

TWO BOOKS ABOUT PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT.*

NO matter what opinion one may entertain concerning Mr. Roosevelt, either as a man or as a statesman, there is no doubt that his personality is extremely interesting to all of us, especially at the present time. The comparison which has been so often made between the American President and the German Kaiser is a very apt one after certain allowances have been made. Both men are impulsive, impatient of restraint, self-conscious, aggressive, and patriotic. Both are egoists in no bad sense of the word. Both are sincere and at the same time intolerant; and because they both have the defects of their qualities, they excite in many minds an indescribable feeling of irritation. The main difference between them is that the German Kaiser is essentially a genius while Mr. Roosevelt is not. Even his personal friend, Mr. Leupp, makes no such claim for him. In the first chapter of this very interesting book occurs the following statement, which is the frank expression of an unusually sane judgment:

President Roosevelt is not a genius. He is a man of no extraordinary natural capacity. As author, lawmaker, administrator, huntsman, athlete, soldier, what you will, his record contains nothing that might not have been accomplished by any man of sound physique and good intelligence. Such prestige as he enjoys above his fellows he has acquired partly by hard work and partly by using his mother-wit in his choice of tasks and his method of tackling them. He has simply taken up and completed what others have dropped in discouragement, sought better ways of doing what others have done before, labored always in the open, and remembered that the world moves.

And in another passage, Mr. Leupp records another opinion which is no less candid:

*The Man Roosevelt. By Francis E. Leupp. Illustrated. New York: D. Appleton & Co.

*Theodore Roosevelt, the Citizen. By Jacob A. Riis. Illustrated. New York: The Outlook Company.

Mr. Roosevelt fairly lives in an atmosphere of superlatives. He will speak of a "perfectly good man with a perfectly honest motive," where all that he intends to say is that the man is well-meaning. He is "delighted" where most of us are pleased. The latest visitor is "just the very man I wanted to see," and "nothing I have heard in a long time has interested me so much" as the passing bit of information.

It is such remarks as these that induce the reader to accept Mr. Leupp's general estimate of the President as being absolutely fair. He does indeed write with rare discretion and discrimination, eschewing all extravagance of eulogy and illustrating all his judgments by the citation of interesting and well-authenticated facts. Few persons have had so good an opportunity of studying Mr. Roosevelt as a public man at such close range; and it is a real tribute to the President that he has inspired in the author of this book so warm and so sincere a friendship. The note of intimacy and the personal touch are everywhere in evidence, and they give to these pages a vitality and a fascination which justify the very wide popularity which the volume has received.

It ought always to be remembered, however, that it is a book by one friend about another, and that there are certain reservations and omissions in it which would not be found in the work of an author who was less hampered by personal considerations. We do not mean by this that Mr. Leupp has intended to mislead his readers; but only that he has desired to present his subject in the most favourable light. For this reason, he has, for example, dealt very charily with Mr. Roosevelt's unprecedented promotion of General Leonard Wood, and has skated rapidly over some very thin ice in his treatment of the President's attitude towards the Addicks scandal in Delaware. His pages on the Booker Washington dinner and the President's negrophilism constitute a piece of special pleading. All the same, the human interest of the whole study is very great;

and if the Republican managers are well advised, they will circulate Mr. Leupp's book as a campaign document in the event of the President's nomination, which may be accepted as a moral certainty. Thousands of readers will be convinced by it of Mr. Roosevelt's ideal fitness for the presidency; for they will accept the picture of him given here as being not only interesting and picturesque but as drawn with an impartial hand.

Turning to the book by Mr. Riis, we find in it almost a justification of the charge that is sometimes made against Americans to the effect that they have no sense of humour. It is absolutely certain that Mr. Riis can have none, or if he has, that he kept it in abeyance while turning out so fatuous a piece of writing. The *Evening Post* of this city has cleverly suggested that the book ought to be entitled *Teddy: by Jake*, and the suggestion does, in fact, serve as a complete commentary and criticism. Mr. Riis's subject is surely not the President of the United States. It is just Teddy, *tout court*—at least wherever it is not Jake. For this reason it would have been sure of a warmer welcome had it appeared about a year and a half ago when strenuous Teddyism was for the moment popular. At the present time it is rather *mal à propos*. The country has become rather weary of Teddyism pure and simple, and is experiencing a reaction in favour of dignity, decorum, and self-control as among the more essential qualities for the Chief Magistrate of the nation. Tree-chopping, bronco-busting, domestic naval reviews for the amusement of the children, unlimited talk about "weaklings" and "my regiment," are just a little out of fashion now. The President and his immediate advisers appear to have recognised this fact, but not so Mr. Riis, who got up steam some time ago and is now tearing along at high pressure, utterly regardless.

The book is a curious *olla* about equally divided in space between Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Riis—*sen 'Jake' libentius audit*. In fact, one of the most attractive passages in it refers to a visit which the latter gentleman once made to Chicago where he met one of the local statesmen who wished to do him honour. After "opening wine" for his respected guest, he spoke confidentially in Mr. Riis's ear

as follows—giving him thereby the freedom of the city:

"B'y, the town is yours! Take it in. Go where ye like; do with it what ye like. And if ye run up against trouble—ye know, the h'ys will have their little scrap with the police—come to me for bail—any crime! any crime!"

One mystery has been cleared up by these pages and that is the authorship of the remarkable article on Mr. Roosevelt which appeared in the *Review of Reviews* in October, 1900. That whole article was a gem, a rare and wonderful manifestation of a soul without a spark of humour. Perhaps our readers may recall the climax of that article, since we referred to it at the time. This climax is contained in three sentences which we venture to reprint.

One evening at Philadelphia, in June, 1900, when his rooms were crowded with powerful men discussing whether or not his impending nomination for the Vice-Presidency was wise, and while an immense body of cheering paraders crowded the street below, Theodore Roosevelt sat in an inner room, alone, absorbed in reading Thucydides. He was resting.

We are now able to inform the world on the authority of Mr. Riis that the author of this awesome, hushful, and almost too sacred revelation, is Dr. Albert Shaw. The mention of it has evidently put Mr. Riis to his trumps, for he has himself produced something which we hesitate to rank below that other masterpiece. It relates to the time when Mr. Roosevelt was a Police Commissioner in New York. Listen to the *voix émue* of Mr. Riis:

I remember once when I got excited—over some outrage perpetrated upon American missions or students in Turkey, I think. It was in the old days in Mulberry Street, and I wanted to know if our ships could not run the Dardanelles and beard the Turk in his capital.

"Ah," put in Colonel Grant, who was in the Police Board, "but those forts have guns."

"Guns!" said Roosevelt; nothing more. It is impossible to describe the emphasis he put upon the word. But in it I seemed to hear Decatur at Tripoli, Farragut at Mobile. "Guns!"

We think that any comment of ours would grate upon the reader's feelings. He must be left to enjoy so delicious a morsel as this in reverent silence.

H. T. P.