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## Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Raymond Robins

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Raymond Robins, Esq.,  
14557 West Ohio Street,  
Chicago, Ill.

June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1915.

Private.

My dear Mr. Robins:

Your letter of May 3<sup>rd</sup> has touched and pleased me very much. As by this time you surely must know, you are one of the three or four men for whom the result of the last three years has given me the greatest regard and feeling, one of the half dozen men with whom it has been a peculiar pleasure to be associated and whose friendship I regard as an honour of which all my life I shall be proud. Indeed I am tempted to say that of all the men with whom I have been associated in this movement you are the men with whom I have been in closest sympathy as regards what seems to me to be all the most momentous issue among the issues that we raised.

Therefore it is a matter of real pride to me that you should show for me the feeling that you did in this letter of yours.

I absolutely agree with your views as to the significance at home and abroad of our foreign policy. I absolutely agree that the present world war is in its essence one between militarism and democracy - and this although I furthermore agree with you that Russia's siding at the moment with the cause of democracy, or at least of liberalism and freedom, may only be accidental and that in the distant future we may have greatly to fear her - although I both hope and that believe/Russia will be liberalized by the war. You are absolutely right when you say that Russia and Japan, with alien pasts, with alien institutions and alien ideals of world dominion by force of arms, may in the near future (although I hope and believe not) occupy a position of menace towards western civilization, with just one people to withstand their mastery, and that is our own nation with our

ideals of democracy, of liberty under law, ~~and~~ of social progress through peaceful industry, education and commerce and of uncorrupted Christianity - which Christianity after all must largely be the attempt to realize that noble verse of Micah, " What more doth the Lord require of thee than to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?" (This verse has always been a favorite of mine, because it embodies the Gospel of Works, with the necessary antidote in the last few words to that hard spiritual arrogance which is brought about by mere reliance on the Gospel of Works). I hope and believe that neither Russia and Japan will ever occupy such a position; but it is of course possible that some day one or both of them may stand as Germany now stands, and menace civilization; and in such event we should be prepared to do just what we have so signally failed to do during the last ten months.

To do our duty in such a crisis America cannot stand as the pacifists, headed to my great regret by Jane Addams, now stand. During the last five years the professional pacifists have brought greater mischief to the American character than either the corrupt politicians or the crooked business man. Their stands tells for unrighteousness. It tells for hideous wrongdoing at the expense of the helpless and the innocent. Our position should be the position of the just man armed, the man who scorns to wrong others and is fearless in the face of the wrongdoer, a position which men of the unworthy stand of Andrew Carnegie, David Starr Jordan and Nicholas Murray Butler seem unable even to understand.

Moreover, I absolutely agree with what you say as to the Democracy on the one hand, and the reactionaries now in control of the Republican party on the other, offering us only a choice of evils; for I verily believe that in international affairs Wilson and Bryan are <sup>10</sup> rather more dangerous than Murphy and Sullivan or Barnes and Penrose.

But I will not support either evil; Such a choice opens to us nothing but a futile jumping to and fro between the frying pan and the fire; some of us trying to choose the frying pan instead of the fire, and in doubt which the frying pan is; and the rest of us wasting a "conscience" vote for some man who cannot be elected, and therefore giving foolish and honest souls the feeling that we ourselves are futile and are putting our own pride and desire for revenge above our duty to seek for the attainable, even although not the satisfactory, "best possible" for the country as a whole.

But, my dear fellow, I do not agree with you in the least when you come to speak of my candidacy as opening any chance for achieving the purpose that you and I and those like us have in mind. I wish you would read a piece by a real friend of mine, Charles Willis Thompson, in the New York Times of May 23rd. He has stated the facts about as I see them. I know I do not have to tell you, who have been associated with me in the campaigns of 1912, 1913 and 1914, that I am willing to make any fight, and either to head it or to assist in it, as may seem best, if it is clear that to do so is my duty. In 1900 I wished to be renominated as Governor of New York, partly, although I can truthfully say not mainly, for personal reasons. In 1904, in addition to other and stronger motives, I had a personal motive, or desire for my own sake to be elected president. In 1912 I loathed having to go into the contest and I did it purely from a sense of duty; and the same course was true last summer. So when I speak thus frankly of my motives in the past, I may ask that when I speak of the present my words shall be taken at their face value.

Now my feeling is that harm and not good would come if I should again be a candidate. In the libel suit that has just ended, the thing that to me was painfully evident was that at least nine-tenths of the men of light and leading, and a very marked majority of the people

as a whole desired my defeat. They did not like Barnes or believe in him; but above all things they wished my defeat. The particular twelve men whose judgment was vital to me were, I think, on the whole against me at the start; but after both Barnes and I had been before them for many days they stood for me against Barnes. This was because I could reach them personally. But it is of course impossible for me to reach more than the smallest fraction of our people in such fashion. The others have made up their minds; and they are against me. I have been like an engine backing a snow-drift. My progress was slower and slower; and finally I accumulated so much snow that I came to a halt and could not get through. The whole thing has been so well expressed by Thompson that I am sending you his article. I believe that there are some men who would support me against Wilson, for instance, or against a reactionary Republican, who would not support anyone else. But I believe that there are a far larger number of men who would at once sink every other purpose, no matter what their convictions might be, for the purpose of smashing me once for all. According to the information at present before me, I believe that the talk of our people would accept my candidacy as a proof of greedy personal ambition on my part, and would be bitterly hostile to me in consequence, and bitterly hostile therefore to the cause for which I stood. I freely grant that at the moment I do not see quite whom we could put out as the man behind whom all of us could rally. But nothing is clearer to me, as I look at it now, than that it is utterly hopeless to attempt to put me forward and that the only result would be mischievous. I have had enough of announcing unalterable decisions ~~in~~ in public; and so I do not wish to make a public definite declaration nor even to make one that is private and personal, unless it become absolutely imperative; but I do most strongly feel that unless a completely new light is cast on things it would be ruinous to any influence I have

for good, and deeply hurtful to the cause you and I have at heart, if I permitted myself to be run in the Republican primaries as you suggest or to be run for President on any ticket.

There is another consideration, and that is afforded by what you speak of on your last page when you suggest two matters to be considered by me. You say that no man can be elected who is not sound on the liquor traffic (with Prohibition as the hopped-for goal); and that no man can be elected who can even plausibly be accused of favoring "Romanism".

With what you state about Prohibition I am in entire agreement. I do not believe that Prohibition at the moment would prohibit in the United States; but I am heartily in favor of the vigorous control and ultimate suppression of the open saloon for private profit; and I would make the Federal Government at once take active action in support of the local authorities of every district in which Prohibition has been voted by the people themselves. I do not want to go in advance of the people in this issue, for I do not believe you can do any good on an issue of this kind by getting too far in advance of them; but I believe they will ultimately come to the national suppression of the liquor traffic and I am heartily with them when they do so come to it. I also agree as regards all the other platform plans you mention.

But I am not in agreement with what apparently you think about my attitude hitherto on "Romanism", although I am certain I am in absolute agreement with your deepest and innermost conviction on the subject. Here let me state something preliminary. I am often spoken of as being a successful practical politician. I have always striven to be a practical politician, for I do not think any public servant is worth anything if he does not <sup>know</sup> politics and if he is not practical. I have also striven consistently to find out the real feeling of the people, and stand for it, and not try to dragoon the people into having it, but rather

to persuade them to adopt what I regarded as the right views. But when I have felt that a fundamental issue of morals or of vital national interest or honor was concerned, I have never hesitated to follow my belief, even though I was certain that to do so would hurt me in the estimation of the people as a whole. For many years I have fought for the navy and for military preparedness, even though I have thought that on the whole this was unpopular rather than popular. I should have been against the free coinage of silver or any species of repudiation of debts, even if the country had been overwhelmingly in its favor. I would have acted as I did about the Panama Canal, about the settlement of the Anthracite Coal Strike, about preserving order in Arizona and Nevada by the use of an army, and about sending the Battle-fleet around the world, even if each of these actions had been certain to ruin my career.

In the same way I have felt as regards the Lusitania business that as an honorable man I could not keep silent, although I thoroughly realized that what I said would offend the pacifists, would offend the good, short-sighted men who do not fully understand international relations, and would make envenomed enemies of the great bulk of these Americans of German descent or birth from whom in the past I have had rather more than my normal proportion of support. This was to me a matter of principle, a matter of national duty, of duty which I owed my country; and I did not think that I was warranted in considering my own personal fortunes in the matter. But I do most emphatically think that when it comes to choosing a candidate the very men who agree with me in what I have done ought to realize that it often becomes impossible to nominate a man even though the very things which make it impossible to nominate him are things where he was right and where he is entitled to our respect and admiration.

It is just the same thing about the Catholic question. You

6714  
object to my first article on Mexico, in which I spoke of the hideous

outrages committed on the priests and especially on the nuns in Mexico. Doubtless you remember a subsequent article in which I spoke, if possible, even more strongly of the outrages committed upon our own people and other foreigners in Mexico. Now in the first article I was dealing with outrages on Catholics; in the second article I was for the most part dealing with outrages on Protestants. In the last case doubtless <sup>were</sup> some and probably most of those committing the outrages ~~themselves~~ not only Catholics but bigoted Catholics. In the first instance doubtless many of those committing the outrages were anit-Clericals, were very possibly Free-thinkers or Masons. All of this seems to me aside from the mark. When I acted against Columbia in the case of Panama, the Clericals were my most embittered foes. At the time when I was preaching war with Spain for the sake of freeing Cuba, the Catholic Hierarchy of this country either sided with Spain (as I was informed at Rome was true of a certain prominent Prelate then living there) or at least did everything possible to prevent our going to war with Spain. I should have been ashamed of myself if I failed to protest against cruel wrong done at the expense of Catholics, including the Catholic Hierarchy, When, as in this case it happens that Free-thinkers and Masons are prominent among the wrong doers. My dear fellow, I know you too well not to know that this is your feeling also.

What you say does not make me feel that I ought to swerve from the course that I have marked out in this manner. But it does make me <sup>as inflamed,</sup> feel that with the anit-Catholic agitation <sup>who</sup> as it is at present, there is an additional reason why it would be utterly hopeless to try to run me for President. All <sup>the</sup> Catholics <sup>are</sup> really bigotably anti-Protestant would join with all the hyphenated Americans, with the professional German-Americans or professional Irish-Americans, and would then strike hands with those who style themselves the ultra-native Americans, the ultra-Protestants, the successors of the A.P.A. people, <sup>infrantically</sup>

opposingly; and this not to speak of their fore-ordained and natural allies, the professional pacifists and the like. Now, this religious matter is one which I regard as of such vital consequence that I cannot compromise on it. You remember how in southern Illinois last year among those miners who were heartily supporting you against Sullivan Many, probably most, were of Irish descent and Catholics in creed. Once, when I ran for the legislature I was pitted against the man of Irish descent and Catholic creed and my great backer at the time was an American, a Catholic who had been born in Ireland. I would have felt that any man of Irish descent or Catholic faith who under those circumstances voted against you or me on grounds of religious or national origin was a thoroughly unworthy American. In just the same way I will not support, I will not keep silent, about, of movement which attacks my fellowmen country-men of different creed or different national origin, because of their creed, or because of that national origin. I regard Catholics of this type as poor citizens, as enemies to our institutions. But I regard Protestants of the same type as being just as emphatically dangerous to the Republic, just as emphatically un-American. In my cabinet Catholic and Protestant and a Jew sat side by side. Some of the men in my Administration in whom I most trusted and on whom I most relied were Catholics. I would have broken the neck of any one of them if I had found he was acting toward any American citizen in an un-American manner, having in view that citizen's creed, whether in discriminating for or against him. But I would have stood by him to the last if he himself had been attacked because of his creed or because of his national origin; and this I would have done as regards every man in this Republic whether he was Protestant or Catholic or Jew, whether he was an English or Irish, French or German origin. I have always tried to act so as to feel that I had a right to the support of a right-thinking Catholic,  
716 just as much as of the right-thinking Protestant, and that in my public

deeds and words I represent one just as much as the other. I am as jealous of the rights of one as of the other and as anxious to earn the respect and good will of one as of the other; and I am also, I hope and believe, incapable of acting say as I conscientiously think the public good demands, even although so to act should forfeit the good will of both.

When I was in Rome five years ago, the Pope, through the Cardinal Secretary of State, notified me that he must ask me to promise not to visit a certain Methodist Institution in Rome or else he could not receive me. I refused to make the promise and in consequence never saw the Pope; and this although, because of a very improper attack on the Pope by one of the Methodist clergymen, I never did visit the Methodist Institution in question. Because of my attitude in this matter, the only attitude, which I felt a self-respecting American could take, I was violently assailed by the ultra-montanes in this country. A few good priests defended me; but the Hierarchy as a whole was hostile to me; and they were successful in swinging against me in 1912, first in the primaries for Mr. Taft, and then at the election for Wilson or for Mr. Taft, the enormous bulk of the Catholic vote. But their doing so did not in the least alter my conviction that I had behaved exactly right in the Vatican incident, nor prevent me from saying again and again openly and in letters to prominent Catholics that under like circumstances I should again take precisely the same action. I would submit to me the dictation from the Catholic or any other Hierarchy - or from anyone else. Every right thinking man should support this position. The real lack of moral worth of the professional anti-Catholic is shown by the fact that they have bitterly attacked me joining hands for the purpose with the men of the more undesirable type as themselves who happen to be Catholics instead of Protestants. The bigots of each creed have shown that they are ready to join with their fellow-bigots to

whom they are in theory most bitterly opposed; this in order to defeat the man who refuses to bow down to or truckle the bigots of either creed and who endeavors ~~XXXMAS~~ to do strict justice to the good citizens of both Creeds.

On the other hand, the misconduct of so many among the leaders (by no means all of them) in the Catholic Church in America, did not, and could not, make me swerve from doing justice to Catholics as much as to Protestants. It did not ~~XXXMAS~~ for a moment make me alter my conviction that the attitude I have always taken toward my Catholic fellow-citizens was the only proper attitude to take and that it was essential that I should continue in that position. I would indignantly resent the conduct of any Catholic who, because I am not of his faith, fail ~~to~~ openly and fearlessly to stand up for me if his convictions on public subjects were my subjects and if he believed I was the best man to put these convictions into effect. In just the same way I should feel ashamed not openly and fearlessly, and at no matter what cost of possible misunderstanding to take ground in favor of my Catholic fellow-citizens when they are right, and against any form of A. P. A. Movement directed against them. I stand openly and aggressively for non-sectarian schools. But I therefore openly stand against reading the bible in the public schools when Catholics and Jews may object to it being read - and this although I prefer to have them read when there is no objection. I am against any Catholic who himself adopts an attitude of intolerance or bigotry toward his fellow citizens of a different creed or who himself proposes to shake America's foreign policy with reference to anything but our common national honor and interest and our duty to humanity as a whole. But I am equally against any protestant who takes anyone of such attitudes.

26718 I do not care whether the discrimination is for or against a man because of his creed; it is equally un-American in either case.

I have spoken to Methodist-Chautauquas; I have spoken to Masonic bodies; I have spoken to the Knights of Columbus. Whenever I deem the public interest will be subserved thereby, I shall in future speak to Masons, to Methodists, to Knights of Columbs; and to each and everyone of them I shall make the same kind of speech and shall say nothing to one body that I would be ashamed of saying to one of the other bodies. This is not an issue upon which I can compromise; it is not an issue on which I would feel it was right to compromise. Some of my most faithful friends, allies and supporters I have ever had in public life, some of the best men who have ever worked under me and with me, have been Americans or German parentage and Protestant faith or per-<sup>s</sup> chance Agnostics. Others have been Americans of Irish birth or decent or Catholic faith. I should be incapable of failing in my loyalty to the men of either class; just as I should be incapable in my loyalty to wise and loyal men of old American stock, whether they were born in the South or the North. Moreover, I cannot keep silent on such a matter as this whenever the need for speaking out may come. And, my dear Robins, I know you too well not to know that you are the very last man in the country who under such circumstances would have me keep silent. But with the Anti-Catholic public feeling as you describe it, and as I have no doubt it actually is, I think this is another reason why it would be hopeless and mischievous even to consider putting me forward for the Presidency at this time.

Now, I want very much to see you and Mrs. Robins out here; and I want to have you meet Wilkinson of Syracuse, who is a trump and the salt of the earth but who needs to have your views on certain points put before him as only you can put them; and perhaps it would be useful to have him in return give you some of his experiences, which have made him take a very dark view of irresponsible trade unions,

a view different from mine.

I have felt that this libel suit which has just ended was really as much a fight for those who have fought with me during the last three years as for myself. It has justified in court, by legal evidence all we said about boss rule and crooked business three years ago. Horace Wilkinson and George Perkins are going to arrange to have the record printed. I could not afford to do it myself, for even though I won, the suit will cost me between thirty and forty thousand dollars. I do not grudge the money, but I think the service was really worth rendering; But I do very strongly feel that in a way it excuses me from doing too much more. There is an anecdote that has long been proverbial in our family which bears on the point. Doctor Polk, of New York, now an old man, was Inspector-General of the Confederate Artillery fifty years ago. Just before Appomattox, Lee sent him to the rear to hurry up the stragglers. He was sitting on a rail fence, with his horse-bridle over his arm when a lank, frowning, half-starved North Carolinian Infantryman trooped by, his feet going "muck-muck" as he ploughed through the mud. Polk said in a perfunctory way, "hurry up, my man, hurry up." Whereupon the North Carolinian looked gloomily at him shook his head, and remarked as he walked by, "if ever I love another country, damn me!"

Now, you must not take this anecdote too literally. Of course, if it was a duty impossible to avoid, I would fight in future as I have fought in the past. But I feel I have done my share; and, what is infinitely more important, I do not feel that I can be of use in a leading position any more. I think the people have made up their mind that they have had all they want of me, and that my championship of a cause or an individual, say in exceptional cases, is a damage rather than a benefit.