

# THE ANONYMOUS ROOSEVELT

**A**n anonymous Roosevelt is hard to conceive, but it now transpires that the Colonel was the author of a dozen unsigned articles appearing in *The Ladies' Home Journal* in 1916 and 1917 under a department heading called "Men." So closely was the secret of the authorship guarded, according to the editor, Edward W. Bok, that "until this revelation only five persons have known the authorship." The articles, or an editorial nature, brought forth many guesses as to their authorship, the majority of opinion finally settling upon Dr. Charles W. Elliot, President Emeritus of Harvard.

The revelation of the many-sided ex-President as an editorial writer for a woman's magazine comes in the autobiography of Mr. Bok, which he calls "The Americanization of Edward Bok," just published by Scribners.

Colonel Roosevelt had already appeared in Mr. Bok's journal through a department called "The President," which consisted of the then President's views on many subjects as set forth in interview form by a newspaper correspondent. Several years later, Mr. Bok proposed to Colonel Roosevelt a series of anonymous articles, "feeling that it would be an interesting experiment to see how 'ar Theodore Roosevelt's ideas could stand unsupported by the authority of his vibrant personality." Mr. Bok continues:

"It was just after he had returned from his South American trip. He was immediately interested.

"But how can we keep the authorship really anonymous?" he asked.

"Easily enough," answered Bok, "if you're willing to do the work. Our letters about it must be written in long hand addressed to each other's homes; you must write your manuscript in your own hand; I will copy it in mine, and it will go to the printer in that way. I will personally send you the proofs; you mark your corrections in pencil, and I will copy them in ink; the company will pay me for each article, and I will send you my personal check each month. By this means, the identity of the author will be concealed."

"Colonel Roosevelt was never averse to hard work if it was necessary to achieve a result that he felt was worth while.

"All right," wrote the Colonel finally. "I'll try—with you!—the

experiment for a year: twelve articles. . . . I don't know that I can give your readers satisfaction, but I shall try my very best. I am very glad to be associated with you, anyway. At first I doubted the wisdom of the plan, merely because I doubted whether I could give you just what you wished. I never know what an audience wants: I know what it ought to want: and sometimes I can give it, or make it accept

"The physical work was great. The Colonel punctiliously held to the conditions, and wrote manuscript and letters with his own hand, and Bok carried out his part of the agreement. Nor was this simple, for Colonel Roosevelt's manuscript—particularly when, as in this case, it was written on yellow paper with a soft pencil and generously interlined—was anything but legible. Month after month the two men worked

ests of a man's life, such as real efficiency; his duties as an employer and his usefulness to his employes; the employe's attitude toward his employer; the relations of men and women; a father's relations to his sons and daughters; a man's duty to his community; the public school system; a man's relation to his church, and kindred topics.

"The anonymity of the articles soon took on interest from the posi-

fairly itched with the desire to write a series of criticisms of his own articles to Dr. Elliot. Bok, however, persuaded the Colonel not to spend more physical effort than he was already doing on the articles; for, in addition, he was notating answers on the numerous letters received, and those Bok answered 'on behalf of the author.'

"For a year the department continued. During all that time the secret of the authorship was known to only one man besides the Colonel and Bok and their respective wives!

"When the Colonel sent his last article in the series to Bok, he wrote:

"Now that the work is over, I wish most cordially to thank you, my dear fellow, for your unvarying courtesy and kindness. I have not been satisfied with my work. This is the first time I ever tried to write precisely to order, and I am not one of those gifted men who can do so to advantage. Generally I find that the 3,000 words is not the right length and that I wish to use 2,000 or 4,000! And, in consequence, feel as if I had either padded or mutilated the article. And I am not always able to feel that every month I have something worth saying on a given subject.

"But I hope that you have not been too much disappointed."

"Bok had not been, and neither had his public!"

At the same time Colonel Roosevelt lent a hand at passing on manuscripts for *The Ladies' Home Journal*, a duty he performed with great conscientiousness and promptness. Finally, Mr. Bok reveals that near the close of his life the Colonel had under consideration a suggestion that he accept the leadership of the Boy Scouts of America. Says the new autobiography:

"Bok told Colonel Roosevelt that he wanted to invest \$25,000 a year in American boyhood—the boyhood that he felt twenty years hence would be the manhood of America, and that would actually solve the problems with which we were now grappling.

"Although, all too apparently, he was not in his usual vigorous health, Colonel Roosevelt was alert in a moment.

"Fine!" he said, with his teeth gleaming. "Couldn't invest better anywhere. How are you going to do it?"

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The Contributing Editor.

what I think it needs—and sometimes I cannot. But the more I thought over your proposal, the more I liked it. . . . Whether the wine will be good enough to attract without any bush I don't know; and besides, in such cases the fault is not in the wine, but in the fact that the consumers decline to have their attention attracted unless there is a bush!"

"In the latter part of 1916 an anonymous department called 'Men' was begun in the magazine.

each at his own task. To throw the public off the scent, during the conduct of the department, an article or two by Colonel Roosevelt was published in another part of the magazine under his own name, and in the department itself the anonymous author would occasionally quote himself.

"It was natural that the appearance of a department devoted to men in a woman's magazine should attract immediate attention. The department took up the various inter-

tiveness of the opinions discussed; but so thoroughly had Colonel Roosevelt covered his tracks that, although he wrote in his usual style, in not a single instance was his name connected with the department. Lyman Abbott was the favorite 'guess' at first; then, after various other public men had been suggested, the newspapers finally decided upon former President Elliot of Harvard University as the writer.

"All this intensely interested and amused Colonel Roosevelt and he

# The Anonymous Roosevelt

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"By asking you to assume the active headship of the National Boy Scouts of America, and paying you that amount each year as a fixed salary."

"The Colonel looked steadily ahead for a moment, without a word, and then with the old Roosevelt smile wreathing his face and his teeth fairly gleaming, he turned to his 'tempter,' as he called him, and said:

"Do you know that was very well put? Yes, sir, very well put."

"Yes?" answered Bok. "Glad you think so. But how about your acceptance of the idea?"

"That's another matter; quite another matter. How about the organization itself? There are men in it that don't approve of me at all, you know," he said.

"Bok explained that the organization knew nothing of his offer; that it was entirely unofficial. It was purely a personal thought. He believed the Boy Scouts of America needed a leader; that the Colonel was the one man in the United States fitted by every natural quality to be that leader; that the Scouts would rally around him, and that, at his call, instead of 400,000 Scouts, as there were then, the organization would grow into a million and more. Bok further explained that he believed his connection with the national organization was sufficient, if Colonel Roosevelt would favorably consider such a leadership, to warrant him in presenting it to the national officers; and he was inclined to believe they would welcome the opportunity. He could not assure the Colonel of this! He had no authority for saying they would; but was Colonel Roosevelt receptive to the idea?"

"At first the Colonel could not see it. But he went over the ground as thoroughly as a half-hour talk permitted; and finally the opportunity for doing a piece of constructive work that might prove second to none that he had ever done made its appeal.

"You mean for me to be the active head?" asked the Colonel.

"Could you be anything else, Colonel?" answered Bok.

"Quite so," said the Colonel. "That's about right. Do you know," he pondered, "Edle (Mrs. Roosevelt) might like me to do something like that. She would figure it would keep me out of mischief in 1920," and the Colonel's smile spread over his face.

"Bok," he at last concluded, "do you know, after all, I think you've said something! Let's think it over. Let's see how I get along with this trouble of mine. I am not sure, you know, how far I can go in the future. Not at all sure, you know—not at all. That last trip of mine to South America was a bit too much. Shouldn't have done it, you know. I know it now. Well, as I say, let's both think it over and through; I will, gladly and most carefully. There's much in what you say; it's a great chance; I'd love doing it. By Jove! It would be wonderful to rally a million boys for real Americanism, as you say. It looms up as I think it over. Suppose we let it simmer for a month or two."

"And so it was left—for 'a month or two.' It was to be forever—unfortunately. Edward Bok has always felt that the most worthwhile idea that ever came to him had, for some reason he never could understand, come too late. He felt, as he will always feel, that the boys of America had lost a national leader that might have led them—where would have been the limit?"

Mr. Bok has had a long literary association with Rudyard Kipling, and the story of the elimination of drinking scenes from the first of the Kipling contributions to be published in his magazine, at the time the subject of much comment, is told in the present biography. The story was "William the Conqueror." We read:

"Sailing again for England, he

[Edward Bok] sought and secured the acquaintance of Rudyard Kipling, whose alert mind was at once keenly interested in what Bok was trying to do. He was willing to co-operate, with the result that Bok secured the author's new story, 'William the Conqueror.' When Bok read the manuscript, he was delighted; he had for some time been reading Kipling's work with enthusiasm, and he saw at once that here was one of the author's best tales.

"At that time Frances E. Willard had brought her agitation for temperance prominently before the public, and Bok had promised to aid her by eliminating from his magazine, so far as possible, all scenes which represented alcoholic drinking. It was not an iron-clad rule, but, both from the principle fixed for his own life and in the interest of the thousands of young people who read his magazine, he believed it would be better to minimize all incidents portraying alcoholic drinking or drunkenness. Kipling's story depicted several such scenes; so when Bok sent the proofs he suggested that if Kipling could moderate some of these scenes it would be more in line with the policy of the magazine. Bok did not make a special point of the matter, leaving it to Kipling's judgment to decide how far he could make such changes and preserve the atmosphere of his story.

"From this incident arose the widely published story that Bok cabled Kipling, asking permission to omit a certain drinking reference and substitute something else, whereupon Kipling cabled back: 'Substitute Mellin's Food.' As a matter of fact (although it is a pity to kill such a clever story) no such cable was ever sent and no such reply ever received. As Kipling himself wrote to Bok: 'No, I said nothing about Mellin's Food. I wish I had.' An American author in London happened to hear of the correspondence between the editor and the author, it appealed to his sense of humor, and the published story was the result. If it mattered, it is possible that Brander Matthews could accurately reveal the originator of the much-published yarn."

There are a number of intimate glimpses of Kipling in the pages of this book, but for these brief excerpts one cannot afford to pass up the following meeting between the publisher and Alexandre Dumas, fils, recalling the days when anarchy of international copyright laws had made European authors deadly enemies of American publishers and their public:

"Bok had been publishing a series of articles in which authors had told how they had been led to write their most famous books, and he wanted Dumas to tell 'How I Came to Write "Camille."'"

"To act as translator this time, Bok took a trusted friend with him, whose services he found were needed, as Dumas was absolutely without knowledge of English. No sooner was the editor's request made known to him than the storm broke. Dumas, hotly excited, denounced the Americans as robbers who had deprived him of his rightful returns on his book and play, and ended by declaring that he would trust no American editor or publisher.

"The mutual friend explained the new copyright conditions and declared that Bok intended to treat the author honorably. But Dumas was not to be mollified. He launched forth upon a new arraignment of the Americans; dishonesty was bred in their bones; and they were robbers by instinct. All of this distinctly nettled Bok's Americanism. The interpreting friend finally suggested that the article should be written while Bok was in Paris; that he should be notified when the manuscript was ready; that he should then appear with the actual money in hand in French notes; and that Dumas should give Bok the manuscript when Bok handed Dumas the money.

"After I count it," said Dumas."