

SOME NEW BOOKS.

Theodore Roosevelt's Autobiography.

Much, and possibly all, of the contents of Theodore Roosevelt's Autobiography (The Macmillan Company), has been printed before, at sundry times and in divers places, and where no single reader, however much interested in the subject, is likely to have seen it all. So it seems safe to treat the whole as new matter.

The fifteen chapters into which the book is divided, or out of which it has been compiled, vary much in interest, and still more in importance. But they are all, or almost all, very well worth reading. Necessarily there is much preaching, and some of the preaching is skipable. Of such is some of the chapter on "The Vigor of Life," which, borrowing it from an Italian version of "The Strenuous Life," the author concedes to be his own title. Of such is a good deal of the chapter on "Applied Idealism" and a good deal of the chapter on "The Big Stick and the Square Deal" and a good deal of the chapter on "The Peace of Righteousness." But even in these the preaching is interspersed with interesting narrative, and the reader will not do to neglect the chapters with these warning titles altogether, while the chapters which are primarily narrative and in which the preaching is strictly incidental to the narrative are to be read through, an exercise which is in the least tedious. The book is another and perhaps the crowning tribute to its author's all roundness and to his huge gifts of life.

I.

Mr. Roosevelt is quoted as having said somewhere that he had not a drop of "Anglo-Saxon" blood in his veins. This would be a hardy thing for any American of two centuries and a half of American descent to say of himself, considering the rapidity of the ratio according to which his ancestors double at every receding generation, without much more minute study than most Americans give to their genealogies, or than it appears that the autobiographer has given. All the same, he makes it appear that not only the patrimonial name, but the prevailing color of his ancestry is Dutch, descended from an immigrant of the seventeenth century whose posterity has, at least since the beginning of the nineteenth, been steadily rising in social importance on Manhattan Island, where all the generations of them have been born and reared. His maternal ancestry he here sets down as predominantly of Scotch, but also of Huguenot and English descent, so that very likely he has not understood or misquoted about the Anglo-Saxonism. His father, Theodore, whom he calls, after the manner of pious sons of good fathers, "the best man I ever knew," is still well remembered by many elderly New Yorkers, although he died at 48, as the most public spirited, the most interested in what are now called the "Cotton" and "Brotherhood," the sons of old C. V. S., who inhabited the parent house at the western corner of Broadway and Fourteenth street for a decade or more after the civil war. On the other side of Broadway, a square or two below, resided C. V. S.'s brother James L., "the Judge," who in his latter years was best known by the activities of his wife, whose social leadership was for many years conspicuous. Of the sons of C. V. S., the most prominent figure was hardly Theodore, but Robert B., whose interest was in politics of a practical kind rather than in charities and the "clerics" to which his younger brother was addicted. Robert B. served several terms in Congress, and succeeded Miles O'Reilly as editor of the Citizen, weekly, which was a current political and literary standard during the late '60s and early '70s, if indeed, Robert B. was not the "angel" of the publication even during Halpine's term as editor. The Bullocks of Georgia seem to have been locally quite equal socially to the Roosevelts of New York. Of his uncle, James Dunwoody Bullock, who was an Admiral in the Confederate navy, and whose naval agent he was in England under whose inspection Alabama, among other vessels, was built, his nephew, who compares him to Thackeray's Colonel Newcome, may not be aware of the professional praise bestowed upon him by a competent Judge, also a Confederate naval officer, as "the best navigator I ever sailed with." There is at least no question that Mr. Roosevelt comes of good people.

II.

The reminiscences here given of the autobiographer's boyhood and youth are readable enough. But the special interest of the book begins with the beginning of his political career in his election to the New York Assembly in 1881. He had already, in spite of the jeers of his friends, begun the fulfillment of his political duties by joining the Republican Association of the Twenty-first Assembly district, one of the richest in the city and also one of the most trustworthily Republican. His mentor was one Joe Murray, who had shown his quality by beating the Tammany district leader, against whom he had a personal grudge, and carrying that leader's district for the Republicans. Jake W. Dutton and Philadelphia there really was a certain mental and moral thinness among very many of the leaders in the civil service reform movement. But nobody ever put him among the mollycoddlers. Moreover, he never pressed the principle of appointment by competitive examination further than it would fairly go, and he is altogether opposed, as he explains here, to a promotion by the method of election. A man must be judged by his work. Of course if his superiors do not care for efficiency in their own departments, as is just now so flagrantly the case with the Department of State, there is no possible way of getting good service in the subordinate places so long as the indifferent head of a department keeps his place at the top. Moreover, Mr. Roosevelt was himself even then, and much more conspicuously has been since a practical politician keenly alive to the exigencies of practical politics.

III.

That a youngster who had made so successful an entry into politics should thereupon, instead of following up his success, have gone to cattle ranching in Dakota, is a variety of his inclinations. 1883 is far enough back to have caused to disappear in the interval the Far West of Owen Wister's stories and Fred Remington's pictures and Theodore Roosevelt's early experiences. There is no better writing and no better reading in the volume than the chapters devoted to that extinct social state. The recollection of the life of the cattleman and the cowboy is entirely convincing and gives the reader an insight into that life as vivid as that of the novelist or of the painter. There are excellent tales. One of them is of the cowboy who lunched at the White House with the British Ambassador and who had been warned in advance that if he should shoot at the feet of the British Ambassador to make him dance, as he had been known to do at those of terrified tenderfeet in former days, he might bring on international complications, where to the ex-cowboy with anguish and horror at so unjust a suggestion, "Why, Colonel, I shouldn't think of it, I shouldn't think of it."

posed when the bill was sent back to the Assembly, though there also it was exposed to attention, the Governor vetoed the bill and after much litigation the roads had to pay the back taxes. Another bill in the interest of a railroad, which was also in the public interest, Assemblyman Roosevelt agreed to take charge of it if he were assured, as he was, that no corrupt means of securing support for it would be invoked. After some weeks of futile effort on his part the backers of the bill took it away from him and entrusted it to a statesman here mis-called "The Bald Eagle of Weehawken," and of course none other than James W. Husted, "The Bald Eagle of Westchester." The bill was passed, it may be inferred, at considerable expense. It is to his legislative experience, and especially to his experience with one bill, a bill which, having habitually clung in tenement houses, which was enacted and declared unconstitutional by the Court of Appeals, that the autobiographer refers the beginning of his distrust of the impeccability of judicial decisions. There are some good legislative stories, among others of a bill which, whose identity is rather uselessly shrouded, it seems that it was to the young Assemblyman that Tim made his classical declaration "I'd never allow the Constitution to come between friends." His interlocutor naturally gave it to Mr. Bryce, who embodied it in the "American Commonwealth."

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The cowboys of the Rough Riders, as everybody knows, have ever since idealized their Lieutenant-Colonel, looked upon him as a father and taken liberties with him which were sometimes trying, as when one comrade wrote him: "Dear Colonel: I write you this note in the middle of the night. I have shot a lady in the eye. But I don't care. I'm shooting at the lady. I was shooting at my wife." It was only long afterward that the Colonel learned from another source that the unfortunate lady was the wild shooter's sister-in-law. Buck Taylor of Texas was one of the Rough Riders who seized every opportunity to show his political fortitude of his old commander's case, and he made the following speech when he was in his old commander's company on a stump tour: "My fellow citizens, vote for my Colonel! Vote for my Colonel, and he will lead you, as he led us, like sheep to the slaughter." In 1901, Roosevelt was stumping the Rocky Mountain States as a candidate for Vice-President and expected much interruption and fierce opposition, inasmuch as he was in a silver country which had gone enthusiastically for Bryan four years before. At one rough mining town he was astonished to find his audience closely attentive but absolutely silent. After the meeting he was asked by a man in the crowd, "I was a spellbinder in holding his audience when his interlocutor explained, "Seth sent around word that he'd kill any son of a gun that peeped."

V.

There was a political episode in 1885 or 1886 that the autobiographer passes over with a mere mention, though he undoubtedly got his fun out of it at the time. This was his nomination as the Republican candidate for Mayor of New York in 1886. He had no chance of being elected, in his own mind and certainly in the minds of some enthusiastic partisans who had partial control of some Republican newspapers. His next public appearance which he now thinks worth notice after his term in the Assembly was his appointment in 1889 to be a Civil Service Commissioner at Washington. It was an excellent appointment for the good of the cause which he has always had much to do with and to which he has always been as true as the frailty of human nature will admit. It was particularly good for the reason that the spoilsmen like Roscoe Conkling used to have great fun with the reformers as mollycoddlers. Mr. Roosevelt admits that there was some color of justification for the fun. "In New York, Boston and Philadelphia there really was a certain mental and moral thinness among very many of the leaders in the civil service reform movement." But nobody ever put him among the mollycoddlers. Moreover, he never pressed the principle of appointment by competitive examination further than it would fairly go, and he is altogether opposed, as he explains here, to a promotion by the method of election. A man must be judged by his work. Of course if his superiors do not care for efficiency in their own departments, as is just now so flagrantly the case with the Department of State, there is no possible way of getting good service in the subordinate places so long as the indifferent head of a department keeps his place at the top. Moreover, Mr. Roosevelt was himself even then, and much more conspicuously has been since a practical politician keenly alive to the exigencies of practical politics.

At a dinner of the Civil Service Association, given perhaps when he was Governor of New York, Wayne MacVeagh convulsed the convives by pointing him out as the concrete example of a successful civil service reformer "who never let go of an office until he had got hold of a better one." As a practical politician he has his sympathy with the bosses, and in these pages he explains clearly enough how such an institution as Tammany Hall came about. There is often much good in the type of boss politics common in big cities, who fulfills toward the people of his district in rough and ready fashion the position of friend and protector. He uses his influence to get jobs for young men who need them. He goes into court for a wild young fellow who has gotten into trouble. He helps out with cash or credit the widow who is in straits or the breadwinner who is crippled or for some other cause temporarily out of work. He organizes clambakes and chowder parties and picnics and is consulted by the local labor leaders when a riot is threatened. For some of his constituents he does proper favors and for others wholly improper favors; but he preserves human relations with all. For the big bosses also he has good words to say, for Mark Hanna and even for M. S. Quay. And of Quay, who had some Indian blood in him, he tells a touching story how on his deathbed he asked and received from Mr. Roosevelt, the President that then was, a promise to look after the interest of the Delaware Indians, whose cause he had himself championed but had no body to succeed him in the championship. All these things were so many guarantees that as Civil Service Commissioner Mr. Roosevelt would not ride rough shod to some purpose. Delight of battle has always been his chief characteristic, and his political failures, it will be commonly agreed, have come for the most part from perfectly unnecessary hunting for trouble. The delight of battle comes back to him after all these years and he calls how he showed up and confuted Grover Cleveland and Governor of Maryland when they made an indiscreet attempt on the operations of the Civil Service Commission in his time.

Nearly all that any one needs to know about the exploits of that regiment everybody knows, either from the volume which Mr. Dooley suggested ought to have been written by Alvin Karpis, or from other sources. The account given here of the author's letter to General Shafter, which was followed by the famous "round robin" to the same officer, has perhaps some points of novelty. Everybody in the army wished the American authorities and the American public to know the military condition of the army in Cuba, but nobody wished to take the chances of a court-martial for insubordination by publishing it. The Colonel of the Rough Riders, as a volunteer for whom military discipline had few terrors, was chosen to bell the cat, which he did in a letter to General Shafter, which the officer declined to receive, but showed over to the representative of the Associated Press, whose presence had been thoughtfully arranged. Secretary Alger, imagining the author of the Roosevelt letter to have been responsible for its publication, took occasion to write for service in that connection. Of the actual course of the Administration he characteristically observes that "criticism of it can come only from misinformation or else from a sentimentality which represents both mental weakness and a moral twist." The volume raises many interesting questions. But no question can arise about its legitimacy.

VI.

The Governorship of New York grew naturally and inevitably out of the colony of the Rough Riders. There was no other such "war record" in the State. Perhaps the most instructive and certainly the most amusing of the disclosures here made concerning the Governorship is the recital of the relations between the Governor and the Boss. The Governor did all that he could, short of a sacrifice of principle to the Boss, to conciliate Boss Platt and to manage his susceptibilities. In most matters he was successful. The nearest approach to an open rupture was on the question of the appointment of a Superintendent of Insurance. Platt insisted on the retention of the actual incumbent, and had of course power to prevent the confirmation of his successor. But the incumbent, created by Platt, did not command the confidence of the public nor of the insurance companies, though the officers of these latter did not venture to oppose him openly on account of their fear that he would hold on in spite of them and look for chances of revenge upon them. In fact, he extracted from them public certificates of good character and efficiency, while they were confidentially reconstituting with their own hands his retention. There had already been a turn-up between the Governor and the Boss over the appointment of a Superintendent of Public Works, in which the Governor had won. But on the question of the Superintendent of Insurance the Boss issued an ultimatum that the incumbent must be retained. The Governor issued a counter ultimatum that the incumbent must be removed. The confidentially reconstituted incumbent undertook to open the deadlock by pleading with the Governor that his political future would be destroyed if he did not yield. "I could only repeat what I had already said, and after half an hour of futile argument I rose and said that nothing was to be gained by further talk and that I might as well go. My visitor repeated that I had this last chance and that if I refused to accept it I refused it, whereas if I accepted anything would be made easy. I shook my head and answered, 'There is nothing to do what I have already said.' He responded, 'You have made up your mind?' and I said, 'I have.' He then said, 'You know it means your ruin,' and I answered, 'Well, we will see about that,' and walked toward the door. He said, 'The fight will begin to-morrow and will be carried on to the bitter end.' I said, 'Yes,' and he added, as I reached the door, 'Good night.' Then, as the door opened, my opponent, or visitor, whichever one chooses to call him, whose face was as impassive and as inscrutable as that of Mr. John Hamlin in a poker game, said 'Hold on.' 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