

WHAT THE PREACHERS MAY LEARN FROM THE "COLONEL".

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Readers of the *Atlantic Monthly* will recall a racy article from the wise and witty Samuel McCord Crothers on "The Colonel in the Theological Seminary". The "Colonel", of course, a soldier, a man of action, is a creature of the essayist's brain, who comes to the Kingdom for just such a time as this, to teach the preachers some things that they need to know. Mr. Crothers makes his "Colonel" tell of a ministers' meeting he attended which was to discuss "The Present Condition of Religion". "I went", the Colonel says, "to find the meeting split up into factions, not in regard to any particular movements or forms of activity, but only by temperamental and traditional differences. Some were complacently saying, 'Oh! Everything will come out all right, if let alone!'—these were called 'Optimists'. Others said, 'No! Everything is going to the dogs!'—these were stigmatized as 'Pessimists'." But, strange to say, neither class suggested, or seemed to see, that they could do much about it one way or the other, and there seemed to be no "mediating" class bent on conciliating the opposing clans, for co-operation and conquest. "Gentlemen", said the Colonel, with the impatience and something of the authority of the soldier, "I understood that this was to be a council of war. Instead of that—instead of your offering and discussing a plan of campaign—you seem to have contented yourselves with differing and simply bringing out your clinical thermometers to take each other's temperature!" Whereupon, he proceeded to give them, not a piece of his mind, but several pieces, and to send them away, somewhat ashamed and sad, but, it is to be hoped,

wiser and more bent on some helpful action. On one reader, at least, the Colonel's lesson was not wholly lost. That reader made it the occasion and motive of a paper which he read to a real, not an imaginary, ministers' meeting.

Now he has come upon another "Colonel" and another "occasion" for teaching something like the same lesson or lessons—only with "variations". The "Colonel", this time, is a real, not an imaginary, "man of action", and the "lessons" he has to teach the preachers—"their name is legion!" Of course, because of "limitations of space", we'll have to confine ourselves to a select few.

First, as Senator Lodge suggested in his Washington address, it is no wonder that the pulpit found in Roosevelt's life a text for sermons. Nor will this prove a fad—a thing for a day. It looks now as if with some he might soon supplant the immortal Lincoln as a theme for discourse in the future, on Sundays, as well as the Fourth of July, or his birthday. Already, men are saying: "Washington was noble and stately, 'the father of his country'; Lincoln homely, humorous, a lover of common folks, and a martyr for liberty; but Wilson is a schoolmaster-statesman, a consummate diplomat and idealist—and hereafter, when we go through our national gallery of heroes, we will find you, Colonel, 'one of the heroic gods of American mythology!'—a colossal demigod, armed with 'big stick', ready for immediate and vigorous action, courageous, outspoken on occasion, strenuous—in short, the very embodiment of what is vital in American life!"

But this is not all they are saying. They are recalling that it was not "ever thus" with the "Colonel". He was a delicate child. He began life like a Charles Darwin, like Sandow did, like many another has done, with an hereditary handicap, threatened with invalidism. But he heroically reacted against all this and came off, like some of the others, like Paul himself, the preacher, "conqueror

and more than conqueror". "Say what we may about you now that you are gone", says a Western editor, in an appreciation which is clear out of the beaten track of Memorial Day eulogy, "the fact remains, Colonel, that your life is an achievement from beginning to end. Your preaching of 'the strenuous life', your wondrous hurly-burly, your magnificent grasping for 'life more abundant', for power unattained; your enormous insatiable appetite for battle—battle with anything, just so the 'scrap' was hot enough—were you not in all of these, after all, just flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood, and bone of our bone—O you incarnation of American spirit? You smashed through the jungles of Africa, of South America; you gloried in the blood of animals like a super-butcher; you paraded through Europe with the grand old Rooseveltian brass-band blare before you, then you came to America, fell upon politics with the old cow-boy 'yip' or jungle 'yelp' of the hunter, and—Alas! Alas!—went down smashingly to defeat. Then, when the world war broke out, here you are again, up at it, filling the land with the sound of your thunderings, almost loud enough to drown out the thunder of the cannonading and groans of the wounded and dying across the seas—but, through it all, you were fighting, giving your sons and yourself to the fighting—you were living, acting, achieving, and feeling the glory of it all, 'the joy of the strife', realizing that life was worth living, embodying, indeed, whole raw sections of American psychology, American life, history, tradition, and aspiration!" Who after this will need ever to despair because he was "born tired", or because he has "suffered from malaria", or had "hook-worm", or "hain't had no chance"? Who that feels the call in his little bones or flaccid body, and in his heart of hearts, to be a leader, a doer of deeds, a hero, a preacher-prophet, need hoist the white flag, or turn Jonah and run away? Listen, preachers!

Still another thing they are saying; it is something like this—I will paraphrase and summarize it: "You hero

—herald of ideas, as well as doer of deeds, you preacher of righteousness and proclaimer of unwelcome truths, often with the bark on; you drove your words, phrases, and messages into our language, as well as into our minds and hearts, with the primal force of a cave-man hammering the earth with a club cut from a gnarly tree, and you made it impossible for any of us to forget them altogether. You not only charged up San Juan Hill, but you made it a part of our proud national traditions. You said, 'Bully!' once—and we laughed at you, we cried out after you, some hating, some loving you; but you smiled back at us with such a good humor that we have built up a national legend about your protruding teeth. You cried out once, 'D-e-e-e-lighted!' and repeated it in such tones and with such a boyish manner that it became as much a part of our consciousness, or subconsciousness, as are the sun, moon, and stars. Once you invited a Negro to lunch with you at the White House, and soon the entire South was sneering at you for it and charging you with 'playing politics'. Then later, when certain Negro troops did something that you considered wrong, you unhesitatingly condemned them, you were stern in your dealing with them, and the entire North shrieked at you—both in vain, for you kept on unperturbed in the even tenor of your way."

Ah! preachers, preachers, learn this lesson! You will need it, if you haven't yet come to the disclosure of the need by kindred experience. You can't afford to be ruffled, or unduly worried, or driven off your chosen track of duty or policy by a whole pack of such barkers at your heels.

But, not all of the "Colonel's word-smashing and driving heedlessly ahead was wise or praiseworthy. The California editor already quoted goes on in his unconventional way to say to the "Colonel"—the much-loved Colonel: "You buffeted us with that old Anglo-Saxon word 'liar': You consigned your enemies right and left to the

'Annanias Club'; you called our great Democratic President a 'traitor' in the thick of America's greatest war—while he was threading Niagara. You scoffed at the idea of a 'League of Nations' in the interest of world peace; you brazenly assured us that there would always be war, and that the only thing for us to do was to arm ourselves to the teeth and be prepared to blow our enemies to flinders. Affectation of a certain mild type, egotism, theatrical posing, going backward or forward as political policy prompted? Yes, Colonel, you were guilty of all of these things—and more; yet, Colonel, we all love you. There was one thing in particular we all recognized and loved in you and about you—and that was your basic honesty, and, what was parcel and part of that, your unfaltering courage—your everlasting outspokenness!" From hypocrisy, cant and make-believe, in man or woman, but especially in the man aspiring to the leadership of men, "Good Lord, deliver us!" Preachers, put all such from you as resolutely and whole-heartedly as you would say, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" But, remember, to resist the devil is the only way to make sure of his fleeing from you.

One more thing some men are sadly saying and doing: They are bemoaning the tarnishing of the Colonel's escutcheon by his bearing toward his great rival during the closing years of his truly great life, thus hanging out a lurid light of warning to us—one and all. A picture in *Life*, the illustrated weekly of world-wide fame, recalls this to memory. It represented the Colonel as a homely bull dog with an enormous mouth baying at the moon on the sands of Oyster Bay—and the man in the moon was President Wilson! The bull dog's carefully contrived resemblance to the Colonel was no compliment—it was the essence of cruelty. Is it a matter of surprise that it called forth protest—and gave acute pain to many who bore it in silence? One respected reader of *Life* put his protest into words: "For twenty-five years Mr. Roosevelt had

been the champion of manliness in the nation, and had inspired, and himself had put in, immense labors to get the country ready for war—and now”, he said, “it seems hard that such a man should thus be held up to opprobrium”. But *Life* defended its course with characteristic courage and plainness of speech: “Opprobrium? No! The cartoon only showed him exercising himself in the manner in which he did exercise almost daily. It showed the Colonel on the job that had engaged him most of the time for the last six years. Mr. Roosevelt was the main, certainly the most vociferous, opposition to the present administration. He was the hind wheels of Mr. Wilson’s car that always kept it, in anxious moments, from tripping up and dumping its load. By attacking Mr. Wilson for not making an army, he practiced, consciously or not, to create a sentiment that made it possible for Mr. Wilson to get into the war and to create an army when the time came.”

Mr. Roosevelt had a great career himself as President—one of the greatest and best that the country ever had. And, like many another great man before him, he found it hard to let slip from his hands the power and the lash he had learned to use so well. But this was but the vice of his qualities. There was something innate, temperamental, belonging to his red-bloodedness, his straight-from-the-shoulder spirit, in all this. He was a born fighter. He fought hard for all he got, and for things he did not get, poor man! And so, in spite of his faults, we all admired and, most of us, loved him.

Then, let it be remembered to his credit, he wrought mightily to ripen the country for war. He helped to create a public opinion that made it easier for Mr. Wilson to quit neutrality when the clock struck for it. You see the lesson, or lessons, in all this for us preachers, for all who would be leaders of the people. Let us beware of yielding to the inevitable temptation that comes to every man to be unjust to his rival in life’s supreme race, and

so unjust to ourselves in yielding to the temptation in such a way as to destroy our peace of mind, impair our sense of justice and do ourselves irreparable injury in our relation to the people's confidence and esteem and to the future of our public ministry. But, even though we yield to the temptation, and though such yielding be brought home to us as sin, we may find solid comfort in this thought, that the God who maketh all things to work together for good to the elect, to those who are called according to His purpose, will often so overrule our opposition as to help our rival, if he be of the elect, to accomplish in His own time and way the work God has chosen and appointed and empowered him to do.

One other lesson is here suggested, and it should not be ignored or lost on us: If a man awake to the consciousness and conviction that he has been in error, then, by all means, he should be manly enough, Christian enough, gentleman enough, to acknowledge the error, confess his mistake or wrongdoing, "eat crow" if necessary, and come out as bravely and publicly in acknowledgement and repentance, as he was originally in giving the attack or offense. This the Colonel did, more than once, but especially in professing his complete conversion and revision of opinion on the subject of the possibility and advisability of Anglo-American unity. It is profoundly and pathetically significant that the last article ever written by Colonel Roosevelt for publication was entitled, *Eyes to the Front*, an article breathing this spirit, but pleading for action—forward action.

After all, let us take to heart the further deep lesson involved in the fact that, when the news was flashed beneath the ocean and over the world that Roosevelt was dead, there came with electric swiftness a chorus of worldwide responses from courts and cabinets, but, what is more significant, from press and people, the world over—from far distant lands. And through it all there ran a golden gleam of interlacing threads of personal feelings,

shared by high and low, rich and poor, young and old, especially the young, feelings which culminated at last in the nation-wide, indeed well-nigh world-wide, observance of "Roosevelt Memorial Day"—a feeling which rarely ever has shown out more radiantly amidst the sombre formalisms of public grief than on that day. Here was a man, it would seem, a private citizen, conspicuous by no office at the time, with no glitter of power about him, no ability to reward or punish, gone from his earthly estate, who must have been unusual, even among leaders of men. As such, surely, he richly deserves and challenges our serious and loving consideration, as men, as American citizens, as lovers of our kind. But I repeat, in conclusion, what this article is written to emphasize; no single class of men may study his life and character, his virtues and faults, his achievements and failures, with greater profit, I take it, than the preachers.

“He died for his faith. That is fine!—
 More than most of us do.
 But—say—can you add to that line
 That he lived for it, too?”

“Ah! To live—every day to live out
 All the truth that he dreamt,
 E’en while friends met his conduct with doubt,
 And others with contempt—

“Was it thus that he struggled ahead,
 Never turning aside?
 Then, we’ll talk of the life that he led—
 Never mind how he died.”

Who does not feel the force and beauty, too, of the remarkable tribute paid to him in the last poem ever written by the young Negro poet, Joseph S. Cotter?

Now with the dust that bore him he is one,
 Silent, into earth's silent maw, ye laid him.
Dimmed is his light, as with the setting sun,
 He folds his steps unto the God who made him.
When shall the weak stand and rejoice again
 To see his banner in the battle's light?
When shall the humble hear his voice again—
 Raised from the mountain of majestic night?
O ye shall see that banner gleam again,
 High o'er the ramparts of a nation's goal;
O ye shall hear that voice redeem again
 The blood-stained conscience of a nation's soul.
Rise ye that tremble 'mid such fearful moan,
 He stands anointed at Jehovah's throne.