



*THE PRESIDENT AT HIS DESK IN THE
EXECUTIVE OFFICE*

THE WORKS OF
THEODORE **R**OOSEVELT

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By the Author
The White House

JUN 1 1900

AT THE BICENTENARY CELEBRATION OF
CHRIST CHURCH PARISH, OYSTER
BAY, N. Y., SEPTEMBER 8, 1906

Dr. Washburn :

Let me first say again what has been said before, and that is a word of special welcome to our old friends Drs. Geer and Vandewater who are here to-day, and I trust they realize how much it means to us to see them back again.

I have only a word or two to say on this celebration of the two hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the church here at Oyster Bay. I can not understand any American citizen who has the faintest feeling of patriotism and devotion to his country failing to appreciate what Dr. Geer put so well—the absolutely essential need of religion, using it in its broadest and deepest sense, to the welfare of this country. If it were not that in our villages and towns as they have grown up the churches have grown up in them, symbolizing the fact that there were among their foremost workers men whose work was not for the things of the body but for the things of the soul, this would not be a nation to-day; because this country would not be an abode fit for civilized men if it were not true that we put our material civilization, our ma-

terial prosperity, as the base only (a necessary foundation, a necessary base, but only as the base, as the foundation) upon which to build the superstructure of the higher spiritual life.

In listening with the pleasure that we all felt to the address of the Bishop of Long Island I was struck, as I am sure all of us were, by his statement of the mission of the church; of its mission to work not in the interest of one sect only, but of humanity as a whole. Speaking here to-day as a layman, who is not expected to go into any question of dogma, any question of ceremonial, I wish to emphasize the vital importance to this nation of our people being taught to realize that the highest value of Christianity must manifest itself in the conduct of those who profess it.

I shall read four or five verses from the end of the first chapter of James:

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

“For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

“For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

“But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

“If any man among you seem to be religious, and

bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

And to ask you to remember in connection with these verses the verse ending the next chapter:

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

And again to remember the insistence of the Saviour himself upon the thesis that "By their fruits ye shall know them."

"Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

"A good tree can not bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit."

It is true that in many things the tendencies at work among us to-day are evil; but it is true also that there are plenty of other tendencies at work among us that are good. I do not know that I am prepared to assent to the statement that we are so much worse than we used to be, but it is not of any importance whether as a matter of academic belief we hold that things have grown better or have grown worse. What is of vital importance is that we should be resolved to do all in our power now—at this present moment as well as in the future—to make them better; and if we are a unit in this belief, it is open to us to differ as regards the other matter. I do feel that there has been a real growth

in broad Christian charity, the growth that produces just such incidents as those of which Dr. Vandewater spoke. I doubt very much whether a couple of centuries prior to that Episcopal gathering in the Friends' meeting house it would have been possible for your and their spiritual ancestors to come together on such an occasion; and it is a mighty good thing that it is possible now. I do believe that the different creeds are in the essentials, in really vital things, coming closer and closer together all the time; because I think that they are grasping the fact that the way in which they can best serve the Lord is not by warring against one another, but by joining hand in hand, by standing shoulder to shoulder in the great struggle against unrighteousness, in the great war for decency, for honesty, for clean living in the home no less than in the nation. The worth of any creed must in the long run be judged largely by the conduct of those who profess it. The most effective service for Christianity that can possibly be given is to show in actual life that those who profess it do give in their conduct an approximate expression to the faith that is in them. I doubt if any of us will be able to give more than such approximate expression of that faith; nevertheless we can each of us strive in our conduct to show that the Word is alive in us; that we are striving to live up to the essentials of Christianity, of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man as they are taught in the Bible, as they are preached to us Sunday after Sunday. It

is the conduct of the average Christian, not on Sunday but on week-days, not in the church alone but in his family and in his relations to his neighbor and to the State, that will more than anything else determine in the eyes of the general public the worth of the creed that man professes. If a man treats mere going to church, or mere devotion in word to his creed or to the outward forms of his creed, not as an incentive to decent action, but as a substitute for decent action, he is in very truth an enemy to the creed he professes; he is a drawback and not a help to the church.

Of course all this applies in little things as much as in big things. It applies in the little things which in their sum are so big. The man is not a good Christian if his domestic conduct is such that when he returns to his home his wife and his children feel a sense of uneasiness at his having come. The man is not a good Christian who in his business dealings fails to remember that it is incumbent upon him to hold a higher standard than his fellows; that it is incumbent upon him, if he is a very rich man, to make it evident alike in the way he earns and the way he spends his fortune that the Word of the Lord is to him a living truth and not a dead doctrine. And of course what I say applies even more strongly to the man in public life than to the man in business, than to the man in private life.

More and more I believe that people who possess either religious belief or aspiration after religious

belief are growing to demand conduct as the ultimate test of the worth of belief. Whenever we read in the newspapers that some man esteemed to be a pillar of the church has been guilty of business dishonesty, or political dishonesty, of offences against the moral law in any shape or way, all who are members of the churches should feel a far greater disappointment, should feel a greater regret by far, than those who are not. We can not afford to let it be supposed for a moment that we exact from those who are attendants at or members of churches any less strict observance of the moral law, anything but a more strict observance of the moral law, in all relations of life, than we expect from those who do not go to churches or who do not belong to them. We must strive each of us in his own life first, each of us as in a certain sense his brother's keeper next, so to bear ourselves as to show that we actually take to our own souls the teaching that by our fruits we shall be known; and that the corrupt tree can not bring forth good fruit, and that the sound tree must prove its soundness by bringing forth good fruit. The nominal Christian, the man who has attended to all the outward observances of Christianity with no matter what scrupulous care, who nevertheless embezzles trust funds, who is a disgrace in business, in politics, or in home life, has sinned against the light, and is more, not less, blameworthy than if he had never made profession of belief. Each of us, layman and clergyman alike, must strive in our actual

conduct 'day by 'day with the people among whom we live to make them understand that what we expect from Christian folk, if they are sincere in their devotion to Christianity, is the highest standard of conduct, is the actual carrying out in practical life of what they profess to receive in church, from the Bible, and from their associations with their fellow-members of whatever creed.

All men in public life come in contact with much that is base, with much that is venal or cowardly or dishonest; and if they have in their hearts any appreciation of what is really necessary to true national greatness, they must feel the need of every force for good in this country being multiplied and strengthened to the utmost possible extent. Dr. Geer spoke very strongly of the need of practical, of applied, religion, in the life of this Republic. He could not speak too strongly. We can not continue as a republic, we can not rise to any true level of greatness, unless that greatness is based upon and conditioned by a high and brave type of spiritual life.

There is nothing we should abhor more than the telling of an untruth, whether a conventional untruth or not; and I would on no account be understood as affecting to deprecate material well-being. To tell men to disregard riches entirely is to preach to them not only a doctrine which it is impossible for them to live up to, but which the preacher knows perfectly well they will not try to live up to. Regard the things of the body, but put them below

the things of the soul. Give to the body what the body is entitled to, but do not give it more than it is entitled to. The multimillionaire of whom Dr. Geer spoke, the man of wealth generally, is not a harm but a good to the community if he appreciates that he is a trustee for that wealth, that his use of it must also be a use which tells for decency in private life, for honesty and courage in business and in public life. No man is going to be of any real use to others until first of all he is able to carry his own weight; and if a man entirely disregards the things of the body it means that some one else has to regard them for him. He can not be a factor for good in the community at large unless he is first able to support himself and those dependent upon him. That is a fundamental, a basic duty for every man, and if he does not fulfil it he is not only doing wrong to those who are near him but he is depriving himself of the chance to do decent work for outsiders. So we need material well-being in this nation as a foundation without which no superstructure can be raised. But upon that foundation we must see to it that we build the superstructure of high individual and national conduct; so that each man in his relations to his fellows shall actually be influenced by the ethical standards which teach us that the thing in life best worth having will prove in the end to be the sense of having so lived that others are better and not worse off because we have lived.