

The Mission of the Republican Party*

By THEODORE ROOSEVELT

AMONG the many wise and notable utterances of Abraham Lincoln there is one which has attracted less attention than by right it ought to have attracted. It was delivered on November 10, 1864, just after Lincoln's re-election to the Presidency, and in response to a serenade. It runs in part as follows:

It has long been a grave question whether any government not too strong for the liberties of its people can be strong enough to maintain its existence in great emergencies. On this point the present rebellion brought our republic to a severe test and the Presidential election occurring in regular course during the rebellion, added not a little to the strain. . . . The strife of the election is but human nature practically applied to the facts in the case. What has occurred in this case must ever occur in similar cases. Human nature will not change. In any future great national trial compared with the men of this, we shall have as weak and as strong, as silly and as wise, as bad and as good. Let us therefore study the incidents in this as philosophy to learn wisdom from and none of them as wrongs to be avenged. . . . Now that the election is over, may not all having a common interest reunite in a common effort to save our common country? For my own part, I have striven and shall strive to avoid placing any obstacle in the way. So long as I have been here, I have not willingly planted a thorn in any man's bosom. While I am deeply sensible to the high compliment of a re-election and duly grateful, as I trust, to Almighty God for having directed my countrymen to a right conclusion as I think for their own good, it adds nothing to my satisfaction that any other man may be disappointed or pained by the result.

This brief speech was typical of Lincoln alike in its strong common sense and in its lofty standard of morality; and the Republican party to-day is a living organism of good because it has continued responsive to those thoughts and purposes of its founders which were given their highest expression in the life of the great

martyred President. In its essentials, human nature does not change; or at least the change is very slow. In the successive national trials, great and small, which this country has had to face since the day, half a century ago, when the Republican party began its career, the same qualities have inevitably been displayed—the qualities of strength and weakness, of wisdom and folly, of evil and good; and in each of these crises we have done well or ill about in proportion as we have shown the qualities which made us do well or ill in the others. The problems shift from generation to generation; but, after all, in each case the danger is due to fundamentally the same evil tendencies, and in each case success can come only by the exercise of wisdom and courage, energy and high-mindedness. This is the reason why the history of the Republican party in the past is not merely of abiding interest to the student, but is of present importance to every man who seeks in practical fashion actually to apply the principles of civic righteousness.

It is of course the merest truism to say that a party is of use only so far as it serves the nation, and that he serves his party best who serves the nation best. In 1856 and in 1860, the party was of use because it stood against the extension of Slavery; in 1864, because it stood against all Slavery as well as against the destruction of this Union; in 1868, because it stood against those who wished to undo the results of the war. These are now dead issues; but we can learn how to face the live issues of the present by studying in good faith how men faced these dead issues of the past. We must act with wisdom or else our adherence to right will be mere sound and fury without substance; and we must act high-mindedly or else our wisdom will in the long run prove to be but folly in the eyes of the just and the far-sighted. Our policy must be such as will secure material prosperity

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to the nation; for exactly as a man cannot be a good citizen unless by his work he is able to keep himself and those dependent upon him from want, so a nation can count for little until it has the power which is based on physical well-being. Yet it is an evil thing for the nation, as for the individual, if material well-being is accepted as in itself all-sufficient; such well-being is worthless save as a foundation on which to build the higher life. It is a good thing for the nation as for the man to have the money-making capacity, but back of this and above it must stand

those qualities of the intellect and of the spirit, of the mind and of the soul, which in their sum make up that high and fine type of character which tells for true greatness. Such was the character shown in every phase of the work of Lincoln.

There are few less desirable things than to advance the history of what has been well done in the past as an excuse for failure to do well in the present; and few more desirable than to study such history with the earnest desire to profit thereby, in order to do better service in the time that now is.