

Talks With T.R. From the Diaries of John J. Leary, Jr.



Roosevelt And His First Grandchild In 1913.



Roosevelt At The Polls.



Interviewing The Colonel.

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"WELL-MEANING FOOLS."

"If they ever get Mr. Wilson out here, I hope they'll bar that trick. It's pretty, but it affords the best cover for evil-minded persons I have ever seen. A man with a bomb could not ask a better opportunity."

Colonel Roosevelt was referring to a feature of his reception in Springfield, O., that, pretty as any picture, he did not exactly like. It was a shower of peonies aimed at the stage as he made his appearance.

Near Springfield is a famous peony nursery. From it bulbs are shipped all over the world. For the blooms of its 40,000 plants there is a rather limited market, so once a year there is "peony day" when the flowers are sold about the streets for the benefit of the Red Cross or some other charity. On the occasion of the colonel's visit there was a "war-chest" drive on, so the blooms were given away, and some one conceived the idea of giving him "a shower" when he reached the auditorium.

This building was filled to capacity when he arrived. Each of the 3000 or more who had jammed their way in had at least one peony blossom; most of them had several. As he appeared emerging from the wings, the audience arose and began hurling the great, luscious blooms at the stage. For a few minutes the air was full of them, the hall looking for all the world as though an army had taken to hurling snowballs. While it lasted, Colonel Roosevelt held his place in the entrance. From my seat I could see his jaw set, and his head half shake. It was clear he did not exactly approve of the demonstration.

"Wasn't that flower thing in the hall a fool affair?" he asked that evening.

I agreed that it was, adding that it was very pretty and that those responsible meant well.

"Exactly," said he. "They meant well. But I have found that one of the real dangers of life are people who mean well. You never can tell what they will do. You can tell, or at least be on guard against those who do not mean well. Some of the greatest embarrassments of my life have been caused by people with the best of intentions that did not know it was loaded."

ON COLLEGE LIFE.

THE two classes of college boys who get the least out of college life are those who have no money and those who have too much. Neither poverty nor great riches are desirable for the boy in college.

Colonel Roosevelt had asked my plans for my boy, and I had told him I meant to send him to Harvard "if I had the necessary funds."

"It does not," said he, "require very much money to send a boy through Harvard or for that matter Yale or any of the big schools. The fact is that the boy who has too much money in college is just as badly off as the poor fellow who has none. He has every sympathy with the boy who works his way through college, but I realize that the poor fellow who has to divide his time between work, classroom, and study does not begin to get all a man should get out of college. He does not get the real spirit of the university, and he may come out with a mass of undigested knowledge, worn physically and mentally and a narrow man. He'd have done as well in many cases working at some trade and devoting his spare time to a public library."

"On the other hand, the boy who has unlimited money has unlimited opportunities to spend it, to get into trouble and acquire habits that will be a handicap in later life. With the aid of tutors he gets his degree, and leaves college just as the extremely poor boy without having gotten the real benefit of the college. Both have been in but not of the college."

"Unlike either of these, the boy of moderate means, enough to permit him to take a real part in all college activities, but not enough to permit or induce extravagance, gets about everything there is to be had. They are men who really benefit by college."

until he could accumulate enough funds to make his stay in the school less of a constant drill.

"That, I know, is not quite so romantic, but it is eminently more practical."

"However, one can never tell how a university man will turn out, or what a university will turn out. Just now the two most eminent of the alumni of my college are Boies Penrose and Bill Barnes."

ON PROHIBITION.

COLONEL ROOSEVELT was not of those who favored the 18th amendment to the constitution prohibiting the manufacture, importation, or sale of intoxicating liquors. To his mind prohibition was certain to cause unrest and dissatisfaction; he doubted the fairness of removing the saloon without providing something to take its place in the life of the tenement-dwellers; and he was inclined to think the liquor question was settling itself.

"You and I can readily recall the time," he said to me one day, "when it was not bad form for substantial men of affairs, for lawyers, doctors—professional men generally—to drink in the middle of the day. It is good form no longer, and it's not now done. It is not so long ago that practically every man in politics drank more or less, when hard drinking, if not the rule, was not the exception. Now the hard drinker, if he exists at all among the higher grade, is a survival of what you might call another day."

"Take Tammany. No one holds that up as an organization of model men, yet I am sure that were you to make a canvass of its district leaders, you would find pretty close to a majority if not an actual majority are teetotalers. Tammany no longer sends men with ability, and a weakness for liquor, to Albany. It may and it probably will send another of Tom Grady's ability, but it will not send one who drinks as hard."

"This, you may rest assured, is not a matter of morals. It is, however, a matter of efficiency. Tammany wants results and it is sufficiently aware of the times to know that drink and efficiency do not go hand in hand in these days of card indexes and adding machines."

"It is the same in your profession. Not long ago most of the boys were fairly competent drinking men; some I know were rated as extra competent by administrators, perhaps, as it is with leagues. Now the drinking man, at least the man who drinks enough to show the effects, is rare. The reason: your editors won't stand for it. As Jack Slaght put it the other day—I think it was Jack—a reporter in the old days was expected to have a 'birthday' about so often and nothing was thought of it. Now, as Slaght puts it, he is allowed but two. The first time, still quoting your friend Slaght, who at times is inclined to use plain language, he gets hell; the next time he gets fired. That is so, is it not?"

I assured him that Slaght was substantially correct.

"It's not a matter of morals there, though" (with a laugh). "I will admit you boys do not lack morals. As with Tammany, it is a question of getting results exactly as it is with the doctor, the lawyer, and the judge. 'Drinking declined once it became an economic question, or at least as soon as it was recognized as an economic factor. It then began to be unfashionable at least to over-drink—and the man who never drank at all ceased to be unusual in any trade or calling."

"I am, however, sorry that they are pressing prohibition so hard at this time. It is, I think, all right, desirable, in fact, to limit or perhaps prohibit the so-called hard liquors, but it is a mistake, I think, to stop or try to stop the use of beers and the lighter wines."

"If this thing goes through, where does the social side of life come in? We both know that a 'dry' dinner is apt to be a sad sort of affair. It will make dining a lost art."

"Likewise, I do not know how the working classes will take to the change. You and I have no need of the saloon. We have other places to go. But you and I know that the saloon fits into a very definite place in the life of the tenement-dweller. I do not know what he will do without it; what substitutes the reformers think they can give him for it. I do not believe they have thought of that, or that they care much."

"Frankly, I do not know what will be the outcome. Prohibition, if it comes, will cause ill-feeling and unrest—it will be a disturbing factor—but I do not look for anything really serious, for after all is said and done, the fact remains that the American workman is a law-abiding individual."

"When it comes, prohibition may or may not be permanent. You may, however, be sure of one thing—it will

be extremely difficult to repeal, once it becomes part of the Constitution."

Responsibility for prohibition Colonel Roosevelt placed squarely upon the shoulders of the liquor dealers good and bad.

"Some liquor dealers I have known," said he, "were good, well-meaning citizens, who kept decent places. Take the Oakeses, father and son, who own the Oyster Bay Inn. I should be very sorry to see them lose their license. There is a clean, respectable place. Again, there is John Brosnan's place in New York. No one ever heard a complaint against John. His place has been no more offensive than if he sold dry goods."

"But the John Brosnans are responsible for the plight they now find themselves in, because they have stood neutral when they did not fight to save men who can drive. Had the Brosnans and Oakeses and men of their stamp lined up with decent citizens in closing up dives, they would have served the community and themselves. However, they did not, and the situation is as it is."

"I shall take no part in the contest one way or the other. It must be settled without me. I shall not allow it or anything else to ever me from the work we're now in."

"The work we're now in" was the effort to speed up the war by arousing the American people to the necessity of winning a "peace with victory."

PERSHING AND WOOD.

ONE thing which annoyed Colonel Roosevelt was the public's persistence in believing that it was to him that General Leonard Wood owed his big jump in the army; in a word, to his confounding the case of Wood with that of Pershing.

"The man they are thinking of," he used to say, "is Pershing. It was he who jumped over the heads of several hundred other army officers. I'd do it again, by thunder, if the same occasion arose! Wood got his big jump from McKinley, and all I ever gave him were the promotions due him in the usual course of seniority. I've tried a hundred times to straighten this out in the public mind, but I don't suppose I'll ever succeed. The public seems to wish to believe this myth."

"President McKinley gave Wood his big jump in the regular establishment, after he took him out of the Rough Riders. I gave Pershing his big jump long after I had succeeded Mr. McKinley in the White House."

"It came about in this way: Pershing was doing brilliant work in the Philippines. All the official reports showed him a man of energy and initiative, who could be depended upon to do what he was sent to do, and about whom you did not have to worry. The unofficial reports that came back squared with all this. Both left no room for doubt as to the caliber and quality of the man."

"Now about this time the line of promotion in the army became clogged. It needed new colonels and lieutenant-colonels, but the law would not permit the appointment of men immediately below these ranks that were of the quality needed. Congress would not change the law."

"I had, however, the right to appoint brigadier-generals. I made Pershing one. Therefore, you might say, to advance Pershing above his elders meant an invitation to charges of favoritism, or, as the army and navy sometimes put it, 'the three p's—politics, petticoat and a pull.' Not to advance him for this reason would have been cowardly and unfair. There was nothing for me to do but name him and let the heathen rage."

"After I had done so, Warren came to me and thanked me."

"I said to him: 'Senator, I am very fond of you, but this appointment has not been made on your account. You owe me no thanks for it. I am promoting Captain Pershing, not because he is your son-in-law, but in spite of the row that relationship will stir up. You don't owe me a thing on account of it.'"

"Warren did not seem to like this, but it was the truth, and there was no reason why it should be sugar-coated for him. However" (this with a laugh), "he did not oppose the appointment."

"Time has proven that I was right. Mr. Wilson has proved it by his selection of Pershing, first for Mexico, and now to command the armies in France. Sims of the navy, another man I was accused of favoring, Mr. Wilson has also chosen for impor-



Colonel Roosevelt On Steamer Imperator.

tant work, fairly good proof that my judgment of these men when they were juniors was sound."

"But he has not approved of Wood," I suggested.

"No, he has not. He has used Wood very badly and very unfairly. I might say he has also been very foolish in the way he has handled Wood. If he wanted to sidetrack him, he could have done it by sending him to Hawaii or the Philippines and leaving him there. But he did not have the courage to do this; he adopted halfway measures, and as a result, Wood has been like a sore thumb to him—always in the way and doing things so well that the public won't allow Mr. Wilson to forget him."

"Wood is a good soldier, and a splendid organizer. So is Pershing. Pershing, in addition, is something of a courtier. Wood is not. Wood has been plain and outspoken and he's suffered for it."

"Wood is a big man who can look on a problem from every angle. He makes few mistakes, but he's big enough, when he makes one, to admit the error, and he always has patience with the other fellow's opinion. 'I am very fond of Wood, and I know he is of me, but in my years in the presidency Wood never took any advantage of our intimacy or in the slightest degree presumed on our friendship. If anything, he leaned backward in this respect.'"

FONDNESS FOR THE KHAKI LAD.

JACK, I understand some of Pershing's wounded are here. I must see them."

Wherever there were men from overseas—and in the early days of the war there were almost invariably wounded or gassed—Colonel Roosevelt wanted to meet them. If they were on hand when he arrived, so much the better. If they were not, he would ask the local committee where they were to be seen.

On trains and in other public places he would always stop to greet them, and ask of their experiences, their commands, and how they were getting along. They were welcome, too, at Sagamore Hill. After the establishment of the great camps on Long Island he was at home to the "rookies" on Saturdays, and after a while a reception for them was a fixed feast each week. For them there would be refreshments, he had something to say to each of them, and glad to show all the famous "trophy room."

Bluejackets, too, were as welcome as the men of the other arm of the service. The marvel of those meetings was the number of mutual acquaintances the Colonel and soldiers and sailors would discover.

"Colonel," a lad would say, "I am from Blank. John Smith there says to remember him to you."

"That's splendid! Tell him I am very glad to hear from him. How did he ever come out with that mine of his?"

Or it might be a request to be remembered to the village doctor or judge. He knew somebody in nearly every place they went to mention.

In Detroit a veteran boatman, recalled from retirement to assist in recruiting, hailed the Colonel.

"I'm mighty glad to see you again," exclaimed T. R. "Let me see, the last time I saw you, you were on top of a turret on a ship in Italian waters—you and two others. I'll have your name in a moment—isn't it Johnson?"

"Yes, sir," said the proud sailor, swelling his chest a bit, "I was a bosun then."

Johnson, by the way, was a navy character, known in the seven seas as "Steamboat" Johnson.

"Steamboat Johnson—that bosun—is tickled to death at your remembering him," I said to the Colonel afterward.

"That's it, 'Steamboat.' I knew he had some such outlandish moniker, as they might say in our beloved New York. That helped me recall him. I remember an officer explaining that he had amazing skill in handling steam launches; could do as much with one as most good seamens could with a fair-sized tug. He's a good sample of the old-time navy man. I believe he's more than half glad of this war—it keeps him in the service."

Once I spoke of the Saturday receptions at Sagamore Hill as a nice thing.

"I'm glad to hear you say that," he answered. "I rather believe the boys enjoy it. I know I do. I'm glad to have them come, and the obligation is all mine. If I can extend them any little courtesy I am glad to do it. It is no more than I would thank another man for doing for my boys. Mrs. Roosevelt feels about it just as I do—she's glad to have them come."

"They won't let me go to war, but they cannot prevent my admiring those who are privileged to go—that, and minding the grandchildren."

The grandchildren frequently took part in these festivities. Once little "Dick" Derby, baby son of the Colonel's younger daughter, Ethel, came out, and espousing a flag preceeded to salute the colors in true man-of-war style. A group of bluejackets present applauded.

"We start them young out here," said the delighted Colonel.

It was on this occasion that the Colonel, showing his visitors through the "trophy room," called attention to an enormous pair of elephant tusks, said to be the largest in the world.

noon, venturing to make what he seldom did—a pun—in showing a book Kaiser Wilhelm, in happier days, had sent him.

"You see, gentlemen," said the colonel, pointing to a grammatical error in the inscription, "the kaiser did not know his English very well even then."

Wilhelm had used "to" where he should have spelled it "too."

ON BEING SIXTY.

COLONEL, I asked on the eve of his last birthday, "how does it seem to be 60—you know you will be 60 on Sunday?"

"I do not know that it makes a bit of difference," he replied. "At any rate, I had not noticed any, or that I feel any different than when I was 59 or 57."

"You are looking well," I said. "I think I will emphasize that in my story of Sunday as sort of an answer to those who are spreading the report that you are a decrepit old man."

"Do so, by all means," he said. "It might be of interest to say that this week I have been pulling a boat—Mrs. Roosevelt and I had a little picnic down at Lloyd's Neck one day this week. My boat is rather heavy and it is a good pull, but I did not notice that it affected me any."

"A man should not be old at 60 if he takes reasonable care of himself. I would be all right if it were not that I have some reminders yet of that old Brazilian fever. It has come back at times in a very disagreeable sort of way. Aside from that I am all right. A man of 60, though, should be in a position where he can take things easy—be in a position where he can do those things he may like to do and not be compelled to do a lot of other things that younger men can do as well."

"A man has done his duty he will have his share of work done at that age, and ordinarily be in a position to retire. If he has not done his duty he may not be called upon to decide the question, for my experience has been that the man who does not do his work is the kind who abuses his health, and if alive, is not much good at 60, or for that matter, years before."

"One cannot, however, lay down any general rule on that sort of thing. Some men do their best work at 60 or even later. It depends on the man and on circumstances that surround him or that may arise after he has thought his best work was behind him."

"How old are you?" he suddenly asked.

"I told him. 'You've got a long way ahead of you yet. You'll be in harness many years yet and won't want to think of retiring before you are 60. Then you will probably insist on doing some work. You won't be so foolish as to wish to quit altogether even at what now seems to you to be a pretty good age for a newspaper man. The man who has been active all of his life who, on a given date, arbitrarily shuts down, is inviting trouble for himself. By shutting down he invites a breakdown.'"

THE COLONEL AND THE TREATY.

THIS country must keep its absolute economic independence and raise or lower economic barriers as its interests demand, for we have to look out for the interests of our own workingman."

"We must insist on the preservation of the Monroe doctrine; we must keep the right to close the Panama canal to our enemies in war time, and we must not undertake to interfere in European, Asiatic or African matters with which we ought to have properly no concern."

That was Colonel Roosevelt's position as to what the peace treaty should in part contain as expressed by him after Mr. Wilson had announced his intention of going to Paris, but before he sailed. In this talk he covered the then nebulous field of treaty-making, and as my notes show, strongly indicated that

he foresaw the complications that arise in the senate when the finished document was presented to that body for action. It was clear that he was not of those who approved of Mr. Wilson's plan to take part in the peace conference and he was very much of the opinion that a definite statement of his position was due the American people from Mr. Wilson.

He also made it clear that he was fearful the now almost forgotten "14 points" would be pressed to the disadvantage of our allies.

"President Wilson," he said, "has not given the slightest explanation of what his views are or why he is going abroad. He pleads for unity, but he himself is responsible for any division among the American people as regards the peace conference at this time."

"He has never permitted the American people to pass on his peace proposals, nor has he ever made these propositions clear and straightforward."

"As for the '14 points,' so far as the American people have expressed any opinion upon them, it was on November 5 when they rejected them."

"What Mr. Wilson says of these '14 points' is sheer nonsense. He says the American army was fighting for them. Why, there was not one American soldier in a thousand that ever heard of them! The American army was fighting to smash Germany. The American people wanted Germany smashed."

"The allies have never accepted the '14 points.' The United States has never accepted them. Germany and Austria enthusiastically accepted them. Here certain individuals, including President Wilson, Mr. Hearst, Mr. Vrebeck, as I understand it, and a number of pro-Germans and pacifists and international socialists have accepted them; but neither the American people nor the American congress has accepted them."

"Mr. Wilson himself has rejected at least one outright and has interpreted another in the directly opposite sense to its plain and obvious meaning."

"The simple truth is that some of the '14 points' are thoroughly misleading under any interpretation and that most of the others are so vague and ambiguous that it is nonsense to try to do anything with them until they have been defined and made definite."

"Inasmuch as Mr. Wilson is going over, it is earnestly to be hoped that it is his business not to try to be an umpire between our allies and our enemies, but act loyally as one of the allies. We haven't suffered anything like as much and we have not rendered as much service as the leading allies. It is the British navy and the French, British and Italian armies that have done most to bring about the downfall of Germany and therefore the safety of the United States. It is our business to stand by our allies."

"The British Empire imperatively needs the greatest navy in the world and this we should instantly concede. Our need for a great navy comes second to hers and we should have the second largest navy in the world. Similarly France needs greater military strength than we do, but we should have our young men trained to arms on the general lines of the Swiss system."

"The phrase 'freedom of the seas' may mean anything or nothing. If it is to be interpreted as Germany interprets it, it is thoroughly mischievous. There must be no interpretation of the phrase that would prevent the English navy in the event of any future war from repeating the tremendous service it has rendered in this war."

"The British must, of course, keep the colonies they have captured." Here the Colonel laid down his irreducible minimum of what the United States should insist upon printed above.

"As for Mr. Wilson at the peace conference, he concluded, 'It is his business to stand by France, England and our other allies and present with them a solid front to Germany.' (Concluding installment will be printed next Sunday.)