II

BEGINNING A CAREER

In the twenty-one years which now followed, Theodore Roosevelt did brilliant service for short periods in five very different fields of public work; this inconsecutive official experience was alternated and blended with adventure in frontier life and in war; not to speak of occasional visits to Europe or of the vast range of reading and the vigorous variety of writing which accompanied the whole. Any one of the episodes into which the story could be broken would be found full of lively incident, of brief but thoroughgoing occupation with grave matters, or of both. But we had better pass those years in rapid survey, viewing them in connection with what was to come.

Shortly after he left college, he married a Massachusetts lady, Miss Alice Hathaway Lee, who became the mother of his eldest daughter, Mrs. Longworth, but whose life partnership with him was not to last long. The young couple settled in New York. Entrance into New York politics might not prove easy, and for precaution's sake Roosevelt began studying law. Long after, during his short Vice-Presidency, he again contemplated

returning to the law, but he had an evident repulsion from the requirement of taking a side regardless of one's sympathies, and the frequent further requirement of exclusive attention to the least important aspects of the matter concerned, which is incident to that august profession. For good and for ill he was unlikely to develop a great legal intellect, though, as he later reflected, an American lawyer might do a great work "for justice against legalism." Quite reasonably he felt no trouble about the broad choice of a side in politics. Historically the Republican Party stood for the Union; in root principle, so far as a distinction could be drawn, it stood for a strong national government; in its composition it included most of the leaders of industrial and commercial advance. Like most young men of his upbringing he had learned to think of that advance as in the main representing human progress, though his troubles as to the exact qualifications which this broad statement requires were to begin before long. So he took the first necessary steps to becoming a Republican politician.

The famous political machine of America had its origin in a more or less sincere zeal that the people at large should control its own government. That zeal had miscarried and long before this time,

in New York City, the organization in each district formed a kind of social and political club for which a man had to be regularly proposed and elected. Into the Twenty-first District Republican Association of that city he, nevertheless, gained admission; regularly attended the meetings in a club-room, which, if otherwise dingy, was at least well furnished with spittoons; unobtrusively took stock of his queer new associates; and was received on the whole with affability, and even friendliness, though he outraged the principles of most of them by voting, with a handful of others, for "a non-partisan method of street-cleaning." Suddenly a remarkable fighting Irishman among them, Joseph Murray, for whom Roosevelt had conceived a liking without suspecting that it was returned, had an inspiration to annoy the great chief of the Club by getting Roosevelt adopted as the Republican candidate in that district for the Assembly (the lower House of the Legislature) of the State. He succeeded; the great chief took his reverse in good part, and the two practised hands together led Roosevelt around to canvass the local saloon-keepers. At the first saloon which they visited they had cause for dismay; for their candidate, being told by the saloon-keeper, who was a man of influence, that the tax on licences was too high,

answered that he should try to get it made higher. In the rest of that canvass the candidate himself was left at home. But he was elected to the Assembly for the year 1882, and, largely as he believed because Joe Murray did not find him, like other men, so puffed up by this honor as to become less friendly to ordinary folk, he was elected again for the two following years.

In the Assembly at Albany "young Mr. Roosevelt of New York, a blond young man with eyeglasses, English side-whiskers, and a Dundreary drawl in his speech," soon found things to fight for, made a mark, and made some friends — of course enemies also. He declares that he got a little bit above himself and nearly lost the position which he had won. If so, he recovered himself quickly, and in his third term narrowly missed being made Speaker, becoming, instead, chairman of important committees dealing mainly with the affairs of New York City. The great State of New York includes, besides the famous city at its extreme southeastern corner, from which it takes its name, other cities far away, distinguished by industry, invention, and public spirit; and the vast and beautiful region which lies between them is the home of an independent farming people of no slight attractiveness and worth. Nevertheless, for reasons over which

we need not pause here, it has not produced an illustrious Legislature. Great and rapid material development was and continues to be in progress, and so a very large proportion of the business of the Legislature consists in what in England is called Private Bill Legislation. The organization and procedure of American legislatures seem unfavorable to the fair and aboveboard transaction of such business. Unscrupulous business corporations were accustomed to buy favor not only by subscriptions to one or both of the rival party-machines, but by the direct bribery of a certain number of specially hardened and skillful legislators.

On the other hand, corporations whether unscrupulous or not were exposed to blackmail upon the part of the same expert gentry. In the milder form of jobbery, which consists in the abuse of patronage, the old hands of the opposed parties had a common interest, for the sake of which they did ingenious "deals" with each other behind the back of the Legislature at large. Public opinion could manage to remain partly ignorant, partly indifferent about it all. It was not in itself a great matter that a city of colossal wealth did not draw all the taxation that it might from a certain railway, or that the fares on the same railway were a little too low or too high; and, though the trans-

action through which some such minor evil arose might really be a very black business, the facts of the matter would generally be hard to discover, and to the ordinary citizen (as to the present historian) dull and unintelligible when told.

Hence in this part of his pilgrimage Roosevelt's efforts were in large part spent in discovering and defeating, or at least exposing, jobs. His first speech was a blunt statement of the case, which explained, and thus destroyed, some "deal" of a customary and plausible kind, but with undeserved profits for somebody at the back of it, between his own party, who were in a minority by only one, and the most orthodox and pestilential group in the divided Democratic majority. Soon after he faced the unpleasant task of demanding investigation into charges of venal favor to rich corporations, made against a Judge of the Supreme Court of the State. The investigation came to nothing, for some reason which was not generally assumed to lie in the uprightness of that Judge; but investigation is discouraging to corruption. When a bill, already alluded to, which would have freed the New York Elevated Railway from half its proper taxation, came around, he failed to defeat it in the Assembly, but aroused a public opinion which encouraged the Governor to veto it. And so forth.

But before the three years were out, he had more positive results to show. As the result of several fights successful and unsuccessful for bills for the better government of New York City, or against bills for its even worse government, he achieved some important steps toward reforming the constitution of that amazing municipality. He accomplished, too, a real measure of Civil Service Reform for all the larger cities in the State. He made good his old promise to the saloon-keeper, that he would advocate a heavier tax on his licence, but his proposal was defeated. More important still, he took up the demand of the Cigar-makers Trade-Union for a law to stop their trade from being carried on under foul conditions in tenement houses. Here he succeeded with the Legislature, but the Courts and the Constitution were against him — a fact with consequences in his mental history.

But the details of these struggles cannot interest us now in comparison with the mere fact that a youth, with only Harvard and a cultured home behind him, was able almost at once to become a leader and a standard-bearer in that queer legislative House. The secret of this fact, apart from his obvious moral courage, lay in a quality which is even more uncommon. He went into what his normal associates thought a very dingy crowd

without the least sense of personal superiority in virtue; he was ready to fight any man or every man if real cause arose, but still more ready to be friends when friendship was possible; above all, for whatever good he did, his own heart gave the greatest praise to comrades whose scope in life was narrower than his, who could win no such praise as he won, and in some cases were knowingly inviting a vengeance which could not touch him. Anyone who is interested in politics from what he deems a high moral standpoint might do well to turn to the passages in Roosevelt's "Autobiography" which tell of Mike Costello or, still more, of Peter Kelly, or, in a different connection, of some of his prize-fighter friends, or of heroes among the police of New York. Not that there is anything very thrilling or picturesque about them, but because, in these days even more than ever, little good can be done for the mass of mankind by the most enlightened and highminded if they cannot make man-to-man friendships without elegant "respect of persons."

It went along with his essentially kindly attitude that, since he had sometimes to hit, he held "that the unforgivable crime is soft hitting." When he saw a thief, he expressed his estimate of that man's moral worth in words and tones intended to electrify the honest people who, from timidity,

depraved custom, or convenient blindness, "consented unto him." Thus "the exquisite Mr. Roosevelt," as in 1882 plausible satire could still call him, developed — and had to do so — a style of oratory which the plausible satire of later days could describe with very different adjectives. And perhaps there were other reasons, too, why he came quite honestly by a superfluously forcible manner. He first spoke in earnest in a place where sometimes — of course by no means always — his words, if they were to be worth speaking, must be of the sledgehammer sort. But, as his college-mates describe him, he started not only with a full share of natural shyness — as do many forcible men — but likewise with a difficulty in clear enunciation; what was burning in him, if it was to come out at all, must come out with a rush, perhaps a roar.

If he learned some large sympathies in his legislative days, he also began to form some antipathies. His disgust was not reserved for the poorer and dirtier agents of a system in which mild corruption spread far and gross corruption did not surprise. More than one of his kindly elders, of high repute in good society, gave him well-meant counsels of wisdom which shocked him. Thus he early became alive to the sort of surreptitious connections between the world of great industrial enterprises and the

world of politics, about which he long after grew fierce. And, what is quite a different matter, he learned that even upright courts of justice may be led to obstruct social progress. Mention has already been made of his Act concerning the manufacture of cigars in tenement houses. When he proposed and carried this measure, he had himself penetrated into the unsavory dens in New York where this manufacture destroyed whatever healthy conditions remained possible to the crowded immigrants with several families in one room. Therefore it left a deep impression on him when the courts held that the Act was invalid, as a violation of rights of property which the Constitution guaranteed. The principle of the decision was one which held up for many years, in New York, reforms which were even more needed there than in London, and to the need of which English opinion became about that time keenly alive. The well-meaning jurist who delivered the decision heightened its effect upon Roosevelt by indulging in sentimentality upon a subject of which he knew nothing; speaking of the lairs in which the hapless aliens concerned were condemned to stink, he talked of "home and its hallowed associations." Roosevelt's later policy was not always referable to thought-out principle, but the connecting strain of loyalty, to deep and

sincere impressions beginning far back, is generally pretty easy to see.

This brave first flight of his in the politics of New York State closed with an incident which disappointed some who had been readiest to admire him, and gave the first start to whatever was honest in a sort of censure which waited upon him ever after. A few plain words must be said upon it. He was sent as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in the spring of 1884. On that memorable occasion the candidate nominated for the Presidency was James G. Blaine. Mr. Blaine was the most brilliant and popular man of his party, but there were grave charges against his probity. The verdict of Mr. Rhodes on these charges is that "he had *probably* prostituted his position as Speaker of the House for the purpose of making money," and Mr. Rhodes is perhaps the justest man who ever wrote history. On the other hand, it seems sure enough that the vast majority of rank-and-file Republicans believed that Blaine had cleared himself. Here it may be worth while for some English readers to notice that a man whose strict financial honor could be doubted at all had never before been put up as a Presidential candidate, and that the all but inevitable effect was to break the long domination of the Republican party and secure the elec-

tion of a Democrat — that great President, Grover Cleveland. It was the occasion when the famous "Mugwumps" revolted from the Republican party.

Roosevelt's efforts to prevent Mr. Blaine's nomination had been conspicuous and bold. But when the Convention had given its decision, he gave enough active support to the chosen candidate to mark himself as a committed party man. It was natural that the Democratic press should denounce him as a "reform fraud" found out; and it was honorable in his courageous "Mugwump" friends to be bitterly grieved. He had not acted without grave searchings of heart. He reflected upon the relative utility of acting "without and within the party"; a man "could not possibly do both"; but he had once, with his eyes open, gone into things as a party man and would continue in his course, feeling deeply that he was "alienating many friends and the only kind of political support he valued." The decisive consideration for him was, he declared, this: he had been sent as a delegate to that Convention by men who trusted him to vote as he saw fit, but trusted him, all the same, to abide by the vote of the majority; if he were not to support Blaine now he should never have accepted the position in which he had been able to offer him a very serious opposition. At a more

memorable crisis of his life, in the Republican Convention of twenty-eight years later, we shall have to ask whether the different circumstances justified the seeming difference of his action. But this reasoning of his in 1884 admits, if an English critic can understand the case, of no possible answer, and the suspicion cast upon his manly rectitude, though quite intelligible, was totally baseless.

Here the scene changes. It was not to be expected or desired that Roosevelt, at the age of twenty-six, with all his powers still rapidly developing and his horizon becoming vast, should hold himself bound down for long to this useful work in New York State. He had already gone hunting in the Far West, and in 1883 he had bought and stocked two cattle ranches in what is now the State of North Dakota. Starting these ranches had been a delightful adventure to him; he probably enhanced its pleasure by imagining that he was likely to see his money back; possibly he enjoyed the knowledge that his wisest relatives thought the whole proceeding mad. Visits of business or of pleasure, to his ranchmen and his cattle, were frequent enough for years after. But from the autumn of 1884 to that of 1886 his home lay among them, and it was a home with a solace which his nature needed at the time. For early in 1884 his mother had passed

away, and upon the following day his young wife had died in childbirth.

The Bad Lands of Dakota had been so named by French-Canadian hunters who found that traveling through these rough plains and tortuous ravines was trying even to them. They are the product of a geological history which is, perhaps fortunately, unusual. Every great wilderness has shifting and haunting beauties, of which the Bad Lands must have their full share; but, to judge from pictures, descriptions, and geological models, the utterly fantastic and freakish shapes of hill and ravine, the general aspect of desolation, and the abundance of sticky mud would specially recommend this section of the West only to the more eccentric lovers of nature's charms. The terror and havoc of the winter of 1886 and of the following spring-floods were probably greater in a country of that nature than anywhere else in the Northwest. To Roosevelt and to many a poorer man they brought heavy loss. But the Bad Lands were attractive for cattle-ranching, first, because they were unpromising for all other purposes, and secondly, because Texas and other ranching areas had already been taken up.

To drop to minor economic considerations, — such as had actually influenced the sturdy fellows from New Brunswick whom Roosevelt found there

and took as partners and who proved loyal and wise friends, — the Northern Pacific Railway would then carry one out there for nothing, but charge five cents a mile for taking one back.

A little study of the map would prepare the reader to find that the arm of the law was not strong at first in the Bad Lands. Around the point where the Northern Pacific Railway crosses the Little Missouri River was gathered, or scattered, a community — if such institutions as a saloon and a gambling hell and the nominal authority of a sheriff and justice of the peace two hundred miles away make community the right name — such as America produces no longer. Fundamentally its life was like that which has given the historical sagas of Iceland a human attractiveness unsurpassed in literature. Some of the tawdrier elements of modern civilization were indeed there, and gave to the more feeble of its characters and the more dingy of its episodes a greater squalor than that of barbarism; but a little under the surface, among these sinewy people, lay enough of those sound traditions which are the unseen heritage of the civilized, to make not a few of them before long such quiet, sturdy citizens, with a strong streak of generosity in most of them, as have been the pride and are the hope of the West.

In the true saga which a true poet, Mr. Hagedorn, has written there are many arresting figures. The name of Hell-Roaring Bill Jones compels attention: poor Bill Jones — there is really little to say about him, except that his closing days, when drink had taken the lachrymose turn with him, had a milder pathos about them than his august designation might suggest. The almost incredible Marquis de Mores, who was to fall later by the hand of a treacherous Arab ally in Africa, on the threshold of a stupendous design against the hated British Empire, and who at this time was dissipating the millions of his New York father-in-law upon hardly less stupendous designs for the development of Dakota, — they never got beyond design and debt, — plays a larger part in the story. But if such heroes, and the "two-gun men" (gun means pistol), and the real bad men who were noted and heartless man-slayers, and the would-be "bad men" who aped them, and the occasional need, on first introduction, of knocking a man down before his insolence turned to shooting, added a brightness to the social scene, they were far from being the whole of it. Now and then there appeared in it an adventurer of a quite different type, who in another age would have got sainted; the valiant surgeon ministering in perilous journeys to suffering scat-

tered over hundreds of miles, or that tough young graduate from Michigan who founded and edited the *Bad Lands' Cowboy*, in a light-hearted championship of decency and reform which went far.

But of course the main element of life was hard work, and in greatly changed surroundings the two chosen friends of earlier journeys whom Roosevelt brought out there were much the same men that they had been as woodmen in far-off Maine, and his guides and ranching partners, aforementioned, were not very different from their fathers who farmed in orderly British New Brunswick. The fascinating quality of the life lay in this: that, remote from the reign of law or (very often) of sound convention either, nearly all the men had come out there full of hope, nearly all were perforce familiar with danger, toil, and pain, and nearly all were young.

There was plenty of sport to be had after many kinds of game. The buffalo had not yet vanished from that country when Roosevelt came, and on a long excursion into yet more secluded wilds he made the much desired acquaintance of the grizzly. But his full attention was given to ranching in real earnest, and sharing, to the full extent to which a master wisely could, the work, privations, and dangers of his men. All the while what can only

be called the strange physical strength of his brain allowed him, after hard outdoor days, to enjoy, for example, Shelley, undisturbed by almost any surroundings short of the attentions of a skunk, or to read — likewise to write — much history.

Order was gradually establishing itself. Naturally at first it was promoted more by a voluntary organization of Western cattle farmers against the cattle thieves than by public authority. Roosevelt did much for that organization. He became also an officer of the law and astounded all that region of the world by an example of how seriously a man might take the law. One "Red-Head" Finnigan, — who boasted that he came "from Bitter Creek where the further up you went the worse men got" and that he lived "at the fountain head," — with two other men stole his boat. He and his men built another, pursued him down the river, swollen high but still ice-obstructed, caught and captured the thieves, and then, when local practice would have prescribed an immediate hanging, added hundreds of miles to a terrible journey, just to lodge them in the gaol. Matthew Arnold would hardly have believed it, — though Tolstoi easily might, — but the works of those two authors were the chief comforts of that expedition. If one were to add here instances of the abrupt courage with which

he sometimes stopped formidable men's foul mouths, or went out of his way to shame some mean oppressor of Indians, they might, quite delusively, suggest the good boy of an improving story. I will risk impertinence and cite that kindly and gracious gentleman, Mr. Lincoln Lang, ex-cowpuncher, as a witness to the tactful gravity with which he could steady some younger fellow. The exuberant fun of an overgrown schoolboy ran through it all. And there was then, and ever after, the solemn and harmless vanity of a schoolboy there. It showed itself in his smart cowpuncher costume, and in the photographs which he got taken of himself in character. It did not sink in very deep. He knew, perhaps exaggerated, the fact that he was not such a hunter as some men, could not handle a vicious horse like some others, much less fell trees like his Maine friends. But he had tried himself and proved that in the hardest life he could hold his own all round very well. There was no harm in it if he was hugely pleased. He had learned much and could feel himself a real man. Beyond the healing influence of wild nature upon sorrow, these were the very things which he had come for. But he had accomplished something further for other men and for himself. Undesignedly, by holding his own in their pursuits and being a good fellow among

them, he had brought into not a few men's lives contact with a range of knowledge, a breadth of vision, and a rigorous standard of right, of which some had never dreamed and others were forgetting the possibility. Because of that contact with a few and the wider reputation which came from it, he was to find himself later a popular leader of an unique — surely a most precious — kind.