
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
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Oswego, NY "Montcalm's Victory..."

September 30, 1913

"Montcalm's Victory and It's Lesson" - Oswego, NY

FDR Speech File

TELEGRAPH
ROUGHKEEPER

HYDE PARK
ON THE HUDSON

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Mt. Teal's Victory and its Lesson.
~~~~~

Writers of history, like readers  
of history, being human, re-  
ceive different impressions and  
different opinions from the  
same statement of facts. And  
likewise I have little doubt  
that the many people who are  
taking part <sup>today</sup> in the commemora-  
tion of a great historical  
event will go away from  
here with many dissimilar  
views about that event,  
about the man who was  
the hero of the capture, and  
about the meaning of the

war which we call the  
"French and Indian".

We are inclined I think  
in learning a host of things that  
happened in the past to  
fall into two very natural  
errors - errors common not  
only to students of history  
but to teachers of history.  
I prefer first to the <sup>mental</sup> practice  
of dwelling on facts and  
on facts alone. I knew a  
very learned gentleman  
once who could give off  
hand every important date  
in history, and the name  
of every important man  
connected with those dates.  
But when I asked him what  
effect the French and Indian

TELEGRAPH  
ROUGHKEEPSIEHYDE PARK  
ON THE HUDSON

was laid upon the preparation of the colonies for the Revolutionary War he could only babble that the one occurred from fifteen to 20 years before the other, and that it must therefore have had considerable influence. In other words he was forgetting causes, forgetting results, in his effort to remember <sup>causes</sup> facts.

And the other historical fallacy is equally common, we might call it the Speculative fallacy. You are probably perfectly

familiar with the man who  
who says "If Napoleon had  
been victorious at Waterloo he  
would have been Master  
of Europe - nay of the whole  
World!" Or "If Burgoyne  
had not ~~been captured~~ <sup>surrendered</sup> at  
Saratoga, we should still  
be colonies of England."

This is interesting, this is  
amusing but it might well  
be called "intellectually slopping"

I have called attention  
to these two viewpoints be-  
cause they illustrate the  
real necessity of looking  
into the cause and the result  
as well as the fact - the  
necessity of so doing if we  
are to gain any benefit

TELEGRAPH  
BOUNDSKEEPER

in the present from the  
lessons which undoubtedly  
exist in history.

The familiar poem of  
Southey sums it up.

"It was a summer evening  
Old Knepars work was done  
And he before his cottage door  
Was sitting in the sun  
And by him sported on the green  
This little granddaughter  
She saw her brother Peterkin.

Roll something large & round  
Which he beside the sunset in playing here had found.  
He came back what he had found that  
was so large & smooth & round  
Old Knepars took it from the boy  
Who stood expectant by,  
And then the old man shook his head  
And with a natural sigh  
"Tis some poor fellow's skull" said he  
Who fell in the great victory

Then you remember, Old Karpan  
goes in to tell of the Battle of  
Blenheim, and at the end says

"And every body praised the Duke  
Who this great fight did win."

"But what good came of it at last?"

Quoth little Peterkin

"Why, that I cannot tell" said he

"But 'twas a famous victory."

What good came of another  
famous victory - the victory  
of Montcalm at Oswego  
in 1756 that we ~~all~~ commemorate  
today? Are we cele-  
brating ~~the~~ ~~fact~~ a date merely  
on the fact of a battle?

Or will we go away after  
the exercises shaking our heads





hitherto without material interference had at last come into contact with each other. The advance of the British colonies had been a natural growth - a normal pushing back of the wilderness from the seaboard by virtue of increasing population - an advance not military, not religious, not political, but an advance of healthy colonization.

On the other hand the French position on the continent was comparatively artificial. For a century explorers and priests and voyagers had laid bare the secrets of the up rivers and lakes, and woods of the great middle

West and had established communication between the St. Lawrence and the vast Territory of Louisiana.

But what had they left behind them besides the knowledge of the trails & streams? A few trading posts perhaps - a few so-called converts among the Indians, but that is all - But in doing this the French had succeeded where the British had failed - They had not colonized, they had not developed the wilderness

but they had established  
a highly concentrated organi-  
zation. What they lacked  
in numbers they made up  
for in co-operative efficiency.  
A few hundred Frenchmen  
were as a matter of fact  
the absolute rulers of all  
this vast country. They  
were the representatives of a  
tottering monarchy, of a  
discredited form of govern-  
ment, of everything that we  
today would call un-American,  
and yet for years, by sheer  
vitality, by organized effort,  
by a united front, they stood  
off the inevitable. Montcalm  
was the embodiment of all

HYDE PARK  
ON THE HUDSONTELEGRAPH  
BOOTHKEEPER'S

that was lost in French America. He fell, the victim not of Wolfe's army, but of the inevitable conflict between the past and the future.

The weakness of the British Colonies was the usual weakness of Anglo-Saxon peoples, a lack of preparation for war. The colonies were going each their own road, thinking of commerce first, and caring after the development and control of the Continent only in so far as their safety from attack in the rear and the success of the fur trade affected their profits.

Parkman sums up the situation  
when he says:

This War was the strife  
of a united and concentrated  
few against a divided and  
discordant many. It was  
the strife too of the past  
against the future; of the  
old against the new; of  
moral and intellectual torpor  
against moral and intellectual  
life; of barren absolutism  
against a liberty, crude,  
incoherent, chaotic, yet  
full of prolific vitality.

Why then did Montezuma  
capture Cawago? Why did  
French arms seem so long  
victorious? The fact as  
this place was as we all

know the chief reliance of  
 the Colonies between Lake  
 Champlain and Pittsburgh -  
 and it was the principal  
 Thru in the flesh of the  
 Frenchmen. Here on the  
 Lake, opposite Fort Frontenac  
 it stood a constant menace  
 to the great line of communica-  
 tion with the Mississippi.  
 Here was a danger spot  
 which threatened the St.  
 Lawrence and the Ohio.  
 The French knew all this -  
 that the Colonies of England  
 were blind to their advantage.  
 The Assembly of the

Colony of New York, was so  
busy fighting the Governor  
that it refused to give aid  
to the Western frontier - so  
it was all along the line -  
Braddock was defeated in  
Pennsylvania, every Englishman  
was driven east of the Allegh-  
enies, and then Oswego fell.

The success of the French  
seemed assured - a hand-  
ful of men comparatively,  
based on a wilderness,  
~~without the backing of~~ had  
driven ~~the~~ the British colonies  
almost back to the seaboard.

At last of course the  
awakening came, the giant  
child began at last to



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TELEGRAPH  
BOUGHEESIE

HYDE PARK  
ON THE HUDSON

realize his strength. The  
Colonies excelled New France  
in numbers, in wealth, in  
resources a hundred fold.  
And of course they were  
victorious.

The historian Greene has  
called the French and  
Indian War the birth of  
the history of the U. S.

If this is so we can learn  
a lesson from its history.

We can learn that strength  
such as Montcalm had is  
of no avail. That unity  
and organization in a

Nation amount to nothing  
if the social structure is  
lacking. We may have  
armies and navies of the  
greatest but in the end  
they will go down & defeat  
if the people at home on  
the farm or in the town  
are rotten at the core.

And we learn that  
the fight at Cawego availed  
Montcalm nothing in the  
end. It had and will  
have, however through all  
time a lesson for the  
vanquished. At bottom  
the British colonies were  
sound. They lacked unity,  
they were given to bickering

TELEGRAPH  
POUCHKEEPSE



HYDE PARK  
ON THE HUDSON

and surface jealousies,  
even as you and I; ~~then~~  
their assemblies were  
fighting their Governors,  
even as you and I.

They were caught unpre-  
pared for war, but the  
inherent soundness of the  
foundation carried them  
to victory in the end.

Today that ultimate victory  
would be more difficult.

Today we fight with  
14 inch guns at ranges  
of Ten miles - The first  
in the top European drawn

is no longer of the  
same sort as was the  
old smelter over the  
chimney.

Conflict like everything  
else in modern civiliza-  
tion is so complicated  
that preparation is  
essential. That is why  
we have our naval militia  
that is why we think  
ahead. No one desires  
war today - we are all  
struggling - army & navy  
to prevent its  
occurrence. But no one  
can guarantee to the  
American people that  
there will be no more  
war. And until that

May come the example  
of Montcalm, the example  
of Wolfe, and the lessons  
of the conflict between  
the French and the  
British colonies cannot  
fail to inspire us to  
better things

Montcalm's Victory and Its Lesson.

----- Hon. Franklin D. Roosevelt

Asst Secy of the Navy  
Washington DC

Writers of history, like readers of history, being human, receive different impressions and <sup>from</sup> different opinions from the same statement of facts. And, likewise, I have little doubt that the many people who are taking part to-day in the commemoration of a great historical event will go away from here with many dissimilar views about that event, about the man who was the hero of the capture <sup>of Oswego</sup>, and about the meaning of the war which we call the "French and Indian."

We are inclined, I think, in learning about things that happened in the past, to fall into two very natural errors -- errors common not only to students of history but to teachers of history. I refer first to the mental practice of dwelling on facts and on facts alone. I once knew a very learned gentleman who could give, off-hand, every important date in history, and the name of every important man connected with those dates. But when I asked him what effect the French and Indian War had upon the preparation of the Colonies for the Revolutionary War, he could only babble that the one occurred from fifteen to twenty years before the other, and that it must, therefore, have had considerable influence. In other words, he was forgetting causes, forgetting results, in his effort to remember concrete facts.

And the other historical fallacy is equally common. We might call it the speculative fallacy. You are probably perfectly familiar with the man who says: "If Napoleon had been victorious at Waterloo, he would have been master of Europe - nay, of the whole world!" Or, "If Burgoyne had not surrendered at Saratoga, we should still be colonies of England."

*but as a contribution*  
This is interesting, this is amusing, ~~but it might well~~  
*to the world's knowledge it is mental effort wasted.*  
~~be called intellectual happiness."~~

I have called attention to these two view-points because they illustrate the real necessity of looking into the cause and the result as well as the fact, which we must do if we are to gain any benefit in the present from the lessons which undoubtedly exist in history.

The familiar poem of Southey sums it up.

It was a summer evening;  
Old Kaspar's work was done.  
And he, before his cottage door,  
Was sitting in the sun.  
And by him sported on the green  
His little grandchild, Wilhelmine.

She saw her brother, Peterkin,  
Roll something large and round  
Which he beside the rivulet,  
In playing there had found.  
He came to ask what he had found  
That was so large and smooth and round.

Old Kaspar took it from the boy,  
Who stood expectant by.  
And then the old man shook his head,  
And, with a natural sigh,  
"Tis some poor fellow's skull," said he,  
"Who fell in the great victory."

Then, you remember, old Kaspar goes on to tell of the Battle of Blenheim, and at the end says:

"And everybody praised the Duke,  
Who this great fight did win."  
"But what good came of it at last?"  
Quoth little Peterkin.  
"Why, that I cannot tell," said he,  
"But t'was a famous victory."

What good came of another famous victory - the victory of Montcalm at Oswego in 1756, that we commemorate to-day? Are we celebrating a date merely or the fact of a battle? Or ~~will~~ *shall* we go away after the exercises shaking our heads and murmuring, like Old Kaspar, "Why, that I cannot tell, but t'was a famous victory?" There are lessons, there is inspiration, to be gained to-day. Do not fear that I will attempt to recite the details of the facts - of the events which occurred. But I would ~~sketch~~ sketch, very briefly, the place which the battle and the commander hold in their relation to the history of many peoples in two continents.

*anted than*  
~~hitherto~~ In about the year 1750, two great forces, ~~advancing~~ *moving* without material interference, had at last come into contact with each other. The advance of the British Colonies had been a natural growth - a normal pushing back of the wilderness from the seaboard by virtue of increasing population; an advance not military, not religious, not political, but an advance of healthy colonization.



On the other hand, the French position on the Continent was comparatively artificial. For a century, explorer and priest and voyageur had laid bare the secrets of the rivers and lakes and woods of the great Middle West and had established communication between the St. Lawrence and the vast Territory of Louisiana. But what had they ~~left behind~~ <sup>gained</sup> them besides the knowledge of the trails and streams? A few trading posts perhaps, a few so-called converts among the Indians; ~~but~~ that is all. But in doing this, the French had <sup>in one respect</sup> succeeded where the British had failed: <sup>while</sup> ~~they~~ <sup>while</sup> had not colonized, <sup>yet</sup> they had not developed the wilderness, <sup>yet</sup> they had established a highly concentrated organization. What they lacked in numbers, they made up for in cooperative efficiency. A few hundred Frenchmen were, as a matter of fact, the absolute rulers of all this vast country. They were the representatives of a tottering monarchy, of a discredited form of government, of ~~an~~ <sup>an</sup> ~~outworn social system;~~ <sup>outworn social system;</sup> ~~that no day would call an American;~~ and yet, for years, by sheer vitality, by organized effort, by a united front, they staved off the inevitable. Montcalm was the embodiment of all that was best in French-America. He fell, the victim not of Wolfe's army, but of the inevitable conflict between the past and the future.

The weakness of the British Colonies was the usual weakness of Anglo-Saxon peoples, a lack of preparation for

*armed conflict.*

~~for~~. The Colonies were going each their own road, thinking of commerce first, and caring for the development and control of the Continent only in-so-far as their safety from attack in the rear and the success of the fur trade affected their pockets. Parkman sums up the situation when he says:

"This war was the strife of a united and concentrated few against a divided and discordant many. It was the strife too of the past against the future; of the old against the new; of moral and intellectual torpor against moral and intellectual life; of barren absolutism against a liberty, crude, incoherent, chaotic, yet full of prolific vitality."

Why, then, did Montcalm capture Oswego? Why did French arms seem so long victorious? The fort at this place was, as we all know, the chief reliance of the <sup>British</sup> Colonies between Lake Champlain and Pittsburg, and it was the principal thorn in the flesh of the Frenchmen. Here on the lake, opposite Fort Frontenac, it stood, a constant menace to the great line of communication with the Mississippi. Here was a danger spot which threatened the St. Lawrence and the Ohio. The French knew all this, but the Colonies of England were blind to their advantage.

The Assembly of the Colony of New York was so busy <sup>quarreling</sup> ~~fight-~~ *with* the Governor that it refused to give aid to the Western frontier. So it was ~~along the line~~ <sup>in the western colonies</sup>. Braddock was defeated

in Pennsylvania, every Englishman was driven east of the Alleghenies, and then Oswego fell. The success of the French seemed assured. A handful of men, comparatively, based on a wilderness, had driven the British colonies almost back to the seaboard.

At last, of course, the awakening came; the giant child began at last to realize his strength. The Colonies excelled New France in numbers, in wealth, in resources, a hundred fold. And, ~~effortless~~, they were victorious.

The historian Greene has called the French and Indian War the birth of the history of the United States. If this is so, we can learn a lesson from its history. We can learn that strength such as Montcalm had <sup>in itself</sup> is of no avail. That unity and organization in a nation amount to nothing if the social structure is lacking. We may have armies and navies of the greatest, but in the end they will go down to defeat if the people at home, on the farms or in the towns are <sup>weak in</sup> ~~poor in~~ resources, <sup>in</sup> ~~and~~ endurance, <sup>and in fundamental ideals.</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>in</sup> ~~poor~~.

And we learn that the fight at Oswego availed Montcalm nothing in the end. It had, and will have, however, through all time, a lesson for the vanquished. At bottom, the British Colonies were sound. They lacked unity, they were given to bickerings and surface jealousies, ~~even as you and I; their Assemblies were fighting their governments, even as you and I.~~

They were caught unprepared for war, but the inherent soundness of the foundation carried them to victory in the end. To-day <sup>such an</sup> ~~that~~ ultimate victory would be more difficult. To-day we fight with fourteen-inch guns at ranges of ten miles. The pistol in the top bureau drawer is no longer of the same avail as was the old musket over the chimney.

Conflict, like everything else in modern civilization, is so complicated that preparation is essential. That is why we have our ~~army and navy~~ <sup>navy, our army and our militia</sup>, and that is why ~~we~~ think ahead. No one desires war to-day. We are all striving - army and navy alike - to prevent its occurrence. But no one can guarantee to the American people that there will be no more war. And until that day comes, the example of Montcalm, ~~the example of~~ ~~Montcalm~~, and the lessons of the conflict between the French and the British Colonies, cannot fail to inspire us to better things.

*Some of us*

~~Today a Montcalm would have <sup>more</sup> ~~no better~~ chance of ~~achieving~~ complete success than he did a century and half ago. And today we cannot be sure that the sleeping giant would be given the same opportunity ~~for~~ to stretch himself.~~

Montcalm  
Vesley

*[Handwritten signature]*