summer of 1910 his first extended tour was to Cheyenne, Wyoming, as the special guest of the Frontier association, where he witnessed that unique show. He spent three days in Cheyenne and was entertained one evening at the large sheep ranch of U. S. Senator Francis E. Warren.

About one hundred visitors and local guests were present. After dinner Colonel Roosevelt was surrounded by a number of newspaper men in the "bunk house" and for an hour talked as man to man. There was no formality and no restraint.

William C. Deming, editor of the Wyoming State Tribune, was present on that occasion, and on the following day published this pen picture of Colonel Roosevelt:

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Mr
Author:

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Col. Roosevelt When He Was President

As He Appeared in 1910

There are occasions which mark real mile posts in people's lives.

But let the guest of honor be a cowboy, an ex-president, a traveler, a naturalist, a soldier, a writer, a lecturer, a Roosevelt, all in one, and the occasion becomes an epoch.

Sitting around a new pine table on a big Wyoming ranch, while viands such as only kings at times command are served, is in itself quite satisfying to a hungry man.

Yet after all it was not in the beautiful new ranch house on Pole creek, sixteen miles north of Cheyenne, where comfort, luxury and good cheer mingled uninterruptedly and lavishly for one hour that we saw the real Roosevelt. Though even there he divested himself of every suggestion of place and position, forgetting the historic welcome of royalty abroad and the cold shoulder of the "Old Guard" at home, and threw himself into the esprit of the informal affair like college boys at a class reunion.

But it was after the dinner was served, and the first table had retired to the adjacent bunk house for coffee and cigars that we began to feel the presence of the master and get true glimpses of the weird, inexplicable character of the man.

In the middle of the main floor was a long pine table, and on either side benches in lieu of chairs. One lamp dispelled the darkness of the hour and the smoke of the Havanas. Gathered in knots about the room were ex-cabinet officers, United States senators, newspaper men with international reputations, governors, city officials, chauffeurs, and ranchmen. The cowboys and ranch hands of the Warren Livestock company came and went in the discharge of their duties, now and then lingering to catch a word from the old cowman whose range was the universe, and who has roped and hog-tied every honor within his native land.

Even the myriads of stars seemed to be peeping through the open doors and windows at a man who had run the gauntlet of human endeavor at 51, and is now prepared, if not eager to do it all over again.

In the midst of the smoke and the babel of tongues sat Roosevelt, and those who could get near him sat opposite or beside him, or hovered around within hearing distance.

The man or nation that thinks wisdom is found only in the head of the Sphinx never knew Roosevelt. He is a veritable torrent of conversation, and overflowing reservoir of experiences, a restless, rolling sea of thought. He talks like a whirlwind, shows his teeth like a bull pup, shakes his head like a buffalo, and threshes around with his arms and legs like his unconquered bucking prototype of the now famous Frontier field.

He sees everybody, hears everything, and yet leads the conversation at his will. Long accustomed to public life, crowded with visitors, overwhelmed with admirers, he has long learned that he cannot let the throng talk at random, and ad infinitum. Therefore in this, as in all things else, he leads, yet answering and elucidating any proper question put to him.

In that hour in the bunk house Sunday evening he fought over again the battle of San Juan Hill; he recalled conversations with Hamilton Fish the night before the young New Yorker was killed; talked of Buck O'Neill, and the colored troops. He discoursed on the present peace, and any possible future war, telling of his plans to raise the United States volunteers if the opportunity ever comes in his time.

He tramped through Africa, sailed down the Nile, and dined with kings, discussed royalty and philosophy, compared monarchs and republics, and said there is a place and a work for each.

One tired cowpuncher who had slept all day Sunday came shambling down the stairs—it was a two-story affair—rubbing his red eyes, and remarked. “I **thought** I heard a strange hoss in the corral.”

Always and ever the fighting spirit of the man was dominant. “I told the boys who enlisted with me in 1898 it would be no picnic—that the place of honor was the post of danger, and that each must expect to die.”

“Like the Trojan mothers, you expected your men to return with their shields,” and before we could finish the quotation he added, “or upon them,” and dashed away on another subject. As in all else, he can give the other man a handicap, even in a quotation, and beat him to the finish.

But we who sat near him desired to hear him talk about himself and asked him many questions that would help us to gain some understanding of this human dynamo, this composite man of the north and south, the east and the west, whom all respect, and none quite comprehend. And he was just as approachable on that subject as any other. One of the party, calling attention to the fact that the New York Sun characterized his speeches as commonplaces and platitudes, he gritted his teeth and said “**But I live them.**” He is just as willing to challenge any criticism of himself as to fight the battles of his country.

“I do not pretend to be an orator,” said he, “but what I say is true, and finds an echo in the hearts of the common people. As I spoke today, ‘Beauty is fine, but strength is finer’—the strength of character and of mind and the body that enables a man to conquer a wild horse or conquer these broad plains.” A comparison was suggested between him and Emperor William, whereupon he said, “The kaiser inherited his place—I made mine.”

Taking up another suggestion he remarked, “Oh, I know they say I am not a scholar, but the great universities of Europe were ready to take a chance on that,” thus coloring his answer with a bit of American humor.

In this connection he remarked Sunday: “I presume there are those who will criticise me for leaving the stand at Frontier park, and riding around the track, but I felt there were several thousand people who were curious to see me, and that it was as little as I could do to give them the opportunity.”

“After all,” turning to J. M. Irwin, father of Charles, he said, slapping the old horseman on the shoulder with his soft hat, “to be the father and grandfather of children who ride like yours is greater than to be president or a king. Oh, boys, this is the life!”

For the time being this first citizen of the world let absolutely nothing raise a barrier between him and those who were intent upon seeing him and hearing him talk. He was as naturally exuberant as a schoolboy who has won his first prize. He was so absolutely unaffected that he did not affect even modesty. He was too earnest and honest to let a mere convention destroy a character study of himself by those whose sympathy and friendship he could feel.

And who knows but that as he looks back over thirty years, and tries to follow his own career from the Bad Lands of Dakota to the presidency, and then through a royal tour across Europe that Roosevelt is a study and a problem to himself?

He is the strangest man America has produced—a greater enigma, if not a greater character than Lincoln.

He does not smoke, but occasionally sips his wine at dinner and when someone said at 9 o'clock, "Come on Colonel, quit talking politics; it is time to go," he declared half humorously, but with Jacksonian emphasis and in the presence of all the assembled, "I have not said a damn word about politics." His favorite cuss-word, however, is "By George."

He is a rare combination of unconventionality, candor, self-confidence, fearlessness, aggressiveness, positiveness, and nervous physical energy, and it is no doubt this combination that has made him the popular leader he is today.

I cannot better close this hasty summary of Roosevelt's characteristics than by quoting some lines spoken recently in his honor by his lifelong friend, Henry Cabot Lodge:

He dwelt with the tribes of the marsh and moor,
He sat at the board of kings;
He tasted the toil of the burdened slave
And the joy that triumph brings.
But whether to jungle or palace hall,
Or white-walled tent he came,
He was a brother to king and soldier and slave;
His welcome was the same.

Cheyenne, Wyoming, August 10, 1919.

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