

THE PRESIDENCY

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Now President of the United States

Editor's Note. This article was written expressly for THE COMPANION by Mr. Roosevelt in 1900, while he was Governor of New York, and previous to the Republican National Convention, which nominated him for Vice-President. The views expressed in the article are, therefore, those of an outside observer, and are not to be regarded as those of an incumbent of the office. It will be clear to all readers that the writer of the article could not have foreseen the place he was destined to occupy before its publication.

THE President of the United States occupies a position of peculiar importance. In the whole world there is no other ruler, certainly no other ruler under free institutions, whose power compares with his. Of course a despotic king has even more, but no constitutional monarch has as much. In the republics of France and Switzerland the president is not a very important officer, at least, compared with the President of the United States. In England the sovereign has much less control in shaping the policy of the nation, the prime minister occupying a position more nearly analogous to that of our President. The prime minister, however, can at any time be thrown out of office by an adverse vote, while the President can only be removed before his term is out for some extraordinary crime or misdemeanor against the nation. Of course, in the case of each there is the enormous personal factor of the incumbent himself to be considered entirely apart from the power of the office itself. The power wielded by Andrew Jackson was out of all proportion to that wielded by Buchanan, although in theory each was alike. So a strong President may exert infinitely more influence than a weak prime minister, or *vice versa*. But this is merely another way of stating that in any office the personal equation is always of vital consequence.

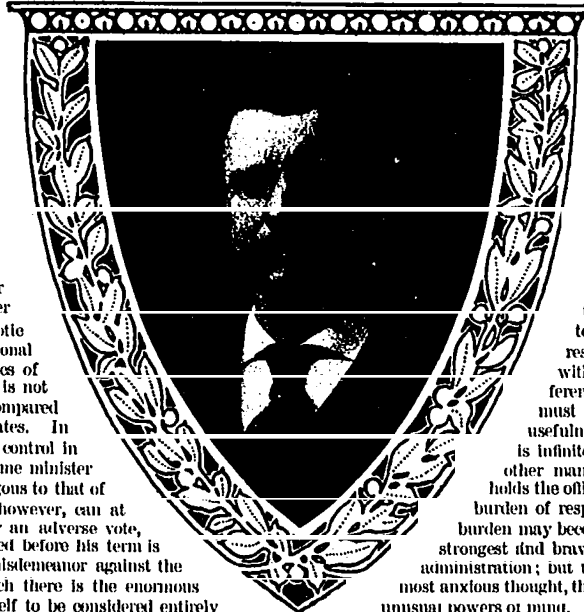
It is customary to speak of the framers of our Constitution as having separated the judicial, the legislative and the executive functions of the government. The separation, however, is not in all respects sharply defined. The President has certainly most important legislative functions, and the upper branch of the national legislature shares with the President one of the most important of his executive functions; that is, the President can either sign or veto the bills passed by Congress, while on the other hand the Senate confirms or rejects his nominations. Of course the President cannot initiate legislation, although he can recommend it. But unless two-thirds of Congress in both branches are hostile to him, he can stop any measure from becoming a law. This power is variously used by different Presidents, but it always exists, and must always be reckoned with by Congress.

While Congress is in session, if the President neither signs nor vetoes the bill which is passed, the bill becomes a law without his signature. The effect is precisely the same as if he had signed it. Presidents who disapproved of details in a bill, but felt that on the whole it was advisable it should become a law, have at times used this method to emphasize the fact that they were not satisfied with the measure which they were yet unwilling to veto. A notable instance was afforded in President Cleveland's term, when he thus treated the Wilson-Gorman tariff bill.

The immense federal service, including all the postal employes, all the customs employes, all the Indian agents, marshals, district attorneys, navy-yard employes, and so forth, is under the President. It would of course be a physical impossibility for him to appoint all the individuals in the service. His direct power lies over the heads of the departments, bureaus and more important offices. But he does not appoint these by himself. His is only the nominating power. It rests with the Senate to confirm or reject the nominations.

The Senators are the constitutional advisers of the President, for it must be remembered that his Cabinet is not in the least like the cabinet of which the prime minister is head in the English Parliament. Under our government the Secretaries who form the Cabinet are in the strictest sense the President's own ministerial appointees; the men, chosen out of all the nation, to whom he thinks he can best depute the most important and laborious of his executive duties. Of course they all advise him on matters of general policy when he so desires it, and in practice each Cabinet officer has a very free hand in managing his own department, and must have it if he is to do good work. But all this advice and consultation is at the will of the President. With the Senate, on the other hand, the advice and consultation are obligatory under the Constitution.

The President and Congress are mutually necessary to one another in matters of legislation, and the President and the Senate are mutually necessary in matters of appointment. Every now and then men who understand our Constitution but imperfectly raise an outcry against the President for consulting the Senators in matters of appointment, and even talk about the Senators "usurping" his functions. These men labor under a misapprehension. The Senate has no right to dictate to the President who shall be appointed, but they have an entire right to say who shall not



be appointed, for under the Constitution this has been made their duty. In practice, under our party system, it has come to be recognized that each Senator has a special right to be consulted about the appointments in his own state, if he is of the President's political party. Often the opponents of the Senator in his state do not agree with him in the matter of appointments, and sometimes the President in the exercise of his judgment finds it right and desirable to disregard the Senator. But the President and the Senators must work together if they desire to secure the best results. But although many men must share with the President the responsibility for different individual actions, and although Congress must of course also very largely condition his usefulness, yet the fact remains that in his hands is infinitely more power than in the hands of any other man in our country during the time that he holds the office; that there is upon him always a heavy burden of responsibility; and that in certain crises this burden may become so great as to bear down any but the strongest and bravest man. It is easy enough to give a bad administration; but to give a good administration demands the most anxious thought, the most wearing endeavor, no less than very unusual powers of mind. The chances for error are limitless, and in minor matters, where from the nature of the case it is absolutely inevitable that the President should rely upon the judgment of others, it is certain that under the best Presidents some errors will be committed. The severest critics of a President's policy are apt to be, not those who know most about what is to be done and of the limitations under which it must be done, but those who know least.

In the aggregate, quite as much wrong is committed by improper denunciation of public servants who do well as by failure to attack those who do ill. There is every reason why the President, whoever he may be and to whatever party he may belong, should be held to a sharp accountability alike for what he does and for what he leaves undone. But we injure ourselves and the nation if we fail to treat with proper respect the man, whether he is politically opposed to us or not, who in the highest office in our land is striving to do his duty according to the strength that is in him.

We have had Presidents who have acted very weakly or unwisely in particular crises. We have had Presidents the sum of whose work has not been to the advantage of the republic. But we have never had one concerning whose personal integrity there was so much as a shadow of a suspicion, or who has not been animated by an earnest desire to do the best possible work that he could for the people at large. Of course infirmity of purpose or wrong-headedness may mar this integrity and sincerity of intention; but the integrity and the good intentions have always existed. We have never hitherto had in the presidential chair any man who did not sincerely desire to benefit the people and whose own personal ambitions were not entirely honorable, although as much cannot be said for certain aspirants for the place, such as Aaron Burr.

Corruption, in the gross sense in which the word is used in ordinary conversation, has been absolutely unknown among our Presidents, and it has been exceedingly rare in our Presidents' Cabinets. Inefficiency, whether due to lack of will-power, sheer deficiency in wisdom, or improper yielding either to the pressure of politicians or to the other kinds of pressure which must often be found even in a free democracy, has been far less uncommon. Of deliberate moral obliquity there has been but very little indeed.

In the easiest, quietest, most peaceful times the President is sure to have great tasks before him. The simple question of revenue and expenditure is as important to the nation as it is to the average household, and the President is the man to whom the nation looks and whom it holds accountable in the matter both of expenditure and of revenue. It is an entirely mistaken belief that the expenditure of money is simply due to a taste for recklessness and extravagance on the part of the people's representatives.

The representatives in the long run are sure to try to do what the people effectively want. The trouble is that although each group has, and all the groups taken together still more strongly have, an interest in keeping the expenditures down, each group has also a direct interest in keeping some particular expenditure up. This expenditure is usually entirely proper and desirable, save only that the aggregate of all such expenditures may be so great as to make it impossible for the nation to go into them.

It is a good deal the same thing in the nation as it is in a state. The demand may be for a consumptive hospital, or for pensions to veterans, or for a public building, or for an armory, or for cleaning out a harbor, or for starting irrigation. In each case the demand may be in itself entirely proper, and those interested in it, from whatever motives, may be both sincere and strenuous in their advocacy. But the President has to do on a large scale what every governor of a state has to do on a small scale, that is, balance the demands on the treasury with the capacities of the treasury. Whichever way he decides, some

people are sure to think that he has tipped the scale the wrong way, and from their point of view they may conscientiously think it; whereas from his point of view he may know with equal conscientiousness that he has done his best to strike an average which would on the one hand not be niggardly toward worthy objects, and on the other would not lay too heavy a burden of taxation upon the people.

Inasmuch as these particular questions have to be met every year in connection with every session of Congress and with the work of every department, it may readily be seen that even the President's every-day responsibilities are of no light order. So it is with his appointments. Entirely apart from the fact that there is a great pressure for place, it is also the fact that in all the higher and more important appointments there are usually conflicting interests which must somehow be reconciled to the best of the President's capacity.

Here again it must be remembered that the matter is not always by any means one of merely what we call politics. Where there is a really serious conflict in reference to an appointment, while it may be merely a factional fight, it is more apt to be because two groups of the President's supporters differ radically and honestly on some question of policy; so that whatever the President's decision may be, he cannot help arousing dissatisfaction.

One thing to be remembered is that appointments and policies which are normally routine

is caused by the entirely well-meaning people who ask him to do what he cannot possibly do. For the first few weeks after the inauguration a new President may receive on an average fifteen hundred letters a day. His mail is so enormous that often he cannot read one letter in a hundred, and rarely can he read one letter in ten. Even his private secretary can read only a small fraction of the mail. Often there are letters which the President would really be glad to see, but which are swamped in the great mass of demands for office, demands for pensions, notes of warning or advice, demands for charity, and requests of every conceivable character, not to speak of the letters from "crunks," which are always numerous in the President's mail.

One President, who was very anxious to help people whenever he could, made the statement that the requests for pecuniary aid received in a single fortnight would, if complied with, have eaten up considerably more than his entire year's salary. The requests themselves are frequently such as the President would like to comply with if there was any way of making a discrimination; but there is none.

One rather sad feature of the life of a President is the difficulty of making friends, because almost inevitably after a while the friend thinks there is some office he would like, applies for it, and when the President is obliged to refuse, feels that he has been injured. Those who were closest to Abraham Lincoln have said that this was one of the things which concerned him most in

the ceaseless worry and harassing anxiety are beyond description. But if the man at the close of his term is able to feel that he has done his duty well; that he has solved after the best fashion of which they were capable the great problems with which he was confronted, and

has kept clear and in good running order the governmental machinery of the mighty republic, he has the satisfaction of feeling that he has performed one of the great world tasks, and that the mere performance is in itself the greatest of all possible rewards.



"THE RHINOCEROS HAS PASSED AWAY."

and unimportant may suddenly become of absolutely vital consequence. For instance, the War Department was utterly neglected for over thirty years after the Civil War. This neglect was due less to the successive Presidents than to Congress, and in Congress it was due to the fact that the people themselves did not take an interest in the army. Neither the regular officer nor the regular soldier takes any part in politics as a rule, so that the demagogue and the bread-and-butter politician have no fear of his vote; and to both of them, and also to the cheap sensational newspaper, the army offers a favorite subject for attack. So it often happens that some unlabile people really get a little afraid of the army, and have some idea that it may be used some time or other against our liberties.

The army never has been and, I am sure, it never will be or can be a menace to anybody save America's foes, or ought but a source of pride to every good and far-sighted American. But it is only in time of actual danger that such facts are brought home vividly to the minds of our people and so the army is apt to receive far less than its proper share of attention. But when an emergency like that caused by the Spanish War arises, then the Secretary of War becomes the most important officer in the Cabinet, and the army steps into the place of foremost interest in all the country.

It is only once in a generation that such a crisis as the Spanish War or the Mexican War or the War of 1812 has to be confronted, but in almost every administration lesser crises do arise. They may be in connection with foreign affairs, as was the case with the Chilean trouble under President Harrison's administration, the Venezuelan matter in President Cleveland's second term, or the Boxer uprising in China. Much more often they relate to domestic affairs, as in the case of a disastrous panic, which produces terrible social and industrial convulsions. Whatever the problem may be, the President has got to meet it and to work out some kind of a solution. In midwinter or midsummer, with Congress sitting or absent, the President has always to be ready to devote every waking hour to some anxious, worrying, harassing matter most difficult to decide, and yet which it is imperative immediately to decide.

An immense addition to the President's burden

in connection with his administration. It is hardly necessary to allude to the well-known fact that no President can gratify a hundredth part of the requests and demands made upon him for office, often by men who have rendered him real services and who are fit to fill the position they seek, but not so fit as somebody else. Of course the man does not realize that his successful rival was appointed because he really was more fit, and he goes away sour and embittered because of what he feels to be the President's ingratitude.

Perhaps the two most striking things in the presidency are the immense power of the President, in the first place; and in the second place, the fact that as soon as he has ceased being President he goes right back into the body of the people and becomes just like any other American citizen. While he is in office he is one of the half-dozen persons throughout the whole world who have most power to affect the destinies of the world.

He can set fleets and armies in motion; he can do more than any save one or two absolute sovereigns to affect the domestic welfare and happiness of scores of millions of people. Then when he goes out of office he takes up his regular round of duties like any other citizen, or if he is of advanced age retires from active life to rest, like any other man who has worked hard to earn his rest.

One President, John Quincy Adams, after leaving the presidency, again entered public life as a Congressman, and achieved conspicuous successes in the Lower House. This, however, is a unique case. Many Presidents have followed the examples of Jefferson and Jackson, and retired, as these two men retired to Monticello and The Hermitage. Others have gone into more or less active work, as practising lawyers or as lecturers on law, or in business, or in some form of philanthropy.

During the President's actual incumbency of his office the tendency is perhaps to exaggerate not only his virtues but his faults. When he goes out he is simply one of the ordinary citizens, and perhaps for a time the importance of the rôle he has played is not recognized. True perspective is rarely gained until years have gone by.

All together, there are few harder tasks than that of filling well and ably the office of President of the United States. The labor is immense,