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“The President and the Czar,” 1905 March 5.

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March 5th., 1905.

THE PRESIDENT AND THE CZAR.

Yesterday, according to historic custom, Theodore Roosevelt was inaugurated as President of the United States and made the enthusiastic acclaim of the people. In far distant Russia is also heard the noise of the multitude - tis the murmuring of the millions in protest against the power of the Czar, many asking abdication of his absolute authority. The Czar hesitates to grant power to the people, fearing the destruction of his government. The President accepts power from the hands of the people, the sure foundation of the government. In Russia, rulers have changed from time to time, 'mid scenes of blood. The Czar Nicholas has been sentenced to death by the court of the revolutionaries and lives in fear of the hour of execution. Presidents, too, have changed. They have surrendered power almost absolute. What a contrast! At the command of the people, without the striking of a single blow, or the shedding of a single drop of blood. Russia and America, the despotism and the democracy bear a strong resemblance to one another. The resemblance is physical. They are the two greatest countries, in extent of territory and in number of population. Russia has its one-hundred and thirty millions plus, America its eighty millions plus. Russia extends from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and almost to the Mediterranean. It spans the continent of Europe, and across the continent of Asia it reaches from the Baltic Sea and the Arctic Ocean in the west and north, eastward to the Pacific. The United States spans the American continent from our northern seas, the great inland lakes to our Mediterranean, the Gulf of Mexico. It reaches across the continent, from ocean to ocean, from the Atlantic westward to the Pacific. The likeness is physical only. Russia and America, the despotism and the democracy in all other respects are thoroughly unlike. Here is peace and prosperity, joy and happiness; there is war and sorrow, confusion and fear, misery and want.

Theodore Roosevelt, the president of the United States, has had unusual training in the school of politics. He is unusually experienced in public administration. More than other men he knows intimately the arts and ways of government. He is a strong personality, strong physically, full of the enthusiasm and energy of youth and of the mature strength of manhood, endowed with the American spirit and the American capacity to do and accomplish things. Strong intellectually, educated in the schools of learning, educated also in the hard and practical school of life; strong, also, of spirit - of soul earnest, of character clean and upright. He is a typical American, a man through and through, in body and brain, in heart and soul. Never, in all the history of America, was there one better prepared to meet the high obligations of the presidency. The president is known of all men. His life, his record, his character - are known to us all.

And the Czar; who knows him? What is his life, his record and his character? He is strong, says one. He is weak, says another. He is determined and self-willed. He is vacillating and pliant to every influence. He is despot. He is a weak Mystic. He is tyrant. He is tool. "Nicholas the 2nd. is his own master and is himself answerable for his men and measures." "Nicholas the 2nd. is subservient to the grand dukes and the royal family and the Holy Procurator, Pobiedonostseff. His is the guiding hand and his the ruling spirit. He is kept in ignorance of the conditions of his own land and people. Absolute monarch, says one; powerless, says another.

Know the misery of the peasantry. Understand the political corruptions and oppressions, the graft and the bribery which fill the land. Read the horrible story of the religious outrages and persecutions against the Jews, but not the Jews only but also the Lutherans and the Armenians and the Roman Catholics and the exiled Doukhobors. Bureaucratic oppression, violence, arbitrary rule, impoverishment of the people, violation of freedom of the person and freedom of thought and of conscience, conditions not to be endured. This is the language, not of agitators and Nihilists, of revolutionists and terrorists; these are the phrases of the petition for representative government, in the name of the nobles of a great province.

Some hundreds of thousands of men are on strike and without employment. Thousands of students have rebelled against governmental oppression, and the professors have joined with the students, and universities are closed. The workmen and the students have joined forces in their demonstration against the government and the peasants are being roused from their lethargy. The best minds and the best souls of Russia are in revolt. Russia's truest patriots are in exile, or if at home live under suspicion. There is no freedom of speech and no freedom of the press. One hundred and fifty Russian editors have signed a memorial to the throne, but of necessity it was published in a foreign and not a Russian periodical. The press, so mighty in America, is censored and coerced, and if not submissive, is suppressed, and the voice of the people, if it be lifted in appeal or protest is silenced with a knout of the Cossack, or the people are shot down in cold blood in the streets. Therefore there is revolutionary method in Russia and force is used against the force of the government. The government will not give attention to reason and refuses to hear the appeal for justice. Von Plehve, Governor General Bobrikov and Grand Duke Serge were the "apostles of force". By force were they destroyed. They were the best hated men in Russia. The nation does not mourn their loss.

It is declared upon Russian authority that autocracy is the best form of government for the Russian people. Despotism may be the ideal form of government if the despot be ideal. Unfortunately, despots are rarely ideal. But Russia still believes in the divine right of kings, a doctrine banished from America by the war of the Revolution. The Czar is head of the state and head of the church, a combination in history productive of the worst evils to the human race. Russia may not be ready for government other than absolute despotism, but no attempt is being made to prepare the people. There is no popular education. The right of assembly is denied. An honest free press is impossible. Men plead for freedom to feel and to think and to speak. What a contrast with America. In America, the leaders and representatives of the working people discuss our national problems with the ablest in the land, and they have no need to be ashamed. Samuel Gompers and John Mitchel sit side by side with our greatest captains of industry and with our most distinguished educators, President Eliot and President Hadley.

There are men in Russia, men with courage and with noble idealism, fit to be leaders of the people. Men, as Albert Shaw has said, as ready for self-government as any in the world.

If you would know the Czar, read, in the November "Century" Andrew D. White's judgment of Nicholas the 2nd. In the time of his youth, as heir to the throne, indifferent to the misery of a famine stricken people. In his manhood, as Czar of all the Russias, giving answer to the appeal of oppressed workingmen of a still more wretched peasantry, with "Yes, I know, I know."

The President of the United States derives power from the people. He lives and rules within the constitution. The Czar of the Russian empire claims power as an inheritance and as an appointment from God. He may grant, graciously or ungraciously, voluntarily, or under compulsion, privilege and freedom and human rights to his unfortunate millions.

Magnificent the opportunity of Czar Nicholas the 2nd. More than Alexander the 2nd. he might prove himself the emancipator of the serfs. He has opportunity to become the liberator of millions, shackled by misery as oppressive as slavery. He has opportunity to reveal himself worthy of Nicholas the Idealist, who would have ended the wars of nations and led mankind to peace.

America has had great presidents, great rulers, who served their country greatly, unselfish men, seeking the true welfare of the people. May Theodore Roosevelt stand true to the noblest traditions of the American presidency, and may the Czar Nicholas the 2nd. prove himself true and worthy to be the ruler of millions of men. Washington, the President, was called the Father of his Country. May Nicholas prove himself the "Little Father" to the millions of Russia.