

CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

ADDRESS BEFORE THE YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION,
CARNEGIE HALL, NEW YORK, DECEMBER 30, 1900

CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP



IT is a peculiar pleasure to me to come before you to-night to greet you and to bear testimony to the great good that has been done by these Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations throughout the United States. More and more we are getting to recognize the law of combination. This is true of many phases in our industrial life, and it is equally true of the world of philanthropic effort. Nowhere is it, or will it ever be, possible to supplant individual effort, individual initiative; but in addition to this there must be work in combination. More and more this is recognized as true not only in charitable work proper, but in that best form of philanthropic endeavor where we all do good to ourselves by all joining together to do good to one another. This is exactly what is done in your associations.

It seems to me that there are several reasons why you are entitled to especial recognition from all who are interested in the

betterment of our American social system. First and foremost, your organization recognizes the vital need of brotherhood, the most vital of all our needs here in this great republic. The existence of a Young Men's or Young Women's Christian Association is certain proof that some people at least recognize in practical shape the identity of aspiration and interest, both in things material and in things higher, which with us must be wide-spread through the masses of our people if our national life is to attain full development. This spirit of brotherhood recognizes of necessity both the need of self-help and also the need of helping others in the only way which ever ultimately does great good, that is, of helping them to help themselves. Every man of us needs such help at some time or other, and each of us should be glad to stretch out his hand to a brother who stumbles. But while every man needs at times to be lifted up when he stumbles, no man can afford to let himself be carried, and it is worth no man's while to try thus to carry some one else. The man who lies down, who will not try to walk, has become a mere cumberer of the earth's surface.

These associations of yours try to make men self-helpful and to help them when they are self-helpful. They do not try merely to

carry them, to benefit them for the moment at the cost of their future undoing. This means that all in any way connected with them not merely retain but increase their self-respect. Any man who takes part in the work of such an organization is benefited to some extent and benefits the community to some extent—of course, always with the proviso that the organization is well managed and is run on a business basis, as well as with a philanthropic purpose.

The feeling of brotherhood is necessarily as remote from a patronizing spirit, on the one hand, as from a spirit of envy and malice, on the other. The best work for our uplifting must be done by ourselves, and yet with brotherly kindness for our neighbor. In such work, and therefore in the kind of work done by the Young Men's Christian Associations, we all stand on the self-respecting basis of mutual benefit and common effort. All of us who take part in any such work, in whatever measure, both receive and confer benefits. This is true of the founder and giver, and it is no less true of every man who takes advantage of what the founder and giver have done. These bodies make us all realize how much we have in common, and how much we can do when we work in common. I doubt if it is possible to overestimate the

good done by the mere fact of association with a common interest and for a common end, and when the common interest is high and the common end peculiarly worthy, the good done is of course many times increased.

Besides developing this sense of brotherhood, the feeling which breeds respect both for one's self and for others, your associations have a peculiar value in showing what can be done by acting in combination without aid from the state. While on the one hand it has become evident that under the conditions of modern life we cannot allow an unlimited individualism which may work harm to the community, it is no less evident that the sphere of the state's action should be extended very cautiously, and so far as possible only where it will not crush out healthy individual initiative. Voluntary action by individuals in the form of associations of any kind for mutual betterment or mutual advantage often offers a way to avoid alike the dangers of state control and the dangers of excessive individualism. This is particularly true of efforts for that most important of all forms of betterment, moral betterment — the moral betterment which usually brings material betterment in its train.

It is only in this way, by all of us working together in a spirit of brotherhood, by

each doing his part for the betterment of himself and of others, that it is possible for us to solve the tremendous problems with which as a nation we are now confronted. Our industrial life has become so complex, its rate of movement so very rapid, and the specialization and differentiation so intense that we find ourselves face to face with conditions that were practically unknown in this nation half a century ago. The power of the forces of evil has been greatly increased, and it is necessary for our self-preservation that we should similarly strengthen the forces for good. We are all of us bound to work toward this end. No one of us can do everything, but each of us can do something, and if we work together the aggregate of these somethings will be very considerable.

There are, of course, a thousand different ways in which the work can be done, and each man must choose as his tastes and his powers bid him, if he is to do the best of which he is capable. But all the kinds of work must be carried along on certain definite lines if good is to come. All the work must be attempted as on the whole this Young Men's Christian Association work has been done, that is, in a spirit of good will toward all and not of hatred toward some; in a spirit in which to broad charity for

mankind there is added a keen and healthy sanity of mind. We must retain our self-respect, each and all of us, and we must beware alike of mushy sentimentality and of envy and hatred.

It ought not to be necessary for me to warn you against mere sentimentality, against the philanthropy and charity which are not merely insufficient but harmful. It is eminently desirable that we should none of us be hard-hearted, but it is no less desirable that we should not be soft-headed. I really do not know which quality is most productive of evil to mankind in the long run, hardness of heart or softness of head. Naked charity is not what we permanently want. There are of course certain classes, such as young children, widows with large families, or crippled or very aged people, or even strong men temporarily crushed by stunning misfortune, on whose behalf we may have to make a frank and direct appeal to charity, and who can be the recipients of it without any loss of self-respect. But taking us as a whole, taking the mass of Americans, we do not want charity, we do not want sentimentality; we merely want to learn how to act both individually and together in such fashion as to enable us to hold our own in the world, to do good to others according to the measure of our opportunities,

and to receive good from others in ways which will not entail on our part any loss of self-respect.

It ought to be unnecessary to say that any man who tries to solve the great problems that confront us by an appeal to anger and passion, to ignorance and folly, to malice and envy, is not, and never can be, aught but an enemy of the very people he professes to befriend. In the words of Lowell, it is far safer to adopt "All men up" than "Some men down" for a motto. Speaking broadly, we cannot in the long run benefit one man by the downfall of another. Our energies, as a rule, can be employed to much better advantage in uplifting some than in pulling down others. Of course there must sometimes be pulling down, too. We have no business to blink evils, and where it is necessary that the knife should be used, let it be used unsparingly, but let it be used intelligently. When there is need of a drastic remedy, apply it, but do not apply it in the spirit of hate. Normally a pound of construction is worth a ton of destruction.

There is degradation to us if we feel envy and malice and hatred toward our neighbor for any cause; and if we envy him merely his riches, we show we have ourselves low ideals. Money is a good thing. It is a foolish affectation to deny it. But it is not

the only good thing, and after a certain amount has been amassed it ceases to be the chief even of material good things. It is far better, for instance, to do well a bit of work which is well worth doing, than to have a large fortune. I do not care whether this work is that of an engineer on a great railroad, or captain of a fishing-boat, or foreman in a factory or machine-shop, or section boss, or division chief, or assistant astronomer in an observatory, or a second lieutenant somewhere in China or the Philippines—each has an important piece of work to do, and if he is really interested in it, and has the right stuff in him, he will be altogether too proud of what he is doing, and too intent on doing it well, to waste his time in envying others.

From the days when the chosen people received the Decalogue to our own, envy and malice have been recognized as evils, and woe to those who appeal to them. To break the Tenth Commandment is no more moral now than it has been for the past thirty centuries. The vice of envy is not only a dangerous but also a mean vice, for it is always a confession of inferiority. It may provoke conduct which will be fruitful of wrong-doing to others, and it must cause misery to the man who feels it. It will not be any the less fruitful of wrong and misery

if, as is so often the case with evil motives, it adopts some high-sounding alias. The truth is that each one of us has in him certain passions and instincts which if they gained the upper hand in his soul would mean that the wild beast had come uppermost in him. Envy, malice, and hatred are such passions, and they are just as bad if directed against a class or group of men as if directed against an individual. What we need in our leaders and teachers is help in suppressing such feelings, help in arousing and directing the feelings that are their extreme opposites. Woe to us as a nation if we ever follow the lead of men who seek not to smother but to inflame the wild-beast qualities of the human heart! In social and industrial no less than in political reform we can do healthy work, work fit for a free republic, fit for self-governing democracy, only by treading in the footsteps of Washington and Franklin and Adams and Patrick Henry, and not in the steps of Marat and Robespierre.

So far, what I have had to say has dealt mainly with our relations to one another in what may be called the service of the state. But the basis of good citizenship is the home. A man must be a good son, husband, and father, a woman a good daughter, wife, and mother, first and fore-

most. There must be no shirking of duties in big things or in little things. The man who will not work hard for his wife and his little ones, the woman who shrinks from bearing and rearing many healthy children, these have no place among the men and women who are striving upward and onward. Of course the family is the foundation of all things in the state. Sins against pure and healthy family life are those which of all others are sure in the end to be visited most heavily upon the nation in which they take place. We must beware, moreover, not merely of the great sins, but of the lesser ones which when taken together cause such an appalling aggregate of misery and wrong. The drunkard, the lewd liver, the coward, the liar, the dishonest man, the man who is brutal to or neglectful of parents, wife, or children — of all of these the shrift should be short when we speak of decent citizenship. Every ounce of effort for good in your associations is part of the ceaseless war against the traits which produce such men. But in addition to condemning the grosser forms of evil we must not forget to condemn also the evils of bad temper, lack of gentleness, nagging and whining fretfulness, lack of consideration for others—the evils of selfishness in all its myriad forms. Each man or woman must remember his or

her duty to all around, and especially to those closest and nearest, and such remembrance is the best possible preparation for doing duty for the state as a whole.

We ask that these associations, and the men and women who take part in them, practise the Christian doctrines which are preached from every true pulpit. The Decalogue and the Golden Rule must stand as the foundation of every successful effort to better either our social or our political life. "Fear the Lord and walk in his ways" and "Love thy neighbor as thyself"—when we practise these two precepts, the reign of social and civic righteousness will be close at hand. Christianity teaches not only that each of us must so live as to save his own soul, but that each must also strive to do his whole duty by his neighbor. We cannot live up to these teachings as we should; for in the presence of infinite might and infinite wisdom, the strength of the strongest man is but weakness, and the keenest of mortal eyes see but dimly. But each of us can at least strive, as light and strength are given him, toward the ideal. Effort along any one line will not suffice. We must not only be good, but strong. We must not only be high-minded, but brave-hearted. We must think loftily, and we must also work hard. It is not written in the Holy Book that we

must merely be harmless as doves. It is also written that we must be wise as serpents. Craft unaccompanied by conscience makes the crafty man a social wild beast who preys on the community and must be hunted out of it. Gentleness and sweetness unbacked by strength and high resolve are almost impotent for good.

The true Christian is the true citizen, lofty of purpose, resolute in endeavor, ready for a hero's deeds, but never looking down on his task because it is cast in the day of small things; scornful of baseness, awake to his own duties as well as to his rights, following the higher law with reverence, and in this world doing all that in him lies, so that when death comes he may feel that mankind is in some degree better because he has lived.

**THE
STRENUOUS LIFE**

**ESSAYS AND
ADDRESSES**

**BY
THEODORE ROOSEVELT**



**NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1905**