



A MESSAGE TO ALL THE BOYS OF AMERICA

BY

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
HONORARY VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

Col. Roosevelt, because of his great interest in American Boys, wrote this message while on his way to South America, and sent it to Mr. James



E. West, Chief Scout Executive of the Boy Scouts of America, as his contribution to the Christmas number of Boys' Life, the Boy Scouts' Magazine.

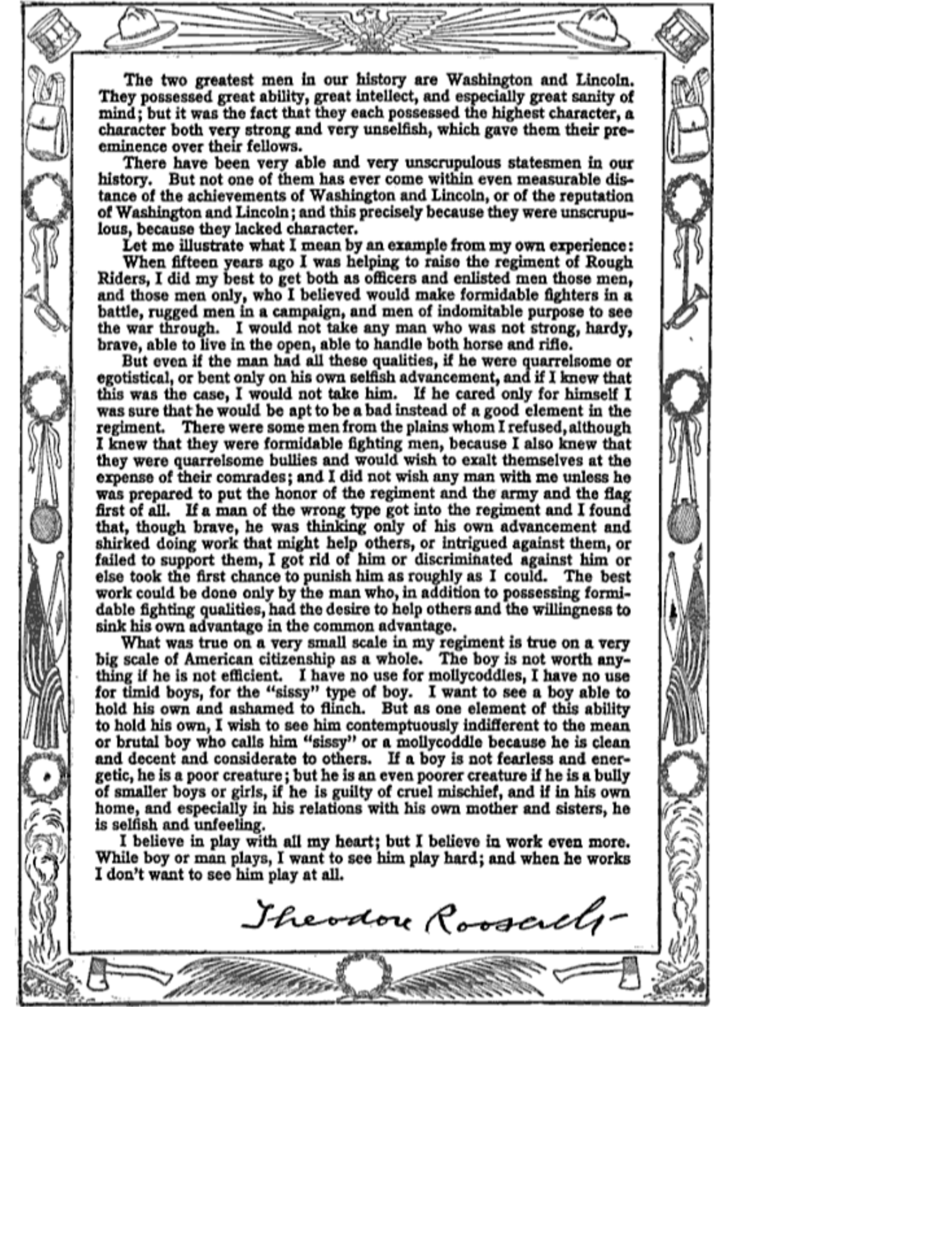
On Board the "Van Dyck,"

I wish to send this message, not only to the Boy Scouts, but to all the boys of America. The prime lesson that the Boy Scout movement is teaching is the lesson that manliness in its most vigorous form can be and ought to be accompanied by unselfish consideration for the rights and interests of others.

Indeed I can go a little further. I wish that I could make the especial appeal to the American boy to remember that unless he thinks of others he cannot fit himself to do the best work in any great emergency.

The names in our history to which we now look back with pride are the names of men who have rendered great service. This service may have been rendered at the same time that they themselves gained glory or reputation. But neither the glory nor the reputation would have been gained save as an incident to the service.

In our history there is now practically no mention of any great financier, of any great business man, who merely made money for himself. If at some crisis in the nation's history that financier rendered a great national service, or if he identified himself in useful fashion with some great movement for good, whether in art or philanthropy or otherwise, then his name remains. But even under these conditions it remains as of secondary value. America's contribution to world history has been made by the statesmen and soldiers whose devotion to the country equaled their efficiency, by men of science, men of art, men of letters, by sane and honest reformers, who did great work and treated that work as in itself a great reward.



The two greatest men in our history are Washington and Lincoln. They possessed great ability, great intellect, and especially great sanity of mind; but it was the fact that they each possessed the highest character, a character both very strong and very unselfish, which gave them their pre-eminence over their fellows.

There have been very able and very unscrupulous statesmen in our history. But not one of them has ever come within measurable distance of the achievements of Washington and Lincoln, or of the reputation of Washington and Lincoln; and this precisely because they were unscrupulous, because they lacked character.

Let me illustrate what I mean by an example from my own experience:

When fifteen years ago I was helping to raise the regiment of Rough Riders, I did my best to get both as officers and enlisted men those men, and those men only, who I believed would make formidable fighters in a battle, rugged men in a campaign, and men of indomitable purpose to see the war through. I would not take any man who was not strong, hardy, brave, able to live in the open, able to handle both horse and rifle.

But even if the man had all these qualities, if he were quarrelsome or egotistical, or bent only on his own selfish advancement, and if I knew that this was the case, I would not take him. If he cared only for himself I was sure that he would be apt to be a bad instead of a good element in the regiment. There were some men from the plains whom I refused, although I knew that they were formidable fighting men, because I also knew that they were quarrelsome bullies and would wish to exalt themselves at the expense of their comrades; and I did not wish any man with me unless he was prepared to put the honor of the regiment and the army and the flag first of all. If a man of the wrong type got into the regiment and I found that, though brave, he was thinking only of his own advancement and shirked doing work that might help others, or intrigued against them, or failed to support them, I got rid of him or discriminated against him or else took the first chance to punish him as roughly as I could. The best work could be done only by the man who, in addition to possessing formidable fighting qualities, had the desire to help others and the willingness to sink his own advantage in the common advantage.

What was true on a very small scale in my regiment is true on a very big scale of American citizenship as a whole. The boy is not worth anything if he is not efficient. I have no use for mollycoddles, I have no use for timid boys, for the "sissy" type of boy. I want to see a boy able to hold his own and ashamed to flinch. But as one element of this ability to hold his own, I wish to see him contemptuously indifferent to the mean or brutal boy who calls him "sissy" or a mollycoddle because he is clean and decent and considerate to others. If a boy is not fearless and energetic, he is a poor creature; but he is an even poorer creature if he is a bully of smaller boys or girls, if he is guilty of cruel mischief, and if in his own home, and especially in his relations with his own mother and sisters, he is selfish and unfeeling.

I believe in play with all my heart; but I believe in work even more. While boy or man plays, I want to see him play hard; and when he works I don't want to see him play at all.

Theodore Roosevelt