

Book Reviews

Theodore Roosevelt: The Making of a Conservationist, by Paul Russell Cutright. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985. xiii, 226 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$27.50 cloth.

Despite a weak constitution and a constant struggle with asthma, Theodore Roosevelt possessed boundless energy and a formidable intellect, which as a child were channeled into a love of natural history, especially ornithology. At a very young age he became a dedicated collector, was soon preparing his own specimens, and by the time he entered Harvard had become a first-class field naturalist. He went to Harvard determined to become a scientist, despite the doubts of his father, who would have preferred a more conventional choice of careers. In the end, of course, he was lost to science. His extensive collections went to the Smithsonian Institution and the American Museum of Natural History. Roosevelt turned to a career in public life, which his family considered just as unconventional, but he never lost his enthusiasm for natural history. He found an outlet for it in hunting, in writing about big game animals, and of course in his support for game and forest preservation along with other conservation issues.

Paul Russell Cutright, who has written before about Roosevelt the naturalist, believes that this youthful enthusiasm holds the key to why Roosevelt later became a champion of conservation issues. That an early love of natural history shaped his later attitudes toward natural resources is plausible up to a point. Cutright's affectionate portrayal of the abiding naturalist in Roosevelt—he estimates, for instance, that most of the vast collection of books on display in practically every room of Sagamore Hill deal with natural history—is quite convincing. Nevertheless, it does not seem to be the whole story. Roosevelt apparently decided against a career in science because just at the point when he entered Harvard, natural history was undergoing the transformation from which it would emerge as biology. Biology was a German-dominated discipline that centered on the laboratory and the microscope. Roosevelt deplored the new reign of the "section cutter, the microscopist and the histologist" (192). He would have none of it himself, and later as an alumnus, he tried to reverse the drift at Harvard. He was a field man, first, last and always.

But it is also true that before he left Harvard another early love, long a competitor, finally pushed science aside, cowbird fashion. It is here that Cutright's fine detailed account undermines to a degree his own thesis. Perhaps the most significant gift of Roosevelt's childhood was the shotgun he received from his father to enable him to collect specimens in Europe and Egypt. The nearsighted, nearly blind child established an immediate bond with this weapon, and he was soon

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potting away at things beyond any conceivable need simply to expand his collection. This love of shooting grew and flourished. By young manhood the natural historian had given way to the hunter. Of course, he never lost his talent for keen observation, but his later writings on big game and other animals were largely byproducts of his hunting. So were his conservation interests. It was Roosevelt the hunter and sportsman, at least as much as Roosevelt the former naturalist, who founded the Boone and Crockett Club, dedicated to the preservation of game in sanctuaries such as national parks and forest reserves. And it was this Roosevelt who later included the conservation movement high among those proudly labeled "my policies." No wonder he ignored his boyhood infatuation with natural history in his autobiography. The boy who dreamed of a career in science had given way to the man who liked to shoot things.

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