## Franklin D. Roosevelt — "The Great Communicator" The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt's Political Ascension

File No. 24

1913 September 30

Oswego, NY "Montcalm's Victory..."

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5 ON THE HUDSON in the present from the lessons which undoubtally Exist in history. The familian paren Loutey sums it up. "IT was a summer evening Old Kuckars work was close had be before his tollage door was litting in the sun had by him sported on The green this little franklikeles Wilholmine The raw der brother l'éterfis Roll som etting targe t round which were the the hound the transfer in they ing there had found the the transfer the transfer the transfer to the transfer to the boy the hound the boy Who stood expectant by, And then The old quan shook his hong and with a natural righ "Tis rome pour fellows a full said he Who fell in The great victory

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HYDE PARK

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HYDE PARK

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Montcalm's Victory and Its Lesson.

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Hon Franklen D. Roosevelt

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Writers of history, like readers of history, being human, receive 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 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, 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."

This is interesting, this is amusing, but it might world world's Knowledge was marked effort weated.

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 wictory."

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 we go away after the exercises shaking our heads and murmuring. like Old Kaspar, "Why, that I cannot tell, but t'was a famous fictory?" 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 provide sketch, very briefly, the place which the battle and the commander hold in their relation to the history of many peoples in two continents.

In about the year 1750, two great forces, attending water that the 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 gained of Louisiana. But what had they Watthehind 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 succeeded where the British had failed: They had not colonized, they had not developed the wilderness, 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 wast country. They were the representatives of a tottering monarchy, of a discredited form of government, of thing that the trader tone to the morteon; 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.

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 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 the the Governor that it refused to give aid to the Western frontier. So it was of the colony the class. 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 followiss 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 Alforence, 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 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 returned the
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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; they were supplied to the colonies were sound.

They were caught unprepared for war, but the inherent soundness of the foundation carried them to victory in the end. 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 the following and that is why 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 that day comes, and the lessons of the conflict between the French and
the British Colonies, cannot fail to inspire us to better things.

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