

ADDRESSES AT THE SOUTHERN CONSERVATION CONGRESS.

"CONSERVATION" FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF A FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

[BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT, DELIVERED OCTOBER 8, 1910.]

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen: I have a fairly full program here in Atlanta. If you wish anywhere to find a real embodiment of the strenuous life you can find it in Atlanta. [Laughter.] But I did not feel that I could refuse to come here and say a few words of cordial and more than cordial sympathy with you and the movement that you are directing.

Now it is not quite correct, Mr. President, to say that I have a message for you, because I feel more as if I were sitting at the feet of Gamaliel when I am here.

I believe in conservation with all my heart. I feel that the beginning of the time has passed when it is possible for reasonable men longer to permit the waste of their natural resources. I feel that nation and state can cooperate in this great movement. And there are one or two misconceptions which I think we should all of us endeavor to remove from the public mind. Here and there, and notably in the West, you will find men who say that our purpose is to lock up the natural resources of the country. That is just as absurd as if a private individual should say that a farmer is locking up the resources of his farm when he declines to cut down all the timber on it in one season, or to till a given field in such a way that it permanently loses its fertility.

We don't intend to lock up a single resource, but we do intend that the resources shall be used without waste; that where they are capable of renewal they shall be used in such a way as to permit that renewal; and that finally, so far as possible, they shall be used for the benefit of the whole people. Now, there are different kinds of natural resources—minerals, for instance, phosphoric deposits, coal, iron. Those resources do not renew themselves. It is impossible to use them in any way which will prevent their ultimate exhaustion. But for that very reason they ought not to be used in a way that will insure their premature exhaustion. We live in an inventive age and we are an inventive people. We are continually searching the secrets of nature. It may be that by the time the coal beds and the easily workable iron beds are exhausted we will be able to use some natural force that will take their places.

Minimum of Waste.

But before that time arrives let us see that there is the minimum of waste in developing the great mineral resources, the use of which by the nation at large, by the world at large, is increasing with such extraordinary and almost alarming velocity.

While it is our duty to give every proper reward to the proper exercise of individual initiative in the business world, it is also our duty to see that the man of exceptional ability displays that ability in our interest. I want to give him all the reward to which his exceptional ability entitles him. But I want that reward to be given because he serves us and not because he swindles us. [Laughter and applause.]

Certain of the papers of the city of my birth, edited in the shadow of Wall Street, regard the doctrine which I have just enunciated as smacking of anarchy. I regard it as the height of conservatism.

It is peculiarly necessary to do that in connection with

our natural resources, the ownership of which, if allowed to get into one hand, into the hands of one man or the hands of one great corporation, might establish a peculiarly oppressive monopoly.

Let us then make it the business of the government, national or state as the case may be, to see that the mineral resources, so far as we still have the power over them—that the water power of the country, and all similar powers, are used under such governmental supervision and control and in accordance with such governmental regulations as will allow ample profit to the users, and at the same time guarantee the public at large its rights.

I think that is an essential position for the government to take. I do not believe that we could afford only to allow men of great astuteness, great shrewdness and sometimes of a marked lack of scrupulousness to get possession of the natural resources and then treat them as peculiarly their own to do with as they choose. There is more than one reason why we should not allow that; in the first place, for the sake of the general public in the present; in the next place, for the sake of those rich men themselves and what they seek in the future, for if such a system of monopoly is allowed to grow up in extenso sooner or later the people will revolt against it, and the revolt will be very likely to have mixed in it with righteousness of attitude, great unrighteousness of attitude, and when the holders of the privileges would run great risks of being treated with an improper degree of severity.

Prevent Injustice.

Let us exact justice from these big men, not only in our own interests but in the interests of the holders of the privileges at some future day. To exact justice from them now is the surest way to prevent injustice from being done those that come after them.

So much for the natural resources that are not capable of self-renewal. Now for those that are capable of renewal—the soil and the forests.

It is our business to see that no private individual is allowed to waste the public heritage, and the public as a whole is vitally concerned with the soil and forests and the water for the land.

It is not so very long ago that our people would have treated as utterly alien any idea of taking any care of the land which they tilled and the ownership of which at the moment they claimed. All through the South the term "old field" has become so recognized that they tend to treat it as one word instead of two. In most cases the old field means a field which was farmed under conditions so wasteful that the whole value of the field was exhausted, so that nothing could be done with it except to abandon it to become riven by deep gullies, and what little soil there was left to be washed off into the waters, and finally to support a growth of worthless shrubbery as all that it could give. Here in the South probably each man who knows a country district can point out farm after farm which did formerly flourish and which is now abandoned because it became worthless.

Our forefathers had any amount of land open to them, and didn't have much capital. It was perfectly natural that their theory should have been to take a farm, skin it, leave

it dead, and go on and take another. It can no longer be done. It is now our duty to see not only that the land that remains fertile is kept fertile but that we reclaim both the waste lands that have been abandoned and the waste lands that have never been brought into cultivation.

Some of the most fertile lands of the future are now swamps, and all that is now necessary is to provide a proper drainage system. Not here, but in the West, some very fertile soil that is now waste will yield a hundred-fold if only water is put upon it by irrigation. Our duty then is to shape our policy to save, and when necessary to reclaim, the actual soil.

Southern Hardwoods.

Just so it is with the forest. The South has the last hardwood forests of great industrial value on the North American continent. There are corniferous forests placed elsewhere that are not exhausted.

I hope the South will use those hardwood forests in such fashion as to get the very utmost business value out of them of which they are capable, provided that the use is always conditioned upon keeping the forests so that our children and children's children shall have their portion of the benefit from them. Cut every big tree that is worth cutting, cut all the timber that can now be used, but cut it in such fashion and use such safeguards that the forests will still remain, that the young trees will remain to grow up in their turn into trees that can be used by your children and your children's children in their turn. Treat each forest as an asset of the country as a whole, as the wise farmer treats his land as, not a merely personal asset for himself, but as an asset for his family.

I hope that Congress will pass the bill for the creation of the great Appalachian forest. [Applause.] Those forests lie in several different states. The waters which rise in them go through more than one state, and it should be peculiarly the work of the national government to see to their preservation. I hope that every one of your representatives in Congress will bestir himself in this manner. Now, in conclusion, my friends, I have just this one thing to point out:

No portion of our country is going to show a greater rate of development, and only one or two small portions of it are growing at the same rate of development, as the South will show in the course of the next thirty or forty years. I ask you to profit by the mistakes that have been made elsewhere and to see that this marvelous development, this extraordinary growth of the new South, takes place in such fashion that it shall represent not a mere exploitation of territory, not a mere feverish growth in wealth and luxuriousness on a honeycomb foundation of morality and good judgment, but that it represents a solid and abiding and enduring prosperity and growth which shall not only be great but permanent; a growth in business, which shall mean that hand in hand with the increase in business energy goes a growth of business morality; and a growth in the use of natural resources which shall mean that, while you get all possible use out of them in the present, you so handle them that you will leave your land as a heritage to your children, increased and not impaired in permanent value.