



Talks With T.R.

From the Diaries of John J. Leary, Jr.



"WHY NOT?"

Colonel Roosevelt asked this question one day when a visitor jokingly remarked that in the event of his returning to the White House, he might have a woman private secretary. The woman in question was Miss Josephine M. Stricker, who became attached to his staff in the Bull Moose days and was his secretary to the end.

"Miss Stricker is a perfectly good secretary," he went on. "She is competent, faithful, loyal. If she is to be criticized at all, it is because she tries to do too much herself. Should I by any chance return to the White House, I should be glad to have a secretary of her attainments. Some of the politicians might not like it, it might be somewhat embarrassing to them, and it would be a precedent, but I am sure that if I could stand it, and she could stand the politicians, we are about the only persons who would have to be considered."

"Come to think of it, is there any good or valid reason why women should not have many places where they are apt to consider exclusive male property? To be sure, Jeanette Rankin has shown a lack of some things to be desired in a member of Congress, but have all the male members been so good? I think not. Now that women are getting the ballot, we must be prepared to see them in many offices hitherto barred to them. Not a few of the most successful men I have known in public life owe their success very largely to the political sense of their wives. Take Blank. He is a nice fellow, and I like him, but I would give more for the opinion of his wife on a matter of practical politics than I would for his. It comes natural to her—she is her father's daughter. Without her, I doubt very much if her husband would have gone as far as he has. With her, he may go farther."

"I mention this couple because you know all about them. Another man I won't name had a reputation for real conservatism. He was as conservative as Senator Allison. You remember that Allison sheep story—where someone remarked that a flock seemed to be closely sheared, and he is said to have answered, 'It appears so from this side.' The man I have in mind was even more conservative at times. He always asked time to think a thing over. It did not take me long to discover that if the thing was of any earthly consequence, he wished time to talk it over with his maiden sister—a lady of the New England schoolmarm type."

"I am not sure that any of us would care to see women in all public tasks. I can think of some that I would dislike seeing any woman in—but any place she can fill as well as the average man she is entitled to. Therefore, to revert, I see no reason why, if I were again in the White House, Miss Stricker would not be a very capable successor to the Honorable Joseph Patrick Flannery."

When he was about to leave the hospital after the serious operation in February, 1918, I spoke of the good work done by Miss Stricker while he was ill.

"Mrs. Roosevelt may tell you of this," I added, "but there are lots of things she has not known about. I imagine."

"Miss Stricker is a 'rump'—a splendid woman and an excellent secretary. Her handling of various matters that have arisen since I came here and when she had to depend on her own judgment has been splendid—she has been very tactful in some very delicate matters. I know that some of my friends do not exactly agree with her—they may swear at her behind her back—but that can make no difference with me."

"They dislike her because she is too faithful to me to please them. Any good secretary comes in for that sort of thing. Take Loeb. He was devoted to me and never considered himself. He was thoroughly disliked by many persons just because he did as I told him. He made good as secretary just as he made good as collector (of the port of New York) and as he is making good in business."

"Loeb is going to be a very wealthy man some of these days, and he deserves to be, for he is honest and a hard worker."

"You do not know Loeb very well? I want you to get acquainted with him—you'll like him, and you'll find you have many things in common. He's a capital fellow."

THE NEW YORK FIGHT OF 1918.

HAD Colonel Roosevelt so chosen, he would have ended his days in the executive mansion in Albany. In the fall of 1918 leaders of a powerful faction in the party used every possible argument and influence to induce him to stand against Charles S. Whitman for the republican nomination.

They believed, and privately the Whitman leaders agreed with them, that they could swamp the convention for "T. R." if he would only say the word. On the other hand, Whitman's lieutenants used every bit of influence they could command to induce him to declare for their man. They were as unsuccessful as the anti-Whitmanites.

"I shall support whoever is nominated," was the best either side could get from him.

"I will not," he declared to me as to others, "be used by Whitman, and I will not allow Whitman's foes to use me as a club on him or to drag any of their chestnuts out of the fire. I shall not interfere in the New York fight or be a candidate for governor."

"It is a fight within the party for the members of the party to settle between themselves. They and the party will be the better off for settling it. I do not know that I could settle it, but if I did, it would leave soreness and ill-feeling and put me in a position I will not take—that of a state boss."

"I have no delusions about Whitman. Neither have I any delusions as to Mr. Barnes and some others who are fighting him. There is no call for me to interfere, and I shall not interfere."

"Believe me, I realize that it is not love for Roosevelt that prompts Whitman's party to praise me. I am too old a bird to be deceived on that point. They talk of me for governor, not because they want me, but because they want to kill off Whitman."

"They won't use me as a black-back."

The effort to induce Colonel Roosevelt

to run for governor was not the only attempt made to use him in New York politics in the last years of his life. An earlier move was in the form of a bill making him food controller of the state. The day this move became public, Colonel Roosevelt called me to his office to say he would not for a moment consider it.

"I shall," said he, "have something to say later in the day. Be at the Union League at five. If you wish, bring one or two of the boys along."

The late N. A. Jennings was the only man of those close to the Colonel I could reach. When he arrived he had a statement ready.

"I have," said he, "tried to be fair to Whitman by emphasizing the fact that the governor should be free to make appointments. I have been governor and I know what that means."

"Furthermore, I am not the man for the place. I know my limitations. And if I were, I would not allow myself to be switched on to a side track at this time. The main thing is to get troops over, to speed up the work, to wake up the country. Food is important, it is extremely important, but there are men who can do this work better than I can and I am going to let some one of them do it."

"I am very much out of patience with those cheerful souls who keep crying, 'Food will win the war.' The war will be won by the men with guns in their hands."

"I have said all this, though not in those words, in this statement. I don't believe you can read my writing, so I'll read it to you."

"You will see," he declared, as he finished reading, "that the real value of this move is that it gives me the opportunity to once more hammer on the need of full, absolute, and complete preparedness."

HOME FOLK.

THERE are many things in Oyster Bay that I would like to see changed, but I cannot well do anything. If I interfered, many would not like it. You see there are some persons in this world who resent being reformed; even by an ex-president of the United States."

Colonel Roosevelt was talking of his relations with the people of Oyster Bay.

These relations were unique and not readily understood by the visitor, who often was surprised to hear a resident speak unkindly of the town's leading citizen. At bottom all liked the Colonel and appreciated what he had done for the town; though many resented the thought that Oyster Bay's sole reason for existence was the need of some place where news dispatches having to do with Colonel Roosevelt might be dated.

The entire truth, I think, is that Roosevelt was not really understood by the home folks. Some resented the fact that only a few of their number ever were asked to Sagamore Hill, where Roosevelt's life, while simple, was essentially that of the lord of the manor. They felt that it was in many ways a world apart, and that the great and important who visited Sagamore Hill were not their kind.

On the other hand, they would have very strongly resented any change. Were they made welcome at any and all times, they would have felt that "T. R." as they invariably called him, would be patronizing them. It was this the Colonel had in mind when he said he was careful not to interfere in town affairs.

"One trouble here," he said, dis-

cussing Oyster Bay and his life there, "is that when there is something worth while here you do not report it. Your papers would not print it if you did, I suppose. It would not be news."

"Take the Christmas exercises at the Cove school. For over 30 years I have been in the Santa Claus there. It began when—no, before—my children started to school. Mrs. Roosevelt for years bought the presents after consultation with the teachers, and learning just what each child wished or should have. I remember she always used to buy at Bloomingdale's because she could get the best value for the money. Of late years she has not been able to do the shopping and the teachers have done that work."

"The celebration is a movable feast, usually fixed after considerable discussion with the teachers. I have been there whenever I could. I always tried to spend Christmas here at home. Sometimes when I was president I could not come, but I was here when I could. It is the usual school celebration—carols, 'Curfew shall not ring tonight,' addresses by myself and other leading citizens—you know what I mean. And of course I have a word for everybody. The occasion would be entirely lost if the little red heads of one family were not appropriately recognized."

"It's a good school and democratic. There is one negro family here that sends its children there. Ted at one time shared a desk with one of them. If that were only known in the south it would damn me forever. But that would not be news, that celebration."

The one person in Oyster Bay who, above all others, voiced his disapproval of the Colonel was Disbrow, the local editor. His was a democratic sheet (it still is, I believe), and Disbrow seemed to feel it incumbent upon him to speak as an individual as strongly as he did when he used the editorial "we." He particularly resented the fact that practically every news item from Oyster Bay in the New York papers referred in some way to the Colonel or his family—a state of affairs he considered most unjust.

How to change things he and others who felt as he did did not know until after Judge Hughes had been favored over the Colonel by the republican convention. Then it occurred to Disbrow and others that a big Independence day celebration, with a parade, a firemen's muster and other trimmings, would for once, at least, result in something other than Roosevelt matter being printed as coming from the bay.

"This man upon the hill is all through," said Disbrow. "The king is dead. We'll have a celebration that will show folks there's something to Oyster Bay but Roosevelt."

Frederic R. Coudert was selected as orator of the day, and everything arranged, even to having the Colonel sit in the grandstand, as a sort of exhibit A. The Colonel, who had an inkling of the motive back of the celebration, agreed to attend on the distinct understanding that he was not to be asked to speak by the committee or the chairman.

When the day came around, a really creditable parade was held, the town was prettily decorated, and half of Long Island was on hand when Mr. Coudert began to speak. So was a detail of bluejackets from a warship, stationed in the bay for the occasion, a battery of moving-picture men, and the usual group of New York reporters. Mr. Coudert, always a good speaker, was at his best, and everything from Disbrow's standpoint was lovely until he was about to conclude.

"However," he said, "I am sure you have heard enough from me. There's another here you'd prefer to hear from, and as I'm bound by no gentleman's agreement, I present to you your fellow townsman, Colonel Roosevelt."

Instantly the picture changed. The "corpus delicti" that was came to life with a crashing, patriotic speech, winding up by inviting the bluejackets and their officers to partake of his hospitality at Sagamore hill, and departed. Next morning Oyster Bay was on the front pages of half the papers of the country, with Mr. Hughes receiving scant room inside. Mr. Coudert was mentioned as having "also spoke," and the parade was given notice in passing.

"Huh," said Maury Townsend, last of the oldest families, next day when asked what he thought of the denouement. "What did they expect? First of all, get them together through some people we know will be scheming to keep squirrels on the ground."

THE VALUE OF MASONRY. COLONEL ROOSEVELT was a Mason, and in a quiet way an enthusiastic one. He was a frequent attendant at Matinecock lodge in Oyster Bay in which he was raised, and when in foreign parts, particularly in out-of-the-way places, made it a rule, when possible, to visit the local lodges. He was as thorough in his Masonry as he was in other things, as witness Harry Russell, well known in the craft, who assisted in his initiation.

"When," says Russell, "the Colonel came up for examining he was let perfect changed if he did not have the work better than his conductor, for he corrected him in an error."

Talking of Oyster Bay affairs at his home one afternoon the Colonel touched on this phase of his activities.

"As you know," he said, turning to me, "I am a member of the local lodge of Masons. You also know, brother, I violate no secret when I say that one of the greatest values in Masonry is that it affords an opportunity for men in all walks of life to meet on common ground, where for the time all men are equal and have one common interest."

"For example, when I was president, the master was Worshipful Brother Douglas, gardener on the estate of one of my neighbors, and a most excellent public-spirited citizen, with whom I liked to maintain contact. Clearly I could not call upon him when I came home. It would have embarrassed him. Neither could he, without embarrassment, call on me. In the lodge it was different. It was over men, though I was president, and it was good for him and good for me."

"I go to the lodge, and even the folks who do not belong to or believe in the order, rather like it that I should go. They seem to feel it's part of the eternal fitness of things. Whenever I return from one of my journeys I always go there to tell of the lodges I have visited, in Nairobi in Africa, in Trinidad, or the quaint little lodge I found away up on the Assumption river. They sort of feel I am their representative to these lodges, and they like it. There's a real community of interest."

"It's the same way with Mrs. Roosevelt. She is an Episcopalian, you know, and belongs to a guild named after a saint—Saint Hilde. I believe

She frequently has the members here. She had them at the White House on several occasions. There's no social rank in the guild, no distinction—the brakeman's wife or the butcher's wife, the equal of her neighbor and all are comfortable. You see, they have a common interest."

"That is the way to make people work together. Get them on common ground, get them together through some people we know will be scheming to keep squirrels on the ground."

HITTING THE BACK TRAIL. "I HAVE no desire to return to the scenes of my ranching days. It's all changed—and I don't want to see it."

I asked the Colonel if he ever longed to retrace his steps through the ranch country he had known as a young man.

"It is a mistake, I think, for one to hit the back trail after many years have passed. One finds things changed, the old picture is destroyed, the romance gone. I was back in the old country once. I saw only a little of it, but that was enough. Why, there was a store down where we had the clash with the Indians. The place is all settled now. The folks there are largely of foreign stock, good people and good citizens, who lead most matter-of-fact lives. It is best that it should be so, but I don't wish to see the place again. I'd rather try and remember it, as it was."

"Change, of course, is the rule of all new countries. I imagine that 20 or 40 years from now the Jungle I hunted over in Africa may be quite settled and as safe as Upper Harlem. This will not be true of the Amazon. A great many years must elapse before that country is little more than a poorly chartered wilderness. It is not attractive to the white man."

"Africa, on the other hand, is. For that reason, it will be comparatively developed when the Amazon country is still raw."

"I shall revisit neither place. I have done my bit. Those who come after me must do theirs. Anyway, I've

no desire to hit the back trail. As a rule, it's not profitable."

ON HEREDITY. ONCE, when Colonel Roosevelt declared that Richard Derby (now Colonel), who married his youngest daughter, Ethel, was a "fine fellow" of whom he was "as proud as I am of my blood sons," I remarked that Dr. Derby came from a splendid family—the Derbys of old Salem, in Massachusetts.

"Yes, I know," he replied; "it is as you say, a splendid family. I do not care what any man says, and I'm no ancestor worshipper, either, blood will tell in a man, a horse, or a dog. In either case you will have culls at times and throw-backs, but in the long run and on the average you will find the blooded animal wins."

"Take our immigrant stock. You will find, I am sure, if you could go back into the history of the immigrant that rises above his fellows, that back of him there was some superior stock; that a father, grandfather, or some remote ancestor was eminent above his fellows in the home land, wherever that might have been."

"It is so with our American negroes. Take my boy, Charlie Lee, for example. Charlie came to me from Captain Fitzhugh Lee, whose boy he had been. Charlie is a first-class citizen, careful, industrious, cleanly, thrifty—a better man than the average run of whites. Charlie's father was General Robert E. Lee's body servant; Charlie takes his name from the Lee family. The father was a superior negro. Doubtless if we could go back, we'd find that his father's father, and beyond, were well above the average of slaves."

"Charlie inherits his good points from his parents, from those people I've been talking about. He is as loyal as a bulldog, perfectly attached to the family and devoted to the children. If it was the life of any one of them or Charlie's, Charlie would not hesitate one second. If he were lucky enough to escape himself, he would not think he had done anything out of the ordinary, and he would probably resent being told that he had."

"I explained at some length, concluding by saying that I would not have cared much had the man not rewarded my taking much trouble to play square with him by misrepresenting my position."

"I can't forget that sort of thing," I said, just a wee bit fearful that my deflection might offend him.

"Jack," he said, hitting his right fist in his left palm, "you are absolutely right, absolutely right. A man has no more right to forget an enemy than he has to forget a friend."

"God knows," he went on after a pause, "I have always tried to do

CHARLIE had an equally high opinion of his adored Colonel. "Colonel Roosevelt has been splendid to me," he said one day. "He's more like a father to us all than an employer. You just be up at the house if one of those Irish girls is sick! The Colonel and Mrs. Roosevelt are just as worried as though she was one of the children and she wouldn't get any better care if she was one of the children."

"But," laughed Charlie at the conclusion of this—for him—very long speech, "what's the use of talking? Quality folks are quality folks wherever you find them."

The Colonel grinned when I one day repeated Charlie's speech to him. "It's about what you should expect of Charlie," said he. "If he were to leave me for any reason, you would find him looking about for some family he felt he could with honor attach himself to and he'd serve it as loyally and as proudly as he now serves mine. Mere money would not get him if what he terms 'quality' were not there. And if I make myself clear, Charlie would honor any family he might go with. If I did not know anything else about it, the fact that Charlie had put his O. K. on it would tell me its members were worth-while people."

"But Charlie won't go. He'll stay with Mrs. Roosevelt and me as long as we live, and then, in all probability, go with one of the children. It will be one of those things everybody will take for granted—Charlie's going with Ted or Ethel or one of the others."

Characteristic Campaign Snapshot

Roosevelt's Grave

Roosevelt Leaving England for Home

ON REMEMBERING FRIEND AND FOE.

IT WAS no part of Colonel Roosevelt's philosophy to turn the other cheek to the smiter. On the contrary, he very much favored payment in kind—if the party of the other part was worthy of attention.

In a word, his philosophy forbade him to forget friends or foes, and it was his regret that he had not had time to attend to all of the latter. This I learned one day when meeting him at the Grand Central terminal he invited me to ride uptown with him.

"I have something to tell you," he said. "I wanted you to know that I have just given Julian Street a statement for use in Collier's endorsing Furry Mitchell for re-election. I thought you would be glad to know of it."

"On the contrary, I am sorry," I replied. "Why?"

"First, because you are binding yourself to a sure loser, and I don't like to see you with a loser. Second, and less important, I cannot be with you on this."

"You surprise me," said the Colonel. "Why can't you be with me?"

"Colonel," I replied, "I am sorry. If this were anything to you personally, I'd follow you anywhere, but it isn't. On the other hand, this man and I are not friends, for he went out of his way to try and do me an injury. No man of his position can do that to me. A little fellow I'd ignore, but a man in his high position I won't."

"What did he do?" asked the Colonel.

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