

African and European Addresses: British Rule in Africa

Theodore Roosevelt (et al.)

Address Delivered at the Guildhall, London, May 31, 1910

It is a peculiar pleasure to me to be here. And yet I cannot but appreciate, as we all do, the sadness of the fact that I come here just after the death of the Sovereign whom you so mourn, and whose death caused such an outburst of sympathy for you throughout the civilized world. One of the things I shall never forget is the attitude of that great mass of people, assembled on the day of the funeral, who in silence, in perfect order, and with uncovered heads, saw the body of the dead King pass to its last resting-place. I had the high honor of being deputed to come to the funeral as the representative of America, and by my presence to express the deep and universal feeling of sympathy which moves the entire American people for the British people in their hour of sadness and trial.

I need hardly say how profoundly I feel the high honor that you confer upon me; an honor great in itself, and great because of the ancient historic associations connected with it, with the ceremonies incident to conferring it, and with the place in which it is conferred. I am very deeply appreciative of all that this ceremony means, all that this gift implies, and all the kind words which Sir Joseph Dimsdale has used in conferring it. I thank you heartily for myself. I thank you still more because I know that what you have done is to be taken primarily as a sign of the respect and friendly good-will which more and more, as time goes by, tends to knit together the English-speaking peoples.

I shall not try to make you any extended address of mere thanks, still less of mere eulogy. I prefer to speak, and I know you would prefer to have me speak, on matters of real concern to you, as to which I happen at this moment to possess some first-hand knowledge; for recently I traversed certain portions of the British Empire under conditions which made me intimately cognizant of their circumstances and needs. I have just spent nearly a year in Africa. While there I saw four British protectorates. I grew heartily to respect the men whom I there met, settlers and military and civil officials; and it seems to me that the best service I can render them and you is very briefly to tell you how I was impressed by some of the things that I saw. Your men in Africa are doing a great work for your Empire, and they are also doing a great work for civilization. This fact and my sympathy for and belief in them are my reasons for speaking. The people at home, whether in Europe or in America, who live softly, often fail fully to realize what is being done for them by the men who are actually engaged in the pioneer work of civilization abroad. Of course, in any mass of men there are sure to be some who are weak or unworthy, and even those who are good are sure to make occasional mistakes—that is as true of pioneers as of other men. Nevertheless, the great fact in world history during the last century has been the spread of civilization over the world's waste spaces. The work is still going on; and the soldiers, the settlers, and the civic officials who are actually doing it are, as a whole, entitled to the heartiest respect and the fullest support from their brothers who remain at home.

At the outset, there is one point upon which I wish to insist with all possible emphasis. The civilized nations who are conquering for civilization savage lands should work together in a spirit of hearty mutual good-will. I listened with special interest to what Sir Joseph Dimsdale said about the blessing of peace and good-will among nations. I agree with that in the abstract. Let us show by our actions and our words in specific cases that we agree with it also in the concrete. Ill-will between civilized nations is bad enough anywhere, but it is peculiarly harmful and contemptible when those actuated by it are engaged in the same task, a task of such far-reaching importance to the future of humanity, the task of subduing the savagery of wild man and wild nature, and of bringing abreast of our civilization those lands where there is an older civilization which has somehow gone crooked. Mankind as a whole has benefited by the noteworthy success that has attended the French occupation of Algiers and Tunis, just as mankind as a whole has benefited by what England has done in India; and each nation should be glad of the other nation's achievements. In the same way, it is of interest to all civilized men that a similar success shall attend alike the Englishman and the German as they work in East Africa; exactly as it has been a benefit to every one that America took possession of the Philippines. Those of you who know Lord Cromer's excellent book in which he compares modern and ancient imperialism need no words from me to prove that the dominion of modern civilized nations over the dark places of the earth has been fraught with widespread good for mankind; and my plea is that the civilized nations engaged in doing this work shall treat one another with respect and friendship, and shall hold it as discreditable to permit envy and jealousy, backbiting and antagonism among themselves. I visited four different British protectorates or possessions in Africa—namely, East Africa, Uganda, the Sudan, and Egypt. About the first three, I have nothing to say to you save what is pleasant, as well as true. About the last, I wish to say a few words because they are true, without regard to whether or not they are pleasant.

In the highlands of East Africa you have a land which can be made a true white man's country. While there I met many settlers on intimate terms, and I felt for them a peculiar sympathy, because they so strikingly reminded me of the men of our own western frontier of America, of the pioneer farmers and ranch-men who built up the States of the great plains and the Rocky Mountains. It is of high importance to encourage these settlers in every way, remembering—I say that here in the City—remembering that the prime need is not for capitalists to exploit the land, but for settlers who shall make their permanent homes therein. Capital is a good servant, but a mighty poor master. No alien race should be permitted to come into competition with the settlers. Fortunately you have now in the Governor of East Africa, Sir Percy Girouard, a man admirably fitted to deal wisely and firmly with the many problems before him. He is on the ground and knows the needs of the country, and is zealously devoted to its interests. All that is necessary is to follow his lead, and to give him cordial support and backing. The principle upon which I think it is wise to act in dealing with far-away possessions is this—choose your man, change him if you become discontented with him, but while you keep him back him up.

In Uganda the problem is totally different. Uganda cannot be made a white man's country, and the prime need is to administer the land in the interest of the native races,

and to help forward their development. Uganda has been the scene of an extraordinary development of Christianity. Nowhere else of recent times has missionary effort met with such success; the inhabitants stand far above most of the races in the Dark Continent in their capacity for progress towards civilization. They have made great strides, and the English officials have shown equal judgment and disinterestedness in the work they have done; and they have been especially wise in trying to develop the natives along their own lines, instead of seeking to turn them into imitation or make-believe Englishmen. In Uganda all that is necessary is to go forward on the paths you have already marked out.

The Sudan is peculiarly interesting because it affords the best possible example of the wisdom—and when I say that I speak with historical accuracy—of disregarding the well-meaning but unwise sentimentalists who object to the spread of civilization at the expense of savagery. I remember a quarter of a century ago when you were engaged in the occupation of the Sudan that many of your people at home and some of ours in America said that what was demanded in the Sudan was the application of the principles of independence and self-government to the Sudanese, coupled with insistence upon complete religious toleration and the abolition of the slave trade. Unfortunately, the chief reason why the Mahdists wanted independence and self-government was that they could put down all religions but their own and carry on the slave trade. I do not believe that in the whole world there is to be found any nook of territory which has shown such astonishing progress from the most hideous misery to well-being and prosperity as the Sudan has shown during the last twelve years while it has been under British rule. Up to that time it was independent, and it governed itself; and independence and self-government in the hands of the Sudanese proved to be much what independence and self-government would have been in a wolf pack. Great crimes were committed there, crimes so dark that their very hideousness protects them from exposure. During a decade and a half, while Mahdism controlled the country, there flourished a tyranny which for cruelty, blood-thirstiness, unintelligence, and wanton destructiveness surpassed anything which a civilized people can even imagine. The keystones of the Mahdist party were religious intolerance and slavery, with murder and the most abominable cruelty as the method of obtaining each.

During those fifteen years at least two-thirds of the population, probably seven or eight millions of people, died by violence or by starvation. Then the English came in; put an end to the independence and self-government which had wrought this hideous evil; restored order, kept the peace, and gave to each individual a liberty which, during the evil days of their own self-government, not one human being possessed, save only the blood-stained tyrant who at the moment was ruler. I stopped at village after village in the Sudan, and in many of them I was struck by the fact that, while there were plenty of children, they were all under twelve years old; and inquiry always developed that these children were known as "Government children," because in the days of Mahdism it was the literal truth that in a very large proportion of the communities every child was either killed or died of starvation and hardship, whereas under the peace brought by English rule families are flourishing, men and women are no longer hunted to death, and the children are brought up under more favorable circumstances, for soul and body, than

have ever previously obtained in the entire history of the Sudan. In administration, in education, in police work, the Sirdar^[12] and his lieutenants, great and small, have performed to perfection a task equally important and difficult. The Government officials, civil and military, who are responsible for this task, and the Egyptian and Sudanese who have worked with and under them, and as directed by them, have a claim upon all civilized mankind which should be heartily admitted. It would be a crime not to go on with the work, a work which the inhabitants themselves are helpless to perform, unless under firm and wise guidance from outside. I have met people who had some doubt as to whether the Sudan would pay. Personally, I think it probably will. But I may add that, in my judgment, this fact does not alter the duty of England to stay there. It is not worth while belonging to a big nation unless the big nation is willing when the necessity arises to undertake a big task. I feel about you in the Sudan just as I felt about us in Panama. When we acquired the right to build the Panama Canal, and entered on the task, there were worthy people who came to me and said they wondered whether it would pay. I always answered that it was one of the great world works which had to be done; that it was our business as a nation to do it, if we were ready to make good our claim to be treated as a great world Power; and that as we were unwilling to abandon the claim, no American worth his salt ought to hesitate about performing the task. I feel just the same way about you in the Sudan.

Now as to Egypt. It would not be worth my while to speak to you at all, nor would it be worth your while to listen, unless on condition that I say what I deeply feel ought to be said. I speak as an outsider, but in one way this is an advantage, for I speak without national prejudice. I would not talk to you about your own internal affairs here at home; but you are so very busy at home that I am not sure whether you realize just how things are, in some places at least, abroad. At any rate, it can do you no harm to hear the view of one who has actually been on the ground, and has information at first hand; of one, moreover, who, it is true, is a sincere well-wisher of the British Empire, but who is not English by blood, and who is impelled to speak mainly because of his deep concern in the welfare of mankind and in the future of civilization. Remember also that I who address you am not only an American, but a Radical, a real—not a mock—democrat, and that what I have to say is spoken chiefly because I am a democrat, a man who feels that his first thought is bound to be the welfare of the masses of mankind, and his first duty to war against violence and injustice and wrong-doing, wherever found; and I advise you only in accordance with the principles on which I have myself acted as American President in dealing with the Philippines.

In Egypt you are not only the guardians of your own interests; you are also the guardians of the interests of civilization; and the present condition of affairs in Egypt is a grave menace to both your Empire and the entire civilized world. You have given Egypt the best government it has had for at least two thousand years—probably a better government than it has ever had before; for never in history has the poor man in Egypt, the tiller of the soil, the ordinary laborer, been treated with as much justice and mercy, under a rule as free from corruption and brutality, as during the last twenty-eight years. Yet recent events, and especially what has happened in connection with and following on the assassination of Boutros Pasha three months ago, have shown that, in certain

vital points, you have erred; and it is for you to make good your error. It has been an error proceeding from the effort to do too much and not too little in the interests of the Egyptians themselves; but unfortunately it is necessary for all of us who have to do with uncivilized peoples, and especially with fanatical peoples, to remember that in such a situation as yours in Egypt weakness, timidity, and sentimentality may cause even more far-reaching harm than violence and injustice. Of all broken reeds, sentimentality^[13] is the most broken reed on which righteousness can lean.

In Egypt you have been treating all religions with studied fairness and impartiality; and instead of gratefully acknowledging this, a noisy section of the native population takes advantage of what your good treatment has done to bring about an anti-foreign movement, a movement in which, as events have shown, murder on a large or a small scale is expected to play a leading part. Boutros Pasha^[14] was the best and most competent Egyptian official, a steadfast upholder of English rule, and an earnest worker for the welfare of his countrymen; and he was murdered simply and solely because of these facts, and because he did his duty wisely, fearlessly, and uprightly. The attitude of the so-called Egyptian Nationalist Party in connection with this murder has shown that they were neither desirous nor capable of guaranteeing even that primary justice the failure to supply which makes self-government not merely an empty but a noxious farce. Such are the conditions; and where the effort made by your officials to help the Egyptians towards self-government is taken advantage of by them, not to make things better, not to help their country, but to try to bring murderous chaos upon the land, then it becomes the primary duty of whoever is responsible for the government in Egypt to establish order, and to take whatever measures are necessary to that end.

It was with this primary object of establishing order that you went into Egypt twenty-eight years ago; and the chief and ample justification for your presence in Egypt was this absolute necessity of order being established from without, coupled with your ability and willingness to establish it. Now, either you have the right to be in Egypt or you have not; either it is or it is not your duty to establish and keep order. If you feel that you have not the right to be in Egypt, if you do not wish to establish and to keep order there, why, then, by all means get out of Egypt. If, as I hope, you feel that your duty to civilized mankind and your fealty to your own great traditions alike bid you to stay, then make the fact and the name agree and show that you are ready to meet in very deed the responsibility which is yours. It is the thing, not the form, which is vital; if the present forms of government in Egypt, established by you in the hope that they would help the Egyptians upward, merely serve to provoke and permit disorder, then it is for you to alter the forms; for if you stay in Egypt it is your first duty to keep order, and above all things also to punish murder and to bring to justice all who directly or indirectly incite others to commit murder or condone the crime when it is committed. When a people treats assassination as the corner-stone of self-government, it forfeits all right to be treated as worthy of self-government. You are in Egypt for several purposes, and among them one of the greatest is the benefit of the Egyptian people. You saved them from ruin by coming in, and at the present moment, if they are not governed from outside, they will again sink into a welter of chaos. Some nation must govern Egypt. I hope and believe that you will decide that it is your duty to be that nation.

