Chapter 5

First American Citizen

September 1915 to March 1916

There is only one way to meet calculated terrorism and that is by making evident a spirit which will not brook it. This is the duty of neutrals just as much as belligerents . . . Nothing is sillier than the pacifist talk of the effect of “the opinion of civilized mankind” upon an erring nation. In the first place the erring nation usually does not know that there is such an opinion; and in the next place if the nation wins it is certain to find innumerable apologists among the very creatures who have previously shrieked loudest that force is unnecessary because civilized opinion will serve as a substitute.

—TR to F. S. Oliver, July 22, 1915

While the war raged on in Europe, Roosevelt spent much of the month of September on holiday in Quebec, as a guest of his old hunting friend and physician Alexander Lambert, at the doctor’s camp in the wilderness preserves of the Tourilli Club. This refuge for animals from beaver to moose was a joint venture of a group of American and Canadian sportsmen who had leased 250 square miles of wilderness northwest of Quebec City from the Canadian government. Tramping the ground with his party, helping to portage the canoes between the local tributaries of the Saint Anne River, and feasting on freshly taken game and fish had a rejuvenating effect on the Colonel. While in the wilderness he witnessed for the first time a moose diving to the bottom of a lake to feed on the bottom grass, and from his canoe he shot another large bull moose standing on the bank.¹

In Canada, Roosevelt found the time to make half a dozen brief speeches in which, while he avoided commenting directly on politics, he expressed his admiration for the way the country had stood by the British Empire and urged her men to continue volunteering. After reading a report of one of these addresses, an American serving in the British army felt compelled to

J.L. Thompson, Never Call Retreat
© J. Lee Thompson 2013
“drop him a line” and tell him “how magnificent it was and how it echoed the hearts of us few Americans who are over here fighting for the Big Ideal.”

Holbrook Bonney, a second lieutenant in the royal field artillery, confided to the Colonel that most Englishmen considered TR “the representative American” and respected his aims and opinions. He knew what TR had to “contend against” at home and only hoped his country would “see its path of duty before it is too late.” He asked himself again and again, “Is this my U.S.A.? Where are all her ideals of justice and liberty?” Bonney continued that it was “sickening to all full blooded Americans to see our country shirk its responsibilities to Humanity.” He hoped to be “in at the finish, and to feel that I have done my bit and to uphold what I consider to be my country’s honor.”

Henry Cabot Lodge echoed this sentiment, writing TR that the “melancholy thing” was the apparently general satisfaction with Woodrow Wilson, “so long as he keeps us out of war, without any reference to the methods by which he does it, and the same indifference on the part of the people to the humiliation of the long and pointless diplomatic discussion about the Lusitania and the Arabic, on which nothing has been accomplished.” The senator also complimented TR’s latest Metropolitan article, which defended the right of America to sell munitions to the Allies despite German protests of the policy’s unneutrality. In seeking to prevent these shipments, Roosevelt had written, the “professional pacificists, hyphenated Americans, and beef and cotton Americans; in short, all the representatives of American mollycoddleism, American greed, and downright treachery to America,” were “playing the game of a brutal militarism against Belgium and against their own country.”

The United States, from the standpoint of international law, had an “absolute right to make such shipments,” and every president since Washington had refused to let “this right be questioned.” Further, TR pointed out, up to the beginning of the present war, this was a right insisted on by Germany “more strongly than any other nation.” This argument, Lodge told the Colonel, was received with “utmost approval” everywhere he spoke.

The Colonel was back at Oyster Bay on October 1 and on Columbus Day traveled to New York to give a speech to the Knights of Columbus at Carnegie Hall. The thousands of Italian casualties in the war had solemnized the holiday celebration and as a result, for the first time in 18 years, there was no great street parade to mark the day. Catholic Vicar General Joseph F. Mooney introduced Roosevelt, to loud applause and cheering, as the “first American citizen.” In every act of his life, said Mooney, TR had “exhibited every quality of true American manhood.” The long address that followed returned to the Colonel’s favorite themes: the twin dangers of unpreparedness and hyphenated Americanism. There was no place, he declared, for the hyphenated American, and the sooner he returned “to the country of his allegiance the better.” For an American citizen to vote as a German American, an Irish American, or an English American was to “be a traitor to American institutions; and those hyphenated Americans who terrorized American politicians by threats of the foreign vote” were “engaged in treason to the American republic.” Even worse than hyphenated Americans, in his estimation, were