THEODORE ROOSEVELT AS MAN OF LETTERS

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"Practical efficiency is common, and lofty idealism not uncommon; it is the combination which is necessary, and the combination is rare."

--Theodore Roosevelt

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Preface

My purpose in writing this essay is to look at that aspect of Theodore Roosevelt so often neglected: the literary. It is apparent that the mass of the American people who consider literature at all are unaware that the twenty-fifth President of the United States was in addition to being a politician, an earnest and capable man of letters.

His forte was not belles lettres. It was the next thing to it, however, for his adventure books ring with the spirit and intensity of Wolfe, the romance of Wister, and the realism of London. There is quality in such books as *African Game Trails* and *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*. When one has read not only the adventure books, but the fine historical study *The Winning of the West*, there is good reason to suspect that had Roosevelt lived a strictly literary life he would have carved for himself a niche in the list of secure American authors. As it is, his importance as a writer rests merely on the fact that he was President.

My thanks are due to Dr. Russel B. Nye, who suggested the subject and whose constant supervision, and sincere interest in this investigation have made it a pleasure rather than a chore.

I am indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Donald T. Grey for the faith they have demonstrated by making it financially possible for me to attend Graduate School. I am obliged to the staff of the Michigan State College Library for the kind and courteous service they rendered, and to Mrs. Louella Shipman for advising me as to the form of the essay.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Doris, who aided me tremendously in revising, proofing, and typing the manuscript.

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CHAPTER I

Theodore Roosevelt: Man of Letters, Man of Action

It is worthy of note that Theodore Roosevelt, more than any of his twenty-four predecessors, was known previous to his election to the Presidency as a man of letters. His books, as well as the speeches, essays, periodical contributions, letters, adventure books, and even his autobiography have been largely neglected by literary critics and historians, in spite of the fact that they have an innate interest and value quite apart from their author's activities in other fields.

Many presidents have been men of letters --there is no need to repeat the already familiar list-- but none are thought of as being primarily interested in writing. No one thinks of Lincoln as a writer, yet there are few documents in American literature that can match the purity and conciseness of his Gettysburg address. Woodrow Wilson was a very good historian and John Quincy Adams wrote poetry. It is true of Roosevelt today that few people think of him as a writer. All the trite cliches have been trotted out yearly in the history classes over a long period of time and there is always a vague connection between the grinning cartoon of Roosevelt straddling the Panama Canal, carrying a heavy club, with the caption 'speak softly, but carry a big stick.' When Roosevelt is mentioned as a man of letters, one is met either with open mouthed incredulity or sly, self-explanatory smirks.

Harpers Weekly, extremely anti-Roosevelt, gave him credit for being

second only to P. T. Barnum in reknown.[1] He was extemely popular, but

[1] "Roosevelt and His Boswell," LV (March 4, 1911), 11-12.

his popularity must be described as of an ambivalent nature: he was either hated intensely, or adored to the point of deification. Parents read Letters to His Children to their little ones before they were tucked into bed at night, perhaps dumbfounded that such a great man could be so utterly human as to experience the same emotions toward children that they themselves felt. If he is a legend now, he was no less a legend during his lifetime. One writer was surprised, if not shocked, that

> he did not ride up the aisle [of a Boston auditorium] in uniform and on a bucking bronco; he did not fire two guns into the air as he cavorted about; he did not uncoil a lariat and haul up to the stage any of the old gentlemen who sat in the front row. It was one of my first disillusionments with the newspapers. Yet I am convinced there were persons in the audience, and many more in the city round about, who confidently expected him to do exactly these things. They never relinquished these expectations.[2]

[2] E. Pearson, "Theodore Roosevelt," Outlook, CVL (March 30, 1927), 41.

But on the other side of the fence were the Roosevelt haters who wielded equally fervent pens:

> One can have respect for a sincere radical, for an honest fanatic, for an agitator or leveler who believes he is doing God's will; but it is hard to be patient with a man who talks big but acts mean, whose eye is always to the main chance politically, and who lets no friendship, no generosity, no principle, no moral scruple stand for a moment between himself and the goal upon which he has set his overmastering ambition.[3]

[3] "Mendacious Journalism," Outlook, XCVI (September 3, 1910), 10a.

Like Franklin D. Roosevelt, he was a man for whom one could not contain mixed emotions. He was called liar and cheat, money-grabber, and all the other names which opposing parties are wont to heap upon each other. At the same time he was blessed with loving appellations by such highly respected men as Henry Cabot Lodge and John Burroughs.

But in all his action, all his deeds, it is difficult for a moment to believe that Roosevelt was anything but sincere. Editors and reporters, caricaturists and critics could all rail at him but "personal contact with T. R. had an amazing effect to make them love the man they were fighting."[4] He writes of his hunting trips in Africa with utter

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[4]Pearson, p. 145.

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humility; in his letters there is a warm quality which intensifies their interest twofold. There is nothing of the man "who talks big but acts mean" and is in possession of "no moral scruple"[5] in the lines that John

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[5]"Mendacious Journalism," p. 10a.

Hays penned to his diary May 8, 1904:

> The president was reading Emerson's 'Days' and came to the wonderful closing line: 'I, too late, Under her solemn fillet saw the scorn.' I said, 'I fancy you do not know what that means.' --'Oh, do I not? Perhaps the greatest men do not, but I in my soul know I am but the average man, and that only marvelous good fortune has brought me where I am.'[6]

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[6]U. R. Thayer, "John Hays' Years with Roosevelt," Harpers, CXXXI (September, 1915), 582.

While these lines do speak well for him, Roosevelt could shift to

the attitude of the bully from the attitude of humble sincerity. He had little patience except when he wanted to exercise it. Even inactive Sunday golfers are willing to stand up against a man that was so ardent in his advocation of the strenuous life he could not discuss the matter but had to hurtle it at them. His naturally bold spirit made him pugnacious --a quality which shows up in his journalistic writings. His character is as many-sided as his activity-filled life.

C. W. Ferguson has indicated the tragic element in Roosevelt's reputation: "he was a man of remarkable literary talent who is known chiefly for his politics."[7] There can be no question left in a person's

[7] "Roosevelt --Man of Letters," Bookman, LXIV, 726.

mind after even the most cursory survey of the fields in which he wrote, that had Roosevelt devoted his entire life to literature, renouncing his driving interest in so many other fields, he would have achieved for himself an enduring position in American literature, a position which would have been challenged by few other men. Brander Matthews has referred to Roosevelt's "polygonal" nature, asserting that

> Roosevelt will hold a secure place among our statesmen, our men of science, and our men of letters, demanding due appraisal by experts in statecraft, in natural history and in literature.[8]

[8] The Tocsin of Revolt and Other Essays, (New York: Scribner's, 1922), p. 232.

Matthews goes on to make the inevitable comparison between Benjamin Franklin and Roosevelt. While both were authors, it seems justifiable

to say that Franklin was an author by accident, Roosevelt by choice, or, better yet, by profession. Even while at Harvard Roosevelt began to write his first book, The Naval War of 1812, a book which is still in a position of some authority. Franklin was undoubtedly the greater man, if only because he lived during a period when events made it possible for his talents to be taxed to their utmost. Roosevelt leaves the impression that he was searching for greater things to do, and could not find them --like any man he wanted to be remembered, to build pyramids which would outlast those of Cheops.

In addition, Franklin was a scientist and a philosopher, as well as a man of letters. Roosevelt was neither. Where Franklin was creative, Roosevelt was not. There was a peculiar flaw in Roosevelt's thinking apparatus which kept him from constructing any great monument of thought, which kept him from contributing much to the world of knowledge which he held in such high esteem. He could not analyse.

> His mind worked by the method of comparison, not of causation. With the vividness of genius he saw both sides of a question --or, rather, of a situation; for he was intensely human and dramatic to the verge of melodrama.[9]

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[9]John Corbin, "Roosevelt in His Writings," Saturday Review of Literature, III (February 19, 1927), 590-591.

He repeatedly says "On the other hand" --and "Yet we must remember that--." Had he been confronted with the problems of contributing to the erection of a constitution there is reason to believe that he would have blustered forward in the realm of vague generalities, unable to comprehend and utilize the fundamental principles which need

to be taken under consideration. Franklin could see the basic issues, if not the ultimate consequences of those issues, and could proceed logically from that position.

Roosevelt could not understand, nor did he want to understand, the creative mind. His whole concept of strenuous living coupled with intense practicality kept him traveling on a plane far below the genius-idealist. When confronted with philosophical ideas he first asked whether or not the concept could be put to expedient use; if not, he would ask, of what value is it to the betterment of society? A teacher once remarked that she would rather do a good job teaching one student than a poor job teaching several. Roosevelt considered her attitude wicked. The greatest good for the greatest number; preserve the forests and wildlife for tomorrow. Action was the dominant note in Roosevelt, and we find it hard to imagine him having much patience with those contemplative individuals who dreamed up lovely verse; yet he was fully capable of appreciating great poetry. Never does he mention Thoreau, to my knowledge. Perhaps he found obnoxious the picture of the poet "on quiet evenings, alone in his boat under the stars"[10]

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[10]Robert E. Spiller, et. al., edd., Literary History of the United States, (New York: Macmillan, 1949), I, 397.

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playing the flute. It may be that he thought it foolish for a grown, intelligent man to be cultivating "his philosophy and a patch of beans," especially since there was so much need in the world for practical men. Roosevelt talks about music very little --he leaves that to the soft, pale men who don't know a bronc when they see one, and the women.

> His mind was without subtlety, and he had little imagination. A life of thought for its own sake; the life of a dreamer or idealist; a life like that of Coleridge, with his paralysis of will and abnormal

> activity of the speculative faculty, eternally spinning metaphysical cobwebs, doubtless seemed to the author of "The Strenuous Life" a career of mere self-indulgence.[11]

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[11]Henry A. Beers, "Roosevelt as a Man of Letters," Yale Review, n.s. VIII (July, 1919), 698.

John Burroughs has said that Roosevelt did not care for fishing -- the sport of the contemplative and the lazy; Roosevelt admits this himself. No, he would rather hunt in Nairobi or Uganda, riding across the African veld, levelling his Holland at a big bull elephant, or riding swiftly after lion, tiger, leopard, wildebeest, hyena. This one fundamental characteristic of Roosevelt's nature guided him, moulded his personality and his life with a buttress against the other forces which might have made him a different man: his drive. He could do nothing without exhibiting it. When he spoke he shook and bared his teeth. When he rode he did so hard and fast, leaping fences, once breaking an arm and riding on to the end of the chase with one hand. He took pride in being in at the finish when the fox was captured by the dogs. He would ride hours on end without rest or anything more to eat than sow-belly bacon and frying-pan biscuits, then spend odd moments composing books, letters, and essays. When he read he did so with a voracious appetite, and his powers of speed and retention are still mentioned with respect. But all his force and energy took him on too fast. He couldn't take the time to stop and study this or that with any degree of concentration. He never intensified his study of one field of literature, for example, until he was particularly well versed in that area. He admits himself that he

> once--traveled steadily from Montaigne through Addison, Swift, Steel, Lamb, Irving and Lowell, to Crothers and Kenneth Grahame --and if it be objected that some of these could not have suggested the others, I can only answer that they did suggest them.[12]

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[12]"Books that I Read," Ladies' Home Journal, XXXII (April, 1915), 72.

It is worthy of admiration that a man has enough stamina and intellectual curiosity to wade through the bulky, often heavy, though interesting, material of these authors, but it also illustrates Roosevelt's roving mind. Beers has suggested that Roosevelt made a specialty of omniscience. It is characteristic of certain energetic individuals to read a great deal of everything without knowing any one field with any degree of intensity. A great many men have taken all knowledge for their realm long before Bacon stated it as his special province, but equally as many men of this type have been, in the final analysis, bereft of real penetration into a particular field of intellectual endeavor. Roosevelt was a sportsman, literary critic, naturalist, politician, journalist, and historian, but in no one field does he exhibit those qualities which make his aspect one of authority. The jack-of-all-trades seldom does more than taste the tools of many different occupations.

CHAPTER II

Roosevelt the Reader

Upon occasion Roosevelt was asked what kind of books a statesman should read. His answer was "poetry and novels--including short stories under the head of novels."[1] By this, he explained, he did not mean

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[1] An Autobiography, (New York: Scribners, 1929), p. 333; hereafter referred to as Autobiography.

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simply "modern" novels and poetry. The statesman should also read, he continued, "interesting books on history and government, and books of science and philosophy. Further,

> in the final event, the statesman, and the publicist, and the reformer, and the agitator for new things, and the upholder of what is good in old things, all need more than anything else to know human nature.[2]

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[2] Ibid., 334.

And, he continues, it is by the study of good books that men find the needs of the human soul set forth in imaginative writing.

We have seen in his theory of "history as literature" that Roosevelt held imagination to be one of the prime requisites for excellent writing, whether it be in science, history, or pure literature. Another of his criteria for the judgment of a good book is that it must be interesting. He recognized that there are many interesting books,

some interesting to certain men for particular reasons; the reader must "meet his own needs"[3] in selecting reading material. A look at

[3] Autobiography, p. 335.

Roosevelt's own reading will not be amiss. In looking over the list which is given in the succeeding paragraphs it will be well to notice how right Brander Matthews was when he called Roosevelt's nature "polygonal!" But before we go into a list of Roosevelt's reading, it might be well to consider portions of the background of such an omniverous reader, material not heretofore considered.

His friends and associates were constantly amazed by the speed of Roosevelt's reading and his power of retention. He was never intellectually tired. Thus he explained to George Trevelyan in a letter dated May 28, 1904:

> I find reading a great comfort. People often say to me that they do not see how I find time for it, to which I answer them (much more truthfully than they believe) that to me it is a dissipation, which I have sometimes tried to avoid, instead of an irksome duty. Of course I have been so busy for the last ten years, so absorbed in political work, that I have simply given up reading any book that I do not find interesting. But there are a great many books which ordinarily pass for 'dry' which to me possess much interest--notably history and anthropology; and these give me ease and relaxation that I can get in no other way, not even on horseback![4]

[4] Joseph Bucklin Bishop, Theodore Roosevelt and His Time, (New York: Scribner's, 1920), II, 142; hereafter referred to as Roosevelt and His Time.

He had excellent taste, and wide and varied reading kept him from ever growing tired of books. He read Tacitus, Thucydides,

Herodotus, Polybius, Goethe, Keats, Gray, Lowell --and in reading them he said he would "lose all memory of everything grimy, and of the baseness that must be parried or conquered."[5]

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[5]"Books that I Read," p. 7.

His reading speed enabled him, of course, to read a great deal more than most men. He had an immense amount of news, official papers, correspondence, manuscripts and documents which demanded constant attention, in addition to the many other matters which kept his days packed to the brim. Somehow he always found time to read, despite the fact that all his life he was afflicted with poor eyes. An anecdote in the "Century" magazine illustrates his powers of concentration:

> The other afternoon he was handed a new book -- a not very long dissertation on a matter of current interest. That evening he entertained a number of guests at dinner, and later there was a musical party at the White House, at which he was present. At luncheon, the next day, the giver said to him: 'Mr. President, of course you have not had time to look at that book.' 'Oh, yes,' said the President; 'I have read it.'[6]

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[6]"Roosevelt as a Reader," Century, LXIX (April, 1905), 953.

He was a photographic reader. He culled the best from whatever he read and was able to recall minute details from obscure books years after he had perused their pages. But as was to be expected, Roosevelt was often discouraged by the vast amount of material which was being published. Worthless, he called much of it, and lamented the fact that

because of the enormity of reading matter available one tended to "lose sight of some really good things that are published."[7] Because

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[7] Roosevelt and His Time, II, 154-155.

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time was extremely precious, he would read whenever the opportunity presented itself, whether lying against an elephant he had just shot, or in the thick of a political campaign. During the campaign of 1904 "he re-read all of Macaulay's 'History of England,' all of Rhodes's 'History of the United States,' and Dickens's 'Martin Chuzzlewit.'"[8]

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[8] "Roosevelt as a Reader," p. 953.

His reading usually had a definite purpose, whether it was to increase his knowledge of a certain field, or whether it was to enable him better to understand the people with whom he came into contact -- he always read because it would do something for him. His practicality showed up in this respect. In Book-Lover's Holiday he advised lovers of good books to read the sketches of old-time Argentine life in Hudson's "El Ombu." His personal reason for reading the book was to enable him better to

> understand the strength and ruthlessness which produced leaders of the stamp of the scarred and war-hardened veteran who in full general's uniform met us at dinner at the house of his son, the governor of Mendoza.[9]

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[9] A Book-Lover's Holiday in the Open, (New York: 1919), p. 101.

A reading list was made over a two year period --the first two

years of his first administration, from November, 1901 to November 1903.[10] When one considers the vast amount of work he had to do as

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[10] "Roosevelt as a Reader," pp. 931-934. This article gives the actual list of books read.

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the Chief Executive it is surprising that he found time to read 105 authors. Nor did he simply read one book by each of the authors. In several cases there were as many as five. He read, for example, two complete works of Lincoln --the strenuous life indeed!

Somewhat of an example of what Roosevelt read may be seen in his famous "Pigskin Library."[11] It is to be noticed that the books

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[11] The original list of the "Pigskin Library" is as follows:

Bible.	
Apocrypha.	
Borrow	Bible in Spain.
	Zingali.
	Lavengro.
	Wilde Wales.
	The Romany Rye.
Shakespeare.	
Spenser	Faerie Queene.
Marlowe.	
Mahan	Sea Power.
Macaulay	History.
	Essays.
	Poems.
Homer	Iliad.
	Odyssey.
Chanson de Roland.	
Nibelungenlied.	
Carlyle	Frederick the Great.
Shelley	Poems.
Bacon	Literary Essays.
Lowell	Literary Essays.
	Biglow Papers.
Emerson	Poems.
Longfellow.	
Tennyson.	
Poe	Tales.
	Poems.

Keats.
Milton.....Paradise Lost (Books I and II).
Dante.....Inferno (Carlyle's translation).
Holmes.....Autocrat.
Over the Teacups.
Bret Harte.....Poems.
Tales of the Argonauts.
Luck of Roaring Camp.
Browning.....Selections.
Crothers.....Gentle Reader.
Pardoner's Wallet.
Mark Twain.....Huckleberry Finn.
Tom Sawyer.
Bunyan.....Pilgrim's Progress.
Euripides (Murray's translation)....Hippolytus.
Bacchae.
The Federalist.
Gregorovius.....Rome.
Scott.....Legend of Montrose.
Guy Mannering.
Waverley.
Rob Roy.
Antiquary.
Cooper.....Pilot.
Two Admirals.
Froissart.
Percy's Reliques.
Thackeray.....Vanity Fair.
Pendennis.
Dickens.....Mutual Friend.
Pickwick.

See African Game Trails, (New York: 1919), II, 648-662.

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mentioned are only those which Roosevelt was able to recall as having been part of the library which he took with him in hunting travels to Africa. There may have been more.

Roosevelt was envious of Trevelyan, who could read Latin and Greek in the original, saying that

> you...who are so blessed as to read all the best of the Greeks or Latins in the original must not look down too scornfully upon us who have to make believe that we are contented with Emerson's view of translations.[12]

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[12] Roosevelt and His Time, II, 160.

These classic writers which he read were as follows: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristotle, Theocritus, Polybius, Euripides' Hippolytus, Bacchae, and supplementary reading in Mahaffy's Hellenistic Greece.

He had a wide knowledge of Biblical sources and in an Outlook article appealed for wider reading of the Bible. He claimed that regardless of a man's religion the Bible contained high ethical teaching which was worthy of study, and praised the language of the King James version. His judgment that the Bible must be studied in the context of the period is typical. In addition to the Bible he read Frazer's Passages from the Bible, George Borrow's Bible in Spain, Zingali, Lavengro, Wild Wales, and The Romany Rye. He knew the Apocrypha and read Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. "Great Heart," he said, referring to the famous character from Bunyan's book,

> is my favorite character in allegory...just as Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress' is to my mind one of the greatest books that was ever written; and I think that Abraham Lincoln is the ideal Great-Heart of public life.[13]

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[13]Roosevelt and His Time, II, 160.

Roosevelt was capable of reading both French and German, and he exercised himself well in these languages. He read Moliere, Pascal, Montaigne, Voltaire's Siecle de Louis XIV, and Memoires de M. Simon "(to be read on the way home)."[14] Freissart, the Memoirs of Marbot,

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[14]African Game Trails, II, 650.

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d'Aurevilly's Chevalier des Touches, were part of his reading diet while shooting hyena and lion in Africa. He read Dumas' Louves de

Mashakoula, and said of his Tartarin de Tarascon that he did not read it "until after I had shot my lions!"[15] In German he read the

[15] African Game Trails, II, 650.

poetry of Schiller, Koerner and Heine, and he was familiar with Goethe's Faust.

Roosevelt knew and read Marlowe's dramatic work. Shakespeare in particular he read all of his life. When he was fifty years old he wrote to Lodge, saying

> you will...be amused to hear that at last, when fifty years old, I have come into my inheritance in Shakespeare. I never before really cared for more than one or two of his plays; but for some inexplicable reason the sealed book was suddenly opened to me on this trip. I suppose that when a man fond of reading is for long periods in the wilderness /of Africa/ with but few books he inevitably grows into a true appreciation of the books that are good. I still balk at three or four of Shakespeare's plays; but most of them I have read or am reading over and over again.[16]

[16] Henry Cabot Lodge, ed., Selections from the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, 1884-1918, (New York: Scribner's, 1925), II, 347-348; hereafter referred to as Letters of Roosevelt and Lodge.

A writer of essays himself, it is a pity that Roosevelt did not profit more by the extensive reading he did in that field. We discover that Roosevelt's essay style was a bit too forceful and energetic, not nearly so conversational in tone as were the authors he read constantly: Huxley, Lord Acton, Macaulay (always a great favorite of his), Bacon, Lowell's Literary Essays and Biglow Papers,

and Holmes' Autocrat of the Breakfast Table and Over the Teacups. He considered Holmes to be the philosopher of the humorists.

Roosevelt was always a great lover of history, and his readings in that field confirmed his love for it. His judgment of a book on history generally depended on the criteria set forth in his "History as Literature" lecture. For example, he praised Henry Osborn Taylor's study of The Medieval Mind on the basis of grasp of fact coupled with the "power of conveying to others what he has thus grasped."[17] He read Murray's History of the Greek Epic; Benjamin

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[17] History as Literature, (New York, 1913), p. 200.

Ide Wheeler's History of Alexander, and Arrian; Ridgeway's Prehistoric Greece; De La Gorce's History of the Second Republic and Second Empire (he claimed it as an invaluable book); Lea's History of the Inquisition; Ferrero's History of Rome (with typical Roosevelt enthusiasm he invited the author of this book to come and stay with him at the White House); Gregorovius' Rome; Percy's Reliques; Green's Short History of the English People; Joinville's History of St. Louis; Mahan's Sea Power; Carlyle's Frederick the Great; Gibbon, Parkman, and Macaulay. In not listing the works of these authors Roosevelt is paying homage to his favorites. Macaulay ranks highest with him, then Parkman. Trevelyan's work on the American Revolution pleased him a good deal, but it is not mentioned as part of those in the "Pigskin Library."

He took with him to Africa a good many books dealing with hunting African big game, mentioning Chapman, Powell Cotton, and Edward North Buxton as being the best in the field. Surprisingly enough he took only

one book which might have been termed political in nature: The Federalist. Equally surprising is the lack of extensive works on science. He took Darwin's Origin of the Species and Voyage of the Beagle, plus Gobineau's Inegalite des Races Humaines, which he called

> a well written book, containing some good guesses; but for the student to approach it for serious information would be much as if an albatross should apply to a dodo for an essay on flight.[18]

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[18] African Game Trails, II, 649.

Roosevelt's excuse for not taking many scientific books with him on his hunting expeditions was that they rarely had literary value. He said:

> Of course a really good scientific book should be as interesting to read as any other good book; and the volume in question [Sutherland's History of the Growth of the Moral Instinct] was taken because it fulfilled this requirement, its eminent Australian author being not only a learned but a brilliant man.[19]

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[19] Ibid., II, 651.

An interesting comment indeed!

It was Roosevelt's wish that people would learn to read novels not only for the relaxation they give, but for the value they have in helping people to understand one anothers' problems. He suggested more than once that people read

> Henry Bordeaux, books like Kathleen Norris's 'Mother,' and Cornelia Comer's 'Preliminaries,' and would use these, and other such books, as tracts, now and then![20]

[20]*Autobiography*, p. 163.

But novels had their practical value for Roosevelt. He wrote to Trevelyan from the battleship Louisiana that

> after I read Milton and Tacitus until I feel I can stand them no longer I devour short stories or novels. In the novels I am sorry to say I usually have to go back to those I have read already.[21]

[21]*Roosevelt and His Time*, II, 160.

And he had his likes and dislikes where the novels were concerned. He accepted tragedy in the tragedians, but in novels he wanted a happy ending, especially when it is "of sufficient length to enable me to get interested in the hero and heroine!"[22] He doesn't defend

[22]"Books that I Read," p. 7.

his attitude; he merely states it.

For humor he liked Sydney Smith, John Phoenix and Artemus Ward, among others --from these to Stephen Leacock. Mark Twain, he said, when at his best, stands apart, "almost as much so as Joel Chandler Harris,"[23] and he had great enthusiasm for Oliver Wendell

[23]*Ibid.*, p. 72.

Holmes.

He paid due praise to his college-friend Owen Wister, saying that he was

> the writer I wish when I am hungry with the

> memories of lonely mountains, of vast sunny plains with seas of wind-rippled grass, of springing wild creatures and lithe sun-tanned men who ride with utter ease on ungroomed, half-broken horses.[24]

[24] "Books that I Read," p. 72.

But he adds that when on the plains he carried a volume of Swinburne, "as a kind of antiseptic to alkali dust, tepid muddy water, frying-pan bread, sow-belly bacon, and the too-infrequent washing of sweat-drenched clothing."[25]

[25] Ibid., p. 72.

The "Pigskin Library" list of novels includes Scott's Legend of Montrose, Guy Mannering, Waverly, Rob Roy, and Antiquary; George Meredith's Farina; Thackeray's Vanity Fair, and Pendennis. While he took only Dickens' Mutual Friend, and Pickwick with him to Africa, it must be mentioned that all his life Roosevelt was a Dickens enthusiast. During the Cuban campaign he took Dickens with him. He said that he would "like to have 'Martin Chuzzlewit' studied as a tract in America,"[26]

[26] Roosevelt and His Time, II, 144-145.

even though he considered that Dickens was mistaken in his notion that "all Americans were represented by his figures."[27] Dickens he judged

[27] Ibid., II, 145.

as "an ill-natured, selfish cad and boor, who had no understanding of what the word gentleman meant, and no appreciation of hospitality or good treatment."[28] It made the patriotic Roosevelt angry to think

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[28]Joseph Bucklin Bishop, ed., Theodore Roosevelt's Letters To His Children, (New York, 1919), p. 219; hereafter referred to as Letters to His Children.

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that Dickens "had not the soul to see what America was really doing."[29]

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[29]Ibid., p. 220.

At any rate, he says,

> there are innumerable characters that he has created which symbolize vices, virtues, follies, and the like almost as well as the characters in Bunyan; and therefore I think the wise thing to do is simply to skip the bosh and twaddle and vulgarity and untruth, and get the benefit out of the rest.[30]

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[30]Ibid., p. 220. It is interesting to note that Roosevelt shared these opinions with his sons; typical of a sincere father who maintained no superior intellectual attitude.

Roosevelt lists some of the novels which he took with him to Africa, but neglects to give the authors' names. Some are familiar, others are long forgotten: The Virginian, Lin McLean, Puck of Pook's Hill, Uncle Remus, Aaron of the Wild Woods, Letters of a Self-made Merchant to His Son, Many Cargoes, The Gentleman from Indiana, David Harum, The Crisis, The Silent Places, Marse Chan, Soapy Sponge's Sporting Tour, All on the Irish Shore, The Blazed Trail, Stratagems and Spoils, Knights in Fustian, Selma, The Taskmasters, Every Man to His Humor. He probably read one of these every day in his spare moments!

He read Cooper's Pilot, Two Admirals; Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, and Tom Sawyer; Bret Harte's Tales of the Argonauts, Luck of Roaring Camp; Poe's Tales, William Allen White's A Certain Rich Man; James Lane Allen's Summer in Arcady; Maurice Egan's Wiles of Sexton Maginnis; Crothers' Gentle Reader and Pardoner's Wallet; Octave Thanet's novels and stories; Alice in Wonderland, Through the Looking Glass; Don Quixote; Dumas' Louves de Machecoul, and others which he does either not recall or neglects to mention.

It is interesting to note that Roosevelt does not include Tolstoy in his "Pigskin Library;" he did read and enjoy Tolstoy, and had many comments to make about him. In typical Roosevelt fashion he put practicality first, for "if a man is not practical," he said, "he is of no use anywhere."[31] The practical man with high ideals,

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[31]Autobiography, p. 179.

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he says, is not influenced by Tolstoy, who is unmoral, and would appeal to the "feeble folk and the fantastic folk."[32] He considered

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[32]"Tolstoy," Outlook, XCII (May 15, 1909), 104.

Tolstoy to be a good novelist, and had high praise for La Guerre et La Paix, plus much adverse criticism. The Kreutzer Sonata he considered to be the work of a moral pervert. He makes an interesting comment after reading Anna Karenine:

> I was struck by the way in which Russians evidently regard themselves out of the European world; perhaps this was the reason the book seemed to me to show something

> curiously American in some of the sides of life it showed.[33]

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[33] "Books that I Read," p. 72.

Like almost everyone interested in literature, Roosevelt went through periods when he read little or no poetry; but as he pointed out, there were times when he

> voraciously devour/ed/ poets of widely different kinds. Now it will be Horace and Pope; now Schiller, Scott, Longfellow, Koerner; now Bret Harte or Kipling; now Shelley or Herrick or Tennyson; now Poe and Coleridge; and again Emerson or Browning or Whitman.[34]

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[34] Ibid., 72.

Included in his "travel library" were the poems of Bret Harte, Poe, Longfellow, Emerson, George Cabot Lodge (the volume entitled The Soul's Inheritance), whom Roosevelt considered to have great promise; of FitzGerald's translation of Omar Khayyam, he said "other versions...always leave me with the feeling that Fitzgerald is the major partner in the book we really like."[35] He took Brown-

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[35] African Game Trails, I, 198-199.

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ing with him, even though he thought that the poet was "unintelligible."[36]

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[36] Letters of Roosevelt and Lodge, I, 42.

He scoffed at readers of Browning, on the basis that they "who labor longest and hardest to master his meaning are entirely mistaken

in thinking that they enjoy him as a poet."[37] While it was true

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[37] History as Literature, p. 211.

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that people enjoy Browning as a puzzle, it was equally true, Roosevelt pointed out, that Browning is to be enjoyed for a peculiar mixture of philosophy and intended philosophy. Browning is inferior, said Roosevelt, to many others in form and expression, but his philosophy is written as literature, and therein lies his attractiveness. Furthermore, when it comes to crises of the spirit, which are also crises of the mind, Browning gives them an expression of the highest order. Other poets, he continues, give expression to our more primitive needs and emotions. (Roosevelt here illustrates his ability to get to the core of the matter.)[38]

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[38] Ibid., 212-213.

In addition to these poets Roosevelt read Keats, Tennyson and Shelley. Of Milton he enjoyed particularly the first two books of Paradise Lost. He also read Milton's prose works --and was convinced of "what an intense Protestant the fine old fellow was."[39]

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[39] Roosevelt and His Time, II, 160.

He thought of him, in his attitude toward divorce, as being distinctly "modern." "Personally," he wrote, "I like his 'Eikonoklastes,' but then I am a radical about punishing people like Charles the First or Jefferson Davis."[40] He thought the poems of William Morris to be slightly absurd,

[40] Roosevelt and His Time, II, 160.

but loved the poetry of Macaulay largely because of his "eminently sane and healthy mind."[41] He read Spenser's Faerie Queene, and

[41] Ibid., II, 160.

Braithwaite's Book of Elizabethan Verse. The Morris translations of various Norse Sagas were in his duffle-bag, and of Morris' translation of Beowulf he complained that "while it had undoubtedly been translated out of Anglo-Saxon, it had not been translated into English, but merely into a language bearing a specious resemblance...."[42]

[42] African Game Trails, II, 651.

In his Autobiography Roosevelt claimed that he cared as much for German poetry as he did for English. He loved the German people and expressed this feeling accurately when he said:

> The affection, the Gemuthlichkeit (a quality which cannot be exactly expressed by any other English word), the capacity for hard work, the sense of duty, the delight in studying literature and science, the pride in the new Germany, the more than kind and friendly interest...all these manifestations of the German character and of German family life made a subconscious impression upon me which I did not in the least define at the time, but which is very vivid still forty years later.[43]

[43] Autobiography, p. 21.

In the German language, in addition to the poetry of Schiller,

Koerner, Heine, and Goethe, he read and respected the Nibelungenlied. Also he enjoyed essays on and translations from early Irish poetry, as well as the Chanson de Roland, and Lounsbury's edition of Chaucer.

Much quoted by Roosevelt, and the subject of a complete essay ("Dante and the Bowery") by him, is Dante.[44] He read Carlyle's trans-

[44]This essay may be found in History as Literature as a complete chapter.

lation of the Inferno, feeling that Dante was right in placing himself ahead of Virgil, Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan, as the greatest poet. He was particularly pleased with Dante's ability to "use anything that was striking and vividly typical of the humanity around him"[45] to

[45]History as Literature, p. 221.

illustrate fundamental truth. Roosevelt always derided the poet who would not (could not) use simple, everyday comparisons --derided the tradition which prevented the poet from using human nature as he sees it.

> The Bowery is one of the great highways of humanity, a highway of seething life, of varied interest, of fun, of work, of sordid and terrible tragedy; and it is haunted by demons as evil as any that stalk through the pages of the 'Inferno.' But no man of Dante's art and with Dante's soul would write of it nowadays; and he would hardly be understood if he did. Whitman wrote of homely things and every-day men, and of their greatness, but his art was not equal to his power and his purpose; and even as it was, he, the poet, by set intention, of the democracy, is not known to the people as widely as he should be known....[46]

[46]Ibid., 220-221.

Both Whitman and Dante, said Roosevelt, illustrate these fundamental truths by allusions to human nature as they see it --and have been criticised for it. He explains why this is so:

> I suppose that this must be partly because we are so self-conscious as always to read a comparison into any illustration, forgetting the fact that no comparison is implied between two men, in the sense of estimating their relative greatness or importance, when the career of each of them is chosen merely to illustrate some given quality that both possess. It is also probably due to the fact that an age in which the critical faculty is great developed often tends to develop a certain querulous inability to understand the fundamental truths which less critical ages accept as a matter of course.[47]

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[47] History as Literature, p. 221.

Lastly, Roosevelt mentions that he read Palmer's translation of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey.

Roosevelt maintained very strongly that the books which accompanied him on his sojourns to Africa "were for use, not ornament."[48]

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[48] African Game Trails, II, 650.

Where it was possible he had them bound in pigskin, and he always carried something to read so that given a moment's leisure he could make good use of his time. The list is by no means accurate, as he pointed out.

> I am writing on the White Nile from memory; the titles I give may sometimes be inaccurate, and I cannot, of course, begin to remember all the books I have at different times taken out with me.[49]

[49] *African Game Trails*, II, 651.

It is, at any rate, an amazing collection, and an indication of the omnivorous, energetic, and kinetic mind of its reader.

CHAPTER III

"History as Literature"

John Burroughs said that Roosevelt was a kind of "electric bombshell," adding that "all other men seem so woodeny and slow in comparison with him."[1] If we agree with his description, then

[1]Clara Barrus, The Life and Letters of John Burroughs, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1925), II, 145.

it is not surprising to see him as President of the American Historical Association standing before that learned group and expounding a theory which he knew would be unacceptable to the majority of it. The theory, simply enough, is self-explanatory as "History as Literature." That he held the majority of the Historical Association in a certain degree of contempt is evinced by a remark he made to Henry Cabot Lodge on the eve of the lecture.

> I am about to deliver a beastly lecture --'History as Literature'--, because I am President of the American Historical Association. None of its members, by the way, believe that history is literature. I have spent much care on the lecture, but as far as I now know it won't even be printed anywhere. Even the Outlook finds it too tough a morsel to swallow.[2]

[2]Letters of Roosevelt and Lodge, II, 427.

Roosevelt excuses his membership in the "preposterous little... organization" in a letter to George Trevelyan, explaining that he

jointed "when...just out of Harvard and very ignorant."[3]

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[3]*Roosevelt and His Time*, II, 140-141.

Well aware of the era in which he was living, Roosevelt launched his attack on the new historical theory which specialized all knowledge, severing history and literature into neat little pigeonholes. Science, he said, is not split off from literature, and neither is history. His definition of literature left ample room for the inclusion of all branches of knowledge, providing the treatment of those branches created "that which has permanent interest because both of its substance and its form, aside from the mere technical value that inheres in a ...treatise for specialists."[4]

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[4]*History as Literature*, p. 8.

In consideration of method and form, Roosevelt was emphatic in his belief that history must "put flesh and blood on dry bones."[5]

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[5]*Ibid.*, 15-16.

He hated the narrow pedantry which constructed neat little pyramids of facts and figures, claiming that "the industrious collector of dead facts" bears the same relation to the literary historian that "a photographer bears to Rembrandt."[6]

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[6]*Ibid.*, 8.

If it is clear that Roosevelt scorned the pedant, it must

also be clear that he recognized the value of the "day laborer"[7]

[7] Roosevelt and His Time, II, 140.

scholar. He was not trying to undermine the tenets of scholarship. He saw the value of scholarly research quite clearly, but was anxious to clarify its position to those who might have some misconceptions concerning scholarship. It is valuable, he said, only when it is productive. Furthermore, the scholar who studies to satisfy himself may well achieve his purpose, but from the broader point of view he achieves nothing unless his learning is productive.[8]

[8] See "Productive Scholarship," History as Literature, p. 197.

It is not enough that the scholar be in possession of the facts, said he. Only a man with vision and imagination is capable of seeing the totality of his subject, thus rendering himself in a position whereby he can successfully assimilate and transmit the facts in a clear vision to others. In The Winning of the West Roosevelt recognized that to understand the history of America he had to return to and evaluate those events which led up to the discovery and subsequent settlement of the nation. He used a great many primary sources, such as letters, reports, personal and intercepted papers, state papers, etc. These make up much of the material he took from the "archives of the American Government, which date back to 1774, when the first Continental Congress assembled."[9] In addition

[9] The Winning of the West, (New York: 1889), I, viii. (For a complete listing see pp. viii-xiii.)

he used old newspapers, unpublished letters, diaries, reports, and other manuscripts which he found at Nashville, Tennessee.

He admits that on certain intellectual levels the collector of facts can do a certain utilitarian service, at the same time rejecting those "utilitarian" historians

> who often decry the recital of the mighty deeds of the past, the deeds which always have aroused, and for a long period to come are likely to arouse, most interest.[10]

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[10] *History as Literature*, p. 16.

He gives due credit to the school history text authors, but adds that

> the historical work which does possess literary quality may be a permanent contribution to the sum of man's wisdom, enjoyment, and inspiration. The writer of such a book must add wisdom to knowledge, and the gift of expression to the gift of imagination.[11]

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[11] *Ibid.*, 9.

It is simply not enough, said Roosevelt, for the historian to present the bare story of what happened. The reader must live the past in his own imagination, aided and abetted by the literary historian. Thus history becomes a vital part of the reader's intellectual experience --a direct result of the great historian moulding routine and mundane facts of common, everyday existence, along with the greater events, into throbbing portions of human experience.

Although he puts his greatest emphasis upon the need for vision and imagination, Roosevelt is scholar enough to recognize that

> no amount of self-communion and of pondering on the soul of mankind, no gorgeousness of literary imagery, can take the place of cool, serious, widely extended study.[12]

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[12] *History as Literature*, p. 6.

Even though a book is interesting, he said, if it is untrue it ceases to be in "the catagory of history...."[13] In addition, no

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[13] Ibid., 43.

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partisanship should ever get in the way of truth, he said, well aware of his own Yankee tendency to obviate Southern motives and principles in interpreting the Civil War.

Practical to the last ditch, Roosevelt was asking that a merger be made between the romantic and scientific views of historiography. "The vision of the great historian," he said, "must be both wide and lofty. But it must be sane, clear, and based on full knowledge of the facts and of their interrelations."[14] The subject of

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[14] *Ibid.*, 6.

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the historian, he said, is as broad as it is long. All phenomena must be embraced so that in tracing the multiple causes he can sketch the total effect in realistic detail.

> He must trace the changes that come almost unseen, the slow and gradual growth that transforms for good or for evil the children and grandchildren so that they stand high above or far below the level on which their forefathers stood.[15]

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[15] *History as Literature*, p. 29.

The historian, he claims, must recognize the part that all realms of knowledge play in an imaginative interpretation of history. Roosevelt had read James Harvey Robinson, and agreed that all departments of knowledge are indefinite, fluctuating back and forth between the lines of demarcation. All of the sciences, Roosevelt, believed, continually bleed into each other at some points, but not at others. He maintains, rightly enough, that unless science is continually aware of this fundamental fact, it cannot progress. He lauds the work of the archaeologist, and anthropologist, and the palaeo-ethnologist, for these branches of science, he said, produce materials of inestimable value to the historian. Roosevelt was not the first to recognize the value of primary source material, but he was anticipating later historians when he maintained that "the study of the economic changes produced by the factory system"[16] was a

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[16] *Ibid.*, 22.

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necessary portion of historical research. The realm of history cannot be marked off by the stakes of intellectual prejudice --"bound to the past by the shackels of an iron conservatism."[17] All subjects play a

[17] History as Literature, p. 4.

part, whether they be "exhaustive tables of statistics," the influence of great orators, "the Websters and Burkes, or by the poets, the Tyrtaeuses and Koerners, who in crisis utter what is in the nation's heart."[18]

[18] Ibid., 4.

Looking down upon his audience, Roosevelt admitted reluctantly that the use of literature to portray history had passed away. "No one would now dream of combining the history of the Trojan War with a poem on the wrath of Achilles,"[19] he said. Making a careful dis-

[19] Ibid., 4.

tinction between metaphysics, material science, and history, Roosevelt maintained that philosophy had been little affected by scientific specialization, implying that history has suffered thereby. "Poetry is still used as a vehicle for the teaching of philosophy.... Goethe was as profound a thinker as Kant."[20] He gives Goethe credit for the

[20] Ibid., 5.

greater influence, on the basis that he utilized a more effective mode of expression than did Kant. The same is true of Browning.

When the poet writes of historical matters he leaves an indelible impression upon the reader's mind, Roosevelt said. In his

own writings Roosevelt more than once describes scenes and incidents which are vivid and intense.

> Shakespeare has definitely fixed the character of Richard III of whom ordinary men think and speak. Keats forget even the right name of the man who first saw the Pacific Ocean; yet it is his lines which leap to our minds when we think of the 'wild surmise' felt by the indomitable explorer-conqueror from Spain when the vast new sea burst on his vision.[21]

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[21] *History as Literature*, pp. 25-26.

Darwin and Huxley said no more than what had already been said by less imaginative writers, Roosevelt claims; they caused a revolution because of the force and imagination of their presentation. They were simply "interesting to read."[22]

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[22] *Ibid.*, 11.

Roosevelt stretched his point in the Keats example, but it is well taken. Is it not a fact that the general concept of the Victorian period is largely a result of the novels which flared forth in that period? And is this general concept not, by and large, erroneous? It is seen that misconceptions of history arise from men with too much imagination and too little factual accuracy. But lest his audience get the notions that he condemns imagination not coupled by scholarship, Roosevelt carefully explained that imagination alone does not distort truth; on the contrary, it is a *distorted* imagination which, if left to itself, leads to eventual inaccuracy. He reiterates again and again his central thesis; that the historian must render himself

available of all the facts applicable to his subject and then, by use of imagination, express them so that they live again. The romantic historical novel and the dead list of pedant facts are both perversions of the historian art, he said. Further, the man who tries to make his literary ability suffice for a paucity of information, or a "misreading of facts renders less than no service."[23] In addition Roosevelt warns the historian to make the

[23] History as Literature, p. 24.

utmost use of the facts at hand, using all the materials that were not available to previous historians. "The fact that a book, though interesting, is untrue," he said, "of course removes it at once from the category of history...."[24]

[24] Ibid., 43.

History must also teach, he said, and with that aspect comes the implication of moralism. Impartiality, he claims, is not obtained merely by treating good and evil on the same level. On the other hand the historian must not become obsessed by moral teaching. It is no easy task to take abstract principles of morality and apply them to concrete instances. Roosevelt criticises Carlyle:

> Very few men have ever been a greater source of inspiration to other ardent souls than was Carlyle when he confined himself to preaching morality in the abstract.[25]

[25] Ibid., 19.

But in his treatment of the American Civil War, says Roosevelt, Carlyle demonstrated that he could not distinguish between great virtue or great vice. He criticised him for juggling facts to fit preconceived notions of morality in Frederick the Great. Roosevelt insisted that the historian must at all times be honest both with himself and his subject.

CHAPTER IV

Roosevelt's Historical Works

Roosevelt entered Harvard in the fall of 1876 and graduated in 1880. When he entered his principal interest was natural history, and his ambition was to be

> a scientific man of the Audubon, or Wilson, or Baird, or Coues type--a man like Hart Merriam, or Frank Chapman, or Hornaday, today.[1]

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[1] Autobiography, p. 22.

He was given a Phi Beta Kappa key, although it was his opinion that Harvard had done him good "only in the general effect, for there was very little in my actual studies which helped me in after life."[2]

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[2] Ibid., 22.

He was, for a time, interested in the law, but after reading law in his uncle's office he decided he did not like it. It may be that his practical mind was repelled by the fine points of the legal procedure, for more than once, later in life, he complained that legalists were unable to deal properly with social matters, since they resided too securely in a sort of ivory tower, unable to see the social and economic implications of their opinions.

At Harvard the young Roosevelt became interested in, and began to write, his history of the Naval War of 1812. Three books were

apparently responsible for his interest in Naval History, one of them William James' Naval History of Great Britain, of which Roosevelt commented,

> it is an invaluable work, written with fulness and care; on the other hand it is also a piece of special pleading by a bitter and not over-scrupulous partisan.[3]

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[3] The Naval War of 1812, (New York: 1889), p. iv.

Supplementing James' work, Roosevelt listed Fenimore Cooper's Naval History of the United States, and George E. Emmons' History of the United States Navy. With characteristic fervor, he read all the Naval history that he could lay his hands on, and impulsively, wrote two chapters of his projected book. He later confessed in his Autobiography that "those chapters were so dry that they would have made a dictionary seem light reading by comparison."[4] Within two years after his graduation

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[4] p. 24.

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the book was completed and published, in 1882. It is still a standard authority in its field. The book was well received and added impetus to his growing popularity as a successful legislator.

The Naval War of 1812 is, as he admitted, "dry and pedestrian in style."[5] As a work which includes much pertinent detail it is extremely

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[5] Russel B. Nye, "Theodore Roosevelt as an Historian," The Nassau County Historical Journal, III (1940), 5.

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valuable, but is tedious to one who has himself participated in sea

battles, for there is a curious fact about fights at sea --they all sound alike. War may have been stupid, meaningless slaughter, but all his life Roosevelt was enchanted by the sound of the bugle and his love and constant reference to his Cuban campaign is proof of his desire for war glory. This facet of his personality is one of the few things about him that the modern reader finds hard to admire. The book was widely accepted, largely due to the fact that, as he pointed out in his Autobiography, "the navy had reached its nadir, and we were then utterly incompetent to fight Spain or any other power that had a navy at all;"[6] through reading it, people

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[6] p. 211.

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were stimulated into consideration of a neglected phase of the military.

In the midst of an active public life Roosevelt never ceased writing books. In 1886 and 1888 he published Thomas Hart Benton and Gouverneur Morris, respectively, for the "American Statesmen" series. In 1889 he published the first two volumes of The Winning of the West, followed two years later by a history of New York City and in 1900 Oliver Cromwell. All the while he was busy writing a great many other books, speeches, and papers on a variety of subjects.

Thomas Hart Benton, by the nature of its subject, is easier to read than his naval history. Roosevelt wrote it quickly (about four months of 1886 were devoted to it) while on his ranch in the Dakotas, snatching moments between long hours in the saddle to write a few pages. In the light of such a procedure, it is to be expected that the

work is not scholarly. He wrote a letter to Lodge which fairly explains the manner in which he approached the book:

> I have pretty nearly finished Benton, mainly evolving him from my inner consciousness; but when he leaves the Senate in 1850 I have nothing whatever to go by; and, being by nature both timid and, on occasions, by choice a truthful man, I would prefer to have some foundation of fact, no matter how slender, on which to build the airy and arabesque superstructure of my fancy--especially as I am writing a history. Now I hesitate to give him a wholly fictitious date of death and to invent all of the work of his later years. Would it be too infernal anuisance for you to hire some one on the Advertiser...to look up, in a biographical dictionary or elsewhere, his life after he left the Senate in 1850?[7]

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[7] Letters of Roosevelt and Lodge, I, 41.

There is no question but that this method of work would not be acceptable to historical scholars today.

Gouverneur Morris was written with the same rapidity as Benton. Roosevelt was familiar with Jared Sparks' biography of Morris, and considered the biographer "a very voluminous writer," although "a quite abnormally dull one."[8] He complained that Sparks

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[8] Gouverneur Morris, American Statesmen Series, edited by John T. Morse, Jr. (New York: 1891), p. v.

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was not aware that "a biographer's duties are not necessarily identical with those of a professional eulogist,"[9] but admitted that most writers have a tendency to heap praise on any dead American ..."save Benedict Arnold."[10] He claims that Sparks was "funnily unconscious of his own prolix dullness," laughs at him for improving

There is no question but that this method of work would not be

acceptable to historical scholars today.

Gunpowder Lord's was written with the same rapidity as

Pocos. Roosevelt was friendly with Jesse Benton's biography of

Morris, and considered the biographer "a very worthy man in writing,"

although "a dull to abnormally dull one." He complained that the

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... have been left wrong." He did not like Parton's style, and

... Parton's life was not necessarily

... Mr. Parton had a tendency to weigh letters on any dead subject

... of a historical enquiry. One cannot

... Parton's letters to Roosevelt, ... Parton ...

Morris' English, and critizes Sparks' tendency "to soften down, or omit anything that he deemed either improper or beneath the stilted 'dignity' of history."[9] If Roosevelt felt "a little appalled over

[9] Gouverneur Morris, p. vi.

the Benton"[10] he had ample reason to feel the same way about Morris.

[10] Letters of Roosevelt and Lodge, I, 37.

It was no better, even though Roosevelt had relied more heavily on primary source material. He used Morris' letters and state papers, as listed in Sparks' work, and in addition made he use of the Jay and Pickering manuscripts. He listed Morris' speeches in the Constitutional Convention as source material, as they were preserved in Madison's Debates. Two articles in Scribner's Magazine by Miss Annie Carey Morris were consulted[11] as well as articles in Macmillan's

[11] "Theodore Roosevelt," in William T. Hutchinson, ed., Marcus W. Jernegan Essays in American Historiography (Chicago UP, 1937), p. 233; hereafter referred to as Jernegan Essays.

Magazine and the Atlantic Monthly. While Roosevelt admitted that he did not enjoy writing Morris as much as he had the Benton, he found great delight in chastising Morris for his conduct in 1812-15."[12]

[12] Letters of Roosevelt and Lodge, I, 59.

The thin volume New York is his most inconsequential work. He listed in the preface a good deal of material from which he drew

his information, but fails to give textual citations. "It has been my aim," he wrote, "less to collect new facts than to draw from the immense storehouse of facts already collected...."[13] It is interest-

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[13] New York, (New York: 1891), p. viii.

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ing in spots, but the material, even though presented with enthusiasm and force, appeals chiefly to the individual with a particular interest in that field of history.

In Oliver Cromwell Roosevelt's judgment is, "in all essentials, accurate."[14] But filled with the same enthusiasm that generated his

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[14] Oliver Cromwell, (New York: 1906), p. 1. Thus it was that Roosevelt described Macaulay's judgment of Cromwell.

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other work, Roosevelt often became chauvinistic about his subject. Cromwell, he said, is "the greatest soldier-statesman of the seventeenth century."[15] But if the worth of a statesman can be measured

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[15] Ibid., 1.

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by his ability to construct what will bear the test of time, then Cromwell was not a great statesman. The soldier may do his job well at a time when he is vitally needed, but constitutional construction, such as was seen in our own country at the time of the Constitutional Convention, pushes the deeds of the soldier into the pale of near-insignificance. If Cromwell was the greatest soldier-statesman, then let us admit that the standard of excellence, if judged by the above criteria, was very low. Again, as in the case of his New York,

the author did not essay a new and objective study. Indeed, the subjectivity of the work provoked the criticism "that it was a fine imaginative study of Cromwell's qualifications for the governorship of New York."[16] Lodge was pleased with the book, and said that he

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[16] Jernegan Essays, p. 234. Thornton does not give his source in this instance, but the criticism is well taken. Since Cromwell was written soon after Roosevelt returned from the Cuban war there is reason to believe that there is a more than coincidental parallel between his own actions and those of his subject.

> liked especially the first part in which you treat with great force and vigor, as it seems to me, the general situation of Europe and of European opinion at that time. The point that the great rebellion was the beginning of the new time and not the end of the old seemed to me especially well taken.[17]

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[17] Letters of Roosevelt and Lodge, I, 431

To call the book an historical romance would not be far amiss, although it is generally accurate in outline.[18]

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[18] F.W. Halsey, "Review of Oliver Cromwell," Outlook, LXVI (December 1, 1900), 812-815. Halsey says that Roosevelt's "sympathies are...with the religious conception of the State and in so far with Puritanism."

On February 15, 1887 Roosevelt wrote to Lodge, saying that

> If I write another historical work of any kind--and my dream is to make one such that will be my magnum opus--I shall certainly take more time and do it carefully and thoroughly, so as to avoid the roughness and interruption of the Benton.[19]

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[19] Letters of Roosevelt and Lodge, I, 51.

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though it is generally accurate in spirit.[12]

To call the book an historical romance would not be fair unless, a -

If Roosevelt succeeded in his dream it is in The Winning of the West. Any judgment of Roosevelt's power as a historian, as one who wrote history as literature, must face up to this work. It was published in 1889, and in July of that year Roosevelt wrote again to Lodge, saying that he was still struggling for "a uniformly excellent style."[20] On September 18 of the same year

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[20] Letters of Roosevelt and Lodge, I, 81.

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he told Lodge that

> The Congregationalist, in criticizing /The Winning of the West/, startled but pleased me the other day by regretting that it did not possess the same sustained charm and interest as, of all things in the world, my 'War of 1812'![21]

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[21] Ibid., I, 90.

Such criticism is hardly justified. Where the Naval History of 1812 is "dry and pedestrian in style,"[22] The Winning of the West is full

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[22] Nye, p. 5.

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of vigor and charm.

Roosevelt was singularly well suited to write such a book. He was familiar with the western country and its people; he knew how they talked, how they thought, and by what emotions they were guided. Frederick Jackson Turner had to admit that Roosevelt was the best equipped. In writing this work Roosevelt was, more than he had ever been, at home. He was not, it is true, so much a westerner as perhaps

even he would have liked to believe--he admitted that he never lost contact with the east-- but he had a feeling for its people that few other men in his position possessed. The work he called "a labor of love to write of the great deeds of the border people." Nor was he blind, as he puts it, "to their manifold shortcomings."[23]

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[23] The Winning of the West, I, xiv. The preface lists in some detail his sources.

The use of facts was, as he stated in his theory of history, but a secondary matter in the actual writing process. The imagination and vision required of the historian was the prime consideration, and Roosevelt certainly possessed both. Francis Parkman was his favorite historian, even above Macaulay and Trevelyan, and it was natural that he should dedicate The Winning of the West to him. So we see that in this work Roosevelt was successfully merging the romantic tradition with the newer scientific tradition. That was all he asked, essentially, and to that extent he was right: the historian must combine the two elements if he is to write a history which will be a contribution to the sum total of human wisdom. Roosevelt praised Trefelyan for writing "the final history of our Revolution,"[24] but

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[24] M.G. Kraus, A History of American History, (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1937), p. 405.

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pointed out that Trevelyan was a little bit too much on the side of the American cause. While it is true that Roosevelt leaned on his pen too heavily when the facts were not available, it is also true that he preferred "to have some foundation of fact, no matter how

slender, on which to build the airy and arabesque superstructure of my fancy."[25] But it is to be admitted that Roosevelt does not strike

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[25] *Letters of Roosevelt and Lodge*, I, 41.

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the middle-road in all instances. His chief difficulty was that he wrote too much and in too many fields. If he had concentrated on Western History, devoting a lifetime to research and thought in that field, there is no question but what he would stand today as one of our great historians. The amazing thing is that he wrote history at all, what with the many other things he accomplished in his life. But therein lies Roosevelt's prominence as a literary figure.

CHAPTER V

Roosevelt's Non-Historical Works

As might be expected, Roosevelt's letters reveal his personality and character more than any of the other media in which he wrote. One of his private secretaries estimated that in his public career he wrote over 150,000 letters. The amazing thing is that they have been preserved.

> With them are the original letters of the many correspondents that he had in all parts of the world --authors, poets, historians, artists, explorers, naturalists, statesmen, prime ministers, kings, emperors.[1]

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[1] Roosevelt and His Time, I, viii.

Few other writers are so completely themselves in their letters as Roosevelt. His letters are frank and truthful, self-revealing and full of character. When writing to political opponents, he is as bold and straight-forward as when he is writing to Theodore Jr. in college.

> His letters are not merely like his talk, they are his talk --frank and free, with rays of irrepressible and always joyous humor playing about it, and with deft and sure thrusts at the foibles, vanities, perversities, and weaknesses of mankind.[2]

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[2] Ibid., I, viii.

He reveals his desires and motives without the least hesitation.

There is something sincerely honest in a man who admits that until he was sixteen all he did was make a "collection of natural history, reading a good deal in certain...fields and indulging in the usual scribbling of the small boy who does not excell in sport," and who further admits that "I cannot remember that I did anything that even lifted me up to the average."[3]

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[3] Roosevelt and His Time, I, 2.

To the student of literature there is no phase of Roosevelt which is quite so interesting as his correspondence with the literary men and women of his day. If Roosevelt chanced upon a new book that he enjoyed to any degree at all, he would write to the author and commend him for his efforts. "While he was President there was scarcely a writer of even moderate fame with whom he had not extablished friendly relations."[4] Young authors were often considerably surprised

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[4] Ibid., II, 136.

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by his knowledge of, and interest in, their writings. His letters to Trevelyan reveal not only a fine relationship, but also Roosevelt's concept of "History as Literature" in its incubation.

That his personality is revealed in even the most formal letters is seen in his correspondence with Hamlin Garland and William Allen White, letters which are primarily concerned with matters of political importance. Roosevelt speaks of his lack of respect for the big-moneyed men, and then adds, as though he were musing on the subject:

> I thoroughly believe that the first duty of every man is to earn his own living, to pull his own weight, to support his own wife and family; but after this has been done, and he is able to keep his family according to his station and according to the tastes that have become a necessity to him, then I despise him if he does not treat other things as of more importance in his scheme of life than mere money getting; if he does not care for art, or literature, or science, or statecraft, or warcraft, or philanthropy --in short for some form of service to his fellows, for some form of the kind of life which is alone worth living.[5]

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[5] Roosevelt and His Time, II, 50-51.

Illustrative of Roosevelt's ability to make his letters intensely personal, is this extract from a letter to W. A. White, written November 26, 1907:

> As far as I am personally concerned, I am well ahead of the game, whatever happens. I have had an exceedingly good time; I have been exceedingly well treated by the American people; and I have enjoyed the respect of those for whose respect I care most. If for a moment I have to go under a cloud, why, it is all in the game.[6]

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[6] Ibid., II, 51.

Roosevelt's letters indicate fully his wide range of interests, both inside and outside the public service --from letters to Mutsuhito, Emperor of Japan, concerning a negotiated peace between Japan and Russia, to the letters to Brander Matthews, in which he tells of an unsuccessfull attempt at advancing the cause of simplified spelling by ordering the public printer to use it in all public documents.[7]

[7]Congress objected and Roosevelt had to back down --a fact which made Brander Matthews angry. Roosevelt said in his defense that there was no use in fighting the thing in an already lost cause; but said he would use it in his own private correspondence. This latter resolution was one he did not live up to.

His most intimate correspondence, aside from his letters to his children and near-relatives, was with Henry Cabot Lodge. While he took great pains with all his correspondence there is reason to suspect that he was especially careful about his letters to his friend and early critic. He wrote to Lodge:

> Writing is horribly hard work to me; I make slow progress...my style is very rough and I do not like a certain lack of sequitur that I do not seem able to get rid of.[8]

[8]Letters of Roosevelt and Lodge, I, 38.

With Lodge he shared all his hopes and aspirations. At the outset of the correspondence Lodge is the more mature and self-confident; Roosevelt looks to him as the critic, but later takes over the role of leader and advisor, while Lodge relinquishes the position to his younger friend.

With his children Roosevelt carried on a correspondence of a singularly beautiful nature. He never speaks to them from any position of authority; they are his intellectual equals and he advises them on that level. It goes without saying that he commanded a greater respect from them for that. He shared their views, and gave them advice on those matters most important to children. He treated them in the same way that he had been treated by his father. As the children, more

particularly the boys, advanced toward manhood the tone of equality never changed. Whenever it became necessary for him to "preach," the father always made an apology. He was always interested in whatever they were doing, whether it was athletic or intellectual. His advice was always practical and sincere. A letter to Ted, when the boy was 14, shows his attitude very well:

> I want you to do well in your sports, and I want even more to have you do well with your books; but I do not expect you to stand first in either, if so to stand could cause you overwork and hurt your health. I always believe in going hard at everything, whether it is Latin or mathematics, boxing or football, but at the same time I want to keep the sense of proportion. It is never worth while to absolutely exhaust one's self or to take big chances unless for an adequate object. I want you to keep in training the faculties which would make you, if the need arose, able to put your last ounce of pluck and strength into a contest.[9]

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[9] Letters to His Children, pp. 25-26.

When Quentin was seven years old his father wrote him many letters of genuine interest.

> Dear Quentyquee: The other day when out riding what should I see in the road ahead of me but a real B'rer Terrapin and B'rer Rabbit. They were sitting solemnly beside one another and looked just as if they had come out of a book; but as my horse walked along B'rer Rabbit went lippity lippity off into the bushes and B'rer Terrapin drew in his head and legs till I passed.[10]

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[10] Ibid., 101.

No more proof is needed of Roosevelt's love and devotion to his

family. Few fathers are concerned enough to take the time to compose a letter which would have such appeal to a child. In addition Roosevelt took time to illustrate his letters, usually denoting those objects which were not drawn with artistic accuracy by arrows and marginal notes.

Roosevelt shared with his children their intellectual growth, being aware, no doubt, that his own development was largely due to the interest and concern of his own father. Their interest in books was greatly supplemented by a father who shared in their critical judgments. As is to be expected there was a good deal of interest in Dickens and Thackeray. Roosevelt, Kermit and Theodore Jr. carried on an extensive discussion of these two writers by correspondence.

As the children got older, and could be more appreciative of their father, they could share more in his aspirations that they had ever done before. They were the kind of children to whom a father could write of his pride in being a contributor to the "material perfection" of the navy.[11]

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[11] *Letters to His Children*, pp.176-177.

With ample reason Roosevelt felt pride in his letters addressed to the children. He said of the published volume of these letters that "I would rather have this book published than anything that has ever been written about me."[12] It is true that these letters show the

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[12] *Ibid.*, 10.

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sensitive and gentle aspect of Roosevelt more than anything he ever penned.

Typical of the man, Roosevelt's speeches and essays have in them that quality of truth, courage, and sincere aggressiveness, "which we associate with the preacher calling men upward to higher things."[13] They reveal more than mere learning; they show a pat-

[13] H. C. Lodge, "Character and Opinions of Theodore Roosevelt," Critic, XLIV (April, 1904), 314.

riotism that approaches chauvinism, conviction, force, and tremendous energy. The typical essayist is not as earnest and energetic as Roosevelt, and for that reason he comes upon us with a little too much vigor; we do not like to be hurried, and the discussive manner of the typical essayist is more to the tone of an evening's reading.

On the occasion of the centennial year of the University of Berlin Roosevelt was asked to deliver the principal address, on May 12, 1910. A month later, on June 7, Roosevelt delivered the Romanes Lecture at Oxford, choosing as his subject "Biological Analogies in History."[14] He gave considerable of his time to the composition of

[14] This lecture is contained in the volume History as Literature as a complete chapter (2).

of the lecture, but Dr. Henry Fairfield Osborn of the Museum of Natural History, to whom Roosevelt sent a draft of the lecture, had to cut out certain passages which were "likely to bring on war between the United States and the governments referred to."[15] The lecture was

[15]Henry Fairfield Osborn, Impressions of Great Naturalists, (New York: Scribner's, 1928), p. 263.

received with a modicum of enthusiasm, but the lecturer was given high approbrium. That was the characteristic result of a Roosevelt speech: if the subject was poor Roosevelt was always good.

Roosevelt's ever-present theme in his speeches and essays is the imperfection of the world, and the opportunities that are open for the advancement of mankind. He is possessed of "singularly open sympathies, of large views, of copious information, and --in the main-- of catholic and balanced judgment."[16] We again have to admire the man

[16]"Roosevelt as Essayist," Independent, LXXVI (October 9, 1913), 93.

who is so interested in seeing the triumph of good over evil.

Lodge pointed out that what a man says forms the contribution, not what is said about him. Roosevelt's speeches reveal the man, his education, sincerity; they have energy, force, conviction, honesty.

> The biographer may flatter, the political friend may paint the portrait all in rose, and the political enemy may draw it in unrelieved shadow with the blackest charcoal, but there can be no mistake about what the man himself has said.[17]

[17]"Character and Opinions of Theodore Roosevelt," p. 313.

It would be impractical for one to choose the "best" of Roosevelt's hunting books. They are all good, full of adventure, action, movement and color. In the hunting and killing of game he was excelled by few

other men of his day, and his approach to the sport was such that it is doubtful if any other man has had a more wholesome attitude. Of course there are those who appreciate nature to the extent that Roosevelt did, but few have articulated the tremendous joy that the "free, self-reliant, adventurous life" gives.[18] If the joy of a

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[18] The Wilderness Hunter, (New York: 1905), p. xiii.

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task, be it work or play, lies in the ability to understand and appreciate, then Roosevelt is clearly free of the trammels of drudgery. It is a pleasure to read a man who took such obvious delight in whatever he did. Speaking of the hunter, he writes:

> In after years there shall come forever to his mind the memory of endless prairies shimmering in the bright sun; of vast snow-clad wastes lying desolate under gray skies; of the melancholy marshes, of the rush of mighty rivers, of the breath of the evergreen forest in summer; of the crooning of ice-armored pines at the touch of the winds of winter; of cataracts roaring between hoary mountain masses; of all the innumerable sights and sounds of the wilderness; of all its immensity and mystery; and of the silences that brood in its still depths.[19]

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[19] Ibid., xiv.

The hunting books provide an intimate portrait of Roosevelt, the man of action. They are, by and large, anecdotal and detailed accounts of the President's adventures hunting in the western United States, and in foreign lands. He writes with charm and interest, describing accurately what he observes. It is worth remarking that his powers of observation, joined with his retentive memory, enabled

him to create real power in description.[20] African Game Trails is

[20]Those hunting books dealt with in this paper are as follows: Hunting Trips of a Ranchman, (New York, 1905); Good Hunting, (New York, 1907); Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail, (New York, 1904); A Book-Lover's Holidays in the Open; The Wilderness Hunter; African Game Trails; Outdoor Pastimes of an American Hunter, (New York; Scribner's, 1925).

filled with enough detail (in every sense of the word) relative to hunting, animals, scenery, safari procedure, history, etc, as to provide a very helpful book of source material for the novelist who has never been to Africa.

The use of color and touch imagery are consciously utilized by Roosevelt in his successful attempt to create mood.

> The midwinter mountain landscape was very beautiful, whether under the brilliant blue sky of the day, or the starlight or glorious moonlight of the night, or when under the dying sun the snowy peaks, and the light clouds above, kindled into flame, and sank again to gold and amber and sombre purple. After the snow-storms the trees, almost hidden beneath the light, feathery masses, gave a new and strange look to the mountains, as if they were giant masses of frosted silver. Even the storms had a beauty of their own. The keen, cold air, the wonderful scenery, and the interest and excitement of the sport, made our veins thrill and beat with buoyant life.[21]

[21]Outdoor Pastimes of an American Hunter, p. 4.

Less romantic and more realistic is this passage from the same book:

> [Colorado] is a high, dry country, where the winters are usually very cold, but the snow not under ordinary circumstances very deep. It is wild and broken in character, the hills

> and low mountains rising in sheer slopes, broken by cliffs and riven by deeply cut and gloomy gorges and ravines. The sage-brush grows everywhere upon the flats and hillsides. Large open groves of pinyon and cedar are scattered over the peaks, ridges, and tablelands. Tall spruces cluster in the cold ravines. Cottonwoods grow along the stream courses, and there are occasional patches of scrub-oak and quaking asp.[22]

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[22] Outdoor Pastimes of an American Hunter, p. 4.

"Tall spruces cluster in the cold ravines." There is a clear image invoked by such clear prose. It goes without saying that Roosevelt was more than ordinarily sensitive to nature. He is a man for whom even the cry of the wolf held a peculiar attractiveness. He writes:

> To me their baying, though a very eerie and lonesome sound, full of vaguely sinister associations, has, nevertheless, a certain wild music of its own which is far from being without charm.[23]

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[23] Ibid., 57-58.

His wide knowledge of the natural world more than once bewilders the reader:

> The plains were generally covered only with the thick grass on which the great herds of game fed; here and there small thorn-trees grew upon them, but usually so small and scattered as to give no shelter or cover.... There were many kinds of shrikes, some of them big, parti-colored birds, almost like magpies, and with a kestrel-like habit of hovering in the air over one spot; others very small and prettily colored.... Little pipits sang overhead like our Missouri skylarks. There were night-jars; and doves of various kinds, one of which uttered a series of notes slightly resembling the call

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> of our whipporwill or whuckwills widow....
> Bustards...francolins...African spur-fowl
> ...civits....[24]

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[24] *African Game Trails*, I, 40-43.

But in addition to the ability to draw pastel portraits of what he saw, Roosevelt could with equal deftness convey sense of rhythm and movement:

> In an hour we overtook the Nandi warriors, who were advancing across the rolling, grassy plains in a long line, with intervals of six or eight yards between the men. They were splendid savages, stark naked, lithe as panthers, the muscles rippling under their smooth dark skins; all their lives they had lived on nothing but animal food, milk, blood, and flesh, and they were fit for any fatigue or danger. Their faces were proud, cruel, fearless; as they ran they moved with long springy strides.[25]

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[25] *Ibid.*, II, 432-433.

He is also able to be realistic; for example, in one passage he speaks of shooting a bear and casually describes the effect in the following manner: "I hit him square between the eyes, and he dropped like a pole-axed steer."[26] Or the following passages from *African Game Trails*:

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[26] *Outdoor Pastimes of an American Hunter*, p. 83.

> Both the cow and the bull [elephants] were in fine condition; but they were covered with ticks, especially wherever the skin was bare. Around the eyes the loathsome creatures swarmed so as to make complete

> rims, like spectacles; and in the armpits and the groin they were massed so that they looked like barnacles on an old boat. It is astonishing that the game should mind them so little; the wildebeest evidently dreaded far more the biting flies which hung around them; and the maggots of the bot-flies in their nostrils must have been a sore torment. Nature is merciless indeed.[27]

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[27] *African Game Trails*, I, 36.

The accusation of didacticism is not entirely unjustified where Roosevelt is concerned. His natural propensity for practicality causes him to continually inject personal opinions and theories concerning his favorite subjects, i.e. preservation of natural resources and the attitude of the true sportsman and lover of nature. Occasionally his opinions get in the way of otherwise smooth prose:

> In spite of the snow-storms spring was coming; some of the trees were beginning to bud and show green, more and more flowers were in bloom, and bird life was steadily increasing. In the bushes by the streams the handsome white-crowned sparrows and green-tailed towhees were in full song, making attractive music; although the song of neither can rightly be compared in point of plaintive beauty with that of the white-throated sparrow, which, except some of the thrushes, and perhaps the winter wren, is the sweetest singer of the North-eastern forests.[28]

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[28] *Outdoor Pastimes of an American Hunter*, p. 108.

In addition to his ability to create image, Roosevelt is continually seeing the varied implications of things. This is a defect, to a certain extent, inasmuch as it suspends the flow of his smooth prose. It is, however, interesting to watch his mind

rove all the avenues of his vast knowledge, playing over this and that with great enjoyment. He speaks of a negro servant while on trail in Africa, noting that

> One, Hamisi, must have had in his veins Galla or other non-negro blood; derived from the Hamitic, or bastard Semitic, or at least non-negro, tribes which, pushing slowly and fitfully southward and southwestward among the negro peoples, have created an intricate tangle of ethnic and linguistic types from the middle Nile to far south of the equator.[29]

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[29] African Game Trails, I, 24-25.

Of elephants he can speak with equal erudition:

> In the first dawn of history, the sculptured records of the kings of Egypt, Babylon, and Nineveh show the immense importance which attached in the eyes of the mightiest monarchs of the then known world to the chase and the trophies of this great strange beast. The ancient civilization of India boasts as one of its achievements the taming of the elephant; and in the ancient lore of that civilization the elephant plays a distinguished part.[30]

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[30] Ibid., I, 290.

Right in the midst of a thrilling passage dealing with the hunting of hippopotamuses, Roosevelt pauses to give us a characteristic sampling of the Roosevelt type of humor:

> I did not wish to shoot again unless I had to, and stood motionless, with the little Springfield at the ready. A head burst up twenty yards off, with a lily pad plastered over one eye, giving the hippo an absurd resemblance to a discomfited prize-fighter, and then disappeared with great agitation.[31]

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[31] *African Game Trails*, I, 272.

The following passage speaks for itself. It comes upon the reader unexpectedly, much as does the dichotomy-writing of Hemingway, although there is no attempt here at making such a comparison. It is interesting to speculate, and we can only do that, whether or not the effect produced is intentional.

> The bullet broke [the deer's] neck and down he went --a fine fellow with a handsome ten-point head, and fat as a prize sheep; for it was just before the rut. Then we rode home, and I sat in a rocking-chair on the ranch-house veranda, looking across the wide, sandy river bed at the strangely shaped buttes and the groves of shimmering cottonwoods until the sun went down and the frosty air bade me go in.[32]

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[32] *Outdoor Pastimes of an American Hunter*, p. 249.

It is true that Roosevelt's autobiography is incomplete. Perhaps such a criticism may be leveled at any attempt at autobiography, but in this case there is some justification. Biography is made interesting by material not of common knowledge --anecdotal or otherwise. The childhood of Roosevelt is only briefly sketched, without much of the material that is evident in the side-glances and digressions of his other books. While Roosevelt does tell a great deal that we did not hitherto know, we wish that he had been a little more eager to tell us about the life that was so filled with varied experience. It is uncanny that a man who had written dozens of books and countless thousands of words in every field imaginable should leave the world with a six-hundred page autobiography and much of

that political theory! At any rate the book is largely a disappointment.

Roosevelt does give in it a clear picture of the Western character. It is a pleasant surprise to know that a man of letters, a politician, was big enough, and man enough, in spite of physical difficulties, to fake a gunman into the position for a "right cross" followed by a quick "left" all in the face of two guns! Roosevelt tells of the incident and quickly passes on to another subject without giving us the slightest hint as to the reaction of such a bold deed on the part of the people in the saloon where it happened. This close-mouthed attitude is in keeping with the Western tradition; humility was not entirely foreign to Roosevelt.

Roosevelt gives his friend Owen Wister credit, along with Remington, for preserving, "with pen and pencil," the true Western man. He writes:

> I have sometimes been asked if Wister's 'Virginian' is not overdrawn; why, one of the men I have mentioned in this chapter was in all essentials the Virginian in real life, not only in his force but in his charm. Half of the men I worked with or played with and half of the men who soldiered with me afterwards in my regiment might have walked out of Wister's stories or Remington's pictures.[33]

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[33] Autobiography, p. 120.

The Western habit of understatement is humorously illustrated in the chapter "In Cowboy Land." Roosevelt was met at a reunion of his regiment by a man, "an excellent soldier," who informed him that

he had been in jail. When asked why he had been confined the man replied with some surprise: "Why, Colonel, don't you know I had a difficulty with a gentleman, and...er...well, I killed the gentleman." Roosevelt asked the man how it happened that he had killed a man. "Misinterpreting my question," he writes, "as showing an interest only in the technique of the performance, the ex-puncher replied: 'With a .38 on a .45 frame, Colonel.'"[34]

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[34] Autobiography, p. 125.

As is so often the case with Roosevelt, his didacticism often intrudes into excellent narrative. He constantly preaches his theories about national defense, preservation of natural resources, politics, idealism, etc.

The most interesting chapter by far, and it appears to be completely out of place in the Autobiography, is that one entitled "Outdoors and Indoors." In it Roosevelt discusses that phase of his life which is pertinent to this essay: the lover of nature, and the lover of books. For the two go hand in hand in Roosevelt's life; no distinction can be made between life and what is said about it, and Roosevelt never divorced the two. His knowledge of natural life supplemented, and was supplemented by, books.

> Like most Americans interested in birds and books, I know a good deal about English birds as they appear in books. I know the lark of Shakespeare and Shelley and the Ettrick Shepherd; I know the nightingale of Milton and Keats; I know Wordsworth's cuckoo; I know mavis and merle singing in the merry green wood of the old ballads; I know Jenny Wren and Cock Robin of the nursery books.[35]

[35] Autobiography, p. 322.

Wherever Roosevelt traveled he constantly made interesting associations between what he saw and his knowledge of natural life, to say nothing of the associations he was able to make as regarding culture. Much of his popularity in foreign countries was due to the fact that invariably he convinced people that he was acquainted with not only their literature, but with the rest of their material and non-material culture as well.

With regard to books themselves, Roosevelt wrote that they

> are almost as individual as friends. There is no earthly use in laying down general laws about them. Some meet the needs of one person, and some of another; and each person should beware of the booklover's besetting sin, of what Mr. Edgar Allan Poe calls the 'the mad pride of intellectuality,' taking the shape of arrogant pity for the man who does not like the same kind of books.[36]

[36] Ibid., 332.

The reader will note that it is a matter of kind; Roosevelt deeply pitied the man who did not care for any books.

The chapter in question is interesting for another good reason: it gives us an intimate glimpse into the personality of Roosevelt the father. He reveals his joy in and love for his children when he tells of adventures they shared together. But even in this chapter we have the feeling that there is much being unsaid which would add tremendously to the interest of the book.

The closing lines are of such Rooseveltian quality they might very well have been the lines with which he closed the book:

> It is impossible to win the great prizes of life without running risks, and the greatest of all prizes are those connected with the home. No father and mother can hope to escape sorrow and anxiety, and there are dreadful moments when death comes very near those we love, even if for the time being it passes by. But life is a great adventure, and the worst of all fears is the fear of living. There are many forms of success, many forms of triumph. But there is no other success that in any shape or way approaches that which is open to most of the many, many men and women who have the right ideals. These are the men and women who see that it is the intimate and homely things that count most. They are the men and women who have the courage to strive for the happiness which comes only with labor and effort and self-sacrifice, and only to those whose joy in life springs in part from power of work and sense of duty.[37]

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[37] Autobiography, pp. 347-348.

In the final analysis Roosevelt was, as many of his critics have said, a small boy who did a lot of talking, but as a whole his philosophy is a good one, and worthy of the admiration of any man.

When he died in 1919 it was as though a great noise had ceased and the room had suddenly become very silent. People could only look about themselves and wonder at the change.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

In the final analysis Roosevelt's writing is, with rare exception, important largely because of the author's greater importance as a political figure. Some comparison is inevitable between Roosevelt and other statesmen-writers, both of his own and previous times. Jefferson, notably, was a writer-statesman; John Quincy Adams wrote poetry and Woodrow Wilson was an American History scholar.

Fletcher Pratt has claimed that the writings of past presidents are all, "in a sense, propaganda."[1] "All," however

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[1]Fletcher Pratt, "Doubling in Literature," Saturday Review of Literature, XI (1937), 3.

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is too strong. Roosevelt's hunting books are not allied to propaganda in any way, other than an occasional direct reference to the matter of conservation. It is perhaps true, as Pratt has pointed out, that "to find good writing without ulterior purpose by government officers we must turn to the great appointive positions"[2]

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[2]Ibid., 3.

--Hawthorne, Irving, Motley, Melville, Bancroft, and others who were in government service. We may disregard them as political figures, Pratt claims, on the grounds that "literature with most of them was

the vocation and diplomacy or politics the toy."[3] This is a moot

[3] "Doubling in Literature," p. 3.

point, yet it must occur to the reader that given the inclination to neglect what he considered an obligation to his country, would not Theodore Roosevelt have produced more and finer work? Roosevelt chose to be both writer and statesman, and men who have chosen to swing two mighty clubs lose the value of the greater force they might apply to a single weapon. The list of men who forsook that which they perhaps enjoyed more than any other thing is undoubtedly a long one. Periods of war see little writing --men forsake to a greater cause their inclinations. The great writers and thinkers of any period might well have been great statesmen and warriors of another. Roosevelt tried to be both writer and statesman, and in so doing lost the place in American letters he might very well have earned.

Pratt has given due credit to Henry Cabot Lodge for Hero Tales of American History --

> still one of the most widely circulated juveniles in the country; has probably been read by, and as an outstanding juvenile has conditioned the ideas of, more persons than any other work in this survey.[4]

[4] Ibid., 4.

But Pratt does not include Roosevelt as the joint author of Hero Tales, the result, no doubt, of Lodge's name being the only one on the book cover. Pratt further claims "that American Literature by politicians

is remarkable chiefly for its poverty"[5] and makes a comparison

[5] "Doubling in Literature," p. 4.

between England and America on the basis of the merits of Disraeli, Bulwer-Lytton, Macaulay, Melbourne, G. D. H. Cole, and A. P. Herbert. But Pratt was writing in 1937 and we have the advantage of a considerable number of subsequent years as perspective. Disraeli is remembered chiefly for his political efforts. He was more popular than Bulwer-Lytton during his lifetime, but now Bulwer-Lytton is remembered where Disraeli is forgotten, at least so far as literature is concerned. Macaulay will stand firmly in English letters, but G. D. H. Cole receives no attention in the English survey courses. A. P. Herbert is a minor writer whose profusion of letters, plays, librettos, novels, and poetry receive scant notice in this country, although his contributions to Punch are still popular in England. It seems unjustifiable to compare these minor English writers with some of our own statesmen, namely Franklin, Hamilton, Madison, Jefferson, Washington, Lincoln or Wilson.

Like Roosevelt, Wilson as an historian does not stand high in the ranks of contributors to historical scholarship. His primary importance lies in the fact that he aided in "shaping the destinies of nations and of races" and all eyes are necessarily "turned to the equipment which he brings to his new task."[6] He is the object of our

[6] Jernegan Essays, p. 103.

interest for the same reason that Roosevelt is --because of what he did, not in books, but in politics. We can best learn about his methods and motives in his political life by finding out what it was that he had to say in the interpretation of past events. Both Wilson and Roosevelt were writers of history who became makers of history, Wilson being by far the more instrumental in shaping world events. Wilson learned from his study of history that man had the right of self-determination; in his role as President, as a major figure of the Peace Conference at Versailles, he determined to put the lesson he had learned from history to good use.

Wilson's judgment was far more mature than Roosevelt's. He could write when he was twenty:

> In Bismarck are united the moral force of Cromwell and the political shrewdness of Richelieu; the comprehensive intellect of Burke, without his learning, and the diplomatic ability of Talleyrand, without his coldness. In haughtiness, a rival of Chatham; in devotion to his country's interests, a peer of Hampden; in boldness of speech and action, an equal of Brougham, Bismarck's qualities are in most unique combination.[7]

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[7] R. S. Baker and W. E. Dodd, (edd.), The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, (New York and London, 1925-1927), I, 6-7. Quoted in Jernegan Essays, p. 104.

His college essays were on such dissimilar individuals as "Prince Bismarck, the Earl of Chatham, John Bright, William E. Gladstone, characters the most dissimilar--essays remarkable for precocity rather than profundity,"[8] a criticism which cannot be laid to

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[8] Jernegan Essays, pp. 104-5.

Roosevelt, although his Naval War of 1812 does exhibit a quality of precociousness, though it is "dry and pedestrian in style."[9]

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[9]Nye, p. 5.

Speaking of Wilson, Louis Martin Sears says that even in college Wilson exhibited evidence

> of that capacity for sweeping generalization which often leads the historian astray but without which no historian can possibly be great.[10]

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[10]Jernegan Essays, p. 105.

Roosevelt could also make the broad, sweeping generalization. Speaking of future historians he says that

> They will show how the land which the pioneers won slowly and with incredible hardship was filled in two generations by the overflow from the countries of western and central Europe. The portentious growth of the cities will be shown, and the change from a nation of farmers to a nation of business men and artisans, and all the far-reaching consequences of the rise of the new industrialism. The formation of a new ethnic type in this melting-pot of the nations will be told. The hard materialism of our age will appear, and also the strange capacity for lofty idealism which must be reckoned with by all who would understand the American character. A people whose heros are Washington and Lincoln, a peaceful people who fought to a finish one of the bloodiest of wars, waged solely for the sake of a great principle and a noble idea, surely possess an emergency-standard far above mere money-getting.[9]

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[9]History as Literature, p. 35.

Wilson was the more scholarly of the two, but even he could write

in the Romantic vein. His George Washington is "good popular stuff" and "suitable for the nontechnical reader."[10] Wilson ranged further

[10] Jernegan Essays, p. 111.

in his studies, and went deeper than Roosevelt, whereas Jefferson ranged no further, but also went deeper. Wilson was capable of dealing in large ideas, and "never failed to shed new light upon existing concepts."[11] Wilson greatly admired Lincoln, as did Roosevelt,

[11] Ibid., 117.

and both men did much by way of eulogizing that great American. But Wilson's admiration was on a higher and more subtle intellectual plane than Roosevelt's. They are far apart in intellect, and the critic is justified in conjecturing that greatness as an historian was within Wilson's grasp, but he did not seize it. "His nature was too rich to be so circumscribed."[12] Roosevelt too, might have reached

[12] Ibid., 121.

an enviable height as a writer, but it would have been in the Romantic vein, whereas Wilson had more of the scientific strain. But science in Wilson gave way to philosophy, and from philosophy he turned, as do so many, to religion. It was his firm conviction toward the end of his life that the world could be saved only by becoming one with the spirit of Christ, and there is in his later work, perhaps a result of his bitter experience, a foreboding of evil days ahead. Roosevelt could see growth and expansion, but he was optomistic about the future

--on the condition that people live to the full vigor of their lives. Roosevelt is never as definite about religion as Wilson --he falls more into the tradition of Paine and Franklin, although he was by no means a deist. He never gives such a bald-faced testimony as that given by Wilson:

> The sum of the whole matter is this, that our civilization cannot survive materially unless it be redeemed spiritually. It can be saved only by becoming permeated with the spirit of Christ and being made free and happy by the practices which spring out of that spirit. Only thus can discontent be driven out and all the shadows lifted from the road ahead.[13]

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[13] Jernegan Essays, p. 121.

There is an interesting parallel between Jefferson and Roosevelt which is worthy of consideration as a means of summing up Roosevelt as a man of letters.

In comparing the merits of Jefferson and Roosevelt, we must first consider the periods in which each lived. Where Jefferson was a philosopher-statesman, Roosevelt was a writer-statesman. The term "philosopher" cannot be used to describe Roosevelt, because neither in approach nor practice did he have the philosophic attitude; philosophical ideas were abhorrent to him. The term "scholar" cannot be applied to him in its narrow sense, for Roosevelt's histories indicate that his scholarly approach was largely a matter of much theory and little application. Jefferson was concerned with much the same philosophical problems as those which confronted the Renaissance humanists, the essential difficulty being how to reconcile

speculative thought on the nature of man with the greater and more immediate problem of creating a new society. Jefferson was particularly concerned with the theory and practice of good government. "He was intellectually prepared to examine the logical, philosophical, scientific, or sentimental elements in his views of society."[14]

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[14] Literary History of the United States, I, 147.

If this implies a character that was practical, then in that sense Jefferson and Roosevelt were much alike.

But in actual ability Jefferson stands far above Roosevelt. Roosevelt leaves the impression that he would have balked at much of the philosophical discussion that went on in Jefferson's day. Even though practical men were needed in the framing of the Constitution Roosevelt would have been lost had he not taken a more philosophic approach. It is not enough that a man be merely practical; the great man looks ahead and by some curious insight and genius sees what the problems will be far ahead of his own time, and aids in preparing to meet those periods of conflict. Roosevelt, as we know, is remembered for his continual harping on the need for conservation of natural resources, and this one factor contributes a good deal to his fame today. It is an instance where he saw through the maze of everyday problems and detected the geater issue. It was, however, a tangible issue, and one which experience in the hunting regions of the nation had pointed out to him.

Jefferson exercised a greater intellect than Roosevelt in many respects. He was a great lover of the fine arts, and his taste for

literature was practical, but above all he possessed a more mature judgment than Roosevelt's. Roosevelt's almost boyish enthusiasm for literature of all kinds, fine as it may be, indicates a lack of discriminating judgment. We rebel that he cannot be put into a "taste catagory." On one occasion at least, Roosevelt and Jefferson shared identical views. As we have seen, Roosevelt considered it an obligation on the part of writers to be interesting, imaginative, and moral, imagination being the necessary catalyst if a book is to stand up as a real contribution to literature. Jefferson coincides to a great extent in this view:

> Considering history as a moral exercise, her lessons would be too infrequent if confined to real life. Of those recorded by historians few incidents have been attended with such circumstances as to excite in any high degree this sympathetic emotion of virtue. We are, therefore, wisely framed to be as warmly interested for a fictitious as for a real personage. The field of imagination is thus laid open to our use and lessons may be formed to illustrate and carry home to the heart every moral rule of life.[15]

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[15]Frederick C. Prescott, ed., Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson (New York, AWS, 1934), p. 184.

Jefferson illustrates his more liberal mind when he asserted that he was no friend to "purism, but a zealous one to the neology which has introduced these two words without any authority from the dictionary."[16]

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[16]Ibid., lxvii-lxviii.

Purism he declared to be a detriment to the language; similarly

Roosevelt once expressed his desire to inaugurate and make official a system of modified spelling.

Nowhere in Roosevelt's criticism does one find such clarity as Jefferson's description of Paine's style:

> No writer has exceeded Paine in ease and familiarity of style, in perspicuity of expression, happiness of elucidation, and in simple and unassuming language.[17]

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[17] Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, p. 184.

Jefferson gets to the core of the matter in a hurry. He is much less concerned with critical generality. Roosevelt, while he does occasionally strike the mark, is often adolescent in his enthusiasm and exercise of the critical faculty, but even when compared to a man of Jefferson's stature he stands as one who does possess more than a modicum of ability. Jefferson ranged no further than Roosevelt, unless it be in the realm of speculative philosophy, but he went deeper. The content of the Declaration of Independence is proof enough of the depth. The criticism of Jefferson's "ideological" program as one "fitted to practical needs and political responsibilities, and yet attuned to the highest cultivation of the arts, the sciences, and belles-lettres,"[18] is a description which

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[18] Literary History of the United States, I, 154.

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fits Theodore Roosevelt very well.

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