

## PREPARATION FOR POLITICS, 1882–1910

Franklin D. Roosevelt's upbringing and education prepared him well for a career in politics. From home and school he acquired self-confidence and ambition, a sense of civic responsibility, and useful social and political connections. Moreover, in his dynamic fifth cousin, Theodore Roosevelt, young Franklin had a hero whom he sought to emulate. Above all, Roosevelt's inheritance endowed him with an extraordinarily sunny disposition and an abiding sense that all was right with the world. Conspicuous gaps remained in his political training, to be sure, and some of these he would have to fill by later experiences. Nevertheless, by the time he ran for his first elective office in 1910, at the age of 28, he had secured advantages that would serve him well during his long and spectacular political career.

Roosevelt was born on 30 January 1882 at Springwood, the family estate, on the east bank of the Hudson River, about two miles south of the village of Hyde Park, New York. During his youth, the Hyde Park area was inhabited by an unusually large number of upper-class families. Families of old wealth and impeccable pedigree, including the Roosevelts, mingled, uneasily at times, with families of new wealth and less august lineage. Archibald Rogers, an associate of oil baron John D. Rockefeller; Ogden Mills, a Wall Street financier; and Vincent Astor,

whose family name was synonymous with high society, lived upriver from the Roosevelts. Another neighbor, Frederick W. Vanderbilt, grandson of Cornelius Vanderbilt, the famous shipping and railroad magnate, boasted the area's most elaborate mansion. With its 54 rooms, Italian Renaissance architecture, museumlike atmosphere, and \$660,000 construction costs, the Vanderbilt mansion offended the sensibilities of some of Hyde Park's old-line families, including the Roosevelts, whose own red-clapboard, 17-room home, although spacious and comfortable, had an informal, lived-in ambience.<sup>1</sup>

Franklin's parents, James and Sara Delano Roosevelt, had no need for ostentatious display, for they were immensely secure in their roots. Descended from seventeenth-century Dutch and English settlers in America, James, who was 53 when Franklin was born, led the life of an English country gentleman. At Hyde Park he raised fine dairy cows, hunted foxes, and presided over afternoon teas and formal dinner parties. Mr. James, as almost everyone called him, had a strong sense of civic responsibility, and over the years he took a turn as village supervisor, sat on the local school board, and served as vestryman and warden of St. James Episcopal Church. He had an equally strong sense of propriety. One time he forbade his wife to renew acquaintance with an old friend who had committed the unpardonable sin of divorcing and remarrying. As a defender of traditional standards, James shunned the gaudy displays of wealth that were so common during the industrial age. Once, for example, he declined an invitation from the Vanderbilts to dine in the grandeur of their estate. "If we accept," he explained to his wife, "we shall have to have them at our home."<sup>2</sup>

Yet when the spirit moved him, he was capable of defying convention. After graduating from Union College and the Harvard Law School, he practiced law for two years. Then, "preferring a more active life," as he put it, he plunged into the world of business, where he played for exceedingly high stakes.<sup>3</sup> He organized a series of highly speculative ventures, the success of any one of which would have brought him spectacular riches and world renown. One bold scheme involved the construction of a canal through Nicaragua connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, this long before the building of the Panama Canal. But each time, just as he seemed on the verge of great success, a combination of economic hard times and just plain bad luck wrecked his plans. All was not lost, however, for he managed to shield the bulk of his inherited wealth in safer investments. The size of his estate, which was valued at about \$300,000, paled by comparison with the fortunes of some of his

neighbors, such as the Vanderbilts and the Astors. Still, in an era when most American families earned less than \$500 a year, Roosevelt's holdings easily placed him within the ranks of the nation's economic elite.

On occasion, James took risks in his personal life as well. His first wife, with whom he had a son, died after 23 years of marriage. At that time, it was not unusual for an older man to marry a considerably younger woman, especially after one or the other of them had lost a spouse. Nevertheless, several years after the death of his first wife, James managed to raise a few eyebrows, when, at the age of 52, he married Sara Delano, who at 26 was young enough to be his daughter. Roosevelt's political affiliation also had a tinge of the unconventional. He was a Democrat, aligned with the conservative, sound-money wing of the party whose hero was fellow New Yorker and president, Grover Cleveland. But even that set him apart from most members of his class and region, who identified the Democrats with corrupt political machines and grasping, undesirable immigrants.

Sara Delano Roosevelt was strong, proud, intelligent, and supremely confident of the superiority of her values and her way of life. The first Delano in America had preceded the first Roosevelt. Sara's father, a daring businessman, made his fortune in the tea and opium trade in China and occupied the upper rungs of New York society. A staunch Republican, he was fond of saying that although perhaps not all Democrats were horse thieves, it had been his experience that all horse thieves were Democrats. As a young girl, Sara had experienced things that other children could only dream about. At the age of seven she had sailed halfway around the world on a clipper ship to join her father in China. She lived in Hong Kong for three years and later in France and Germany.

Tall, handsome, and dignified without being stuffy, Sara presented an imposing, even intimidating, figure. Within the family circle, however, she was warm, affectionate, and possessed of a self-effacing sense of humor. Like James, she displayed a strong sense of civic responsibility and compassion for humanity in the abstract, both of which she passed on to her son.

James and Sara gave their only child the best things that money and social prominence could buy. They furnished him with ponies to ride, yachts to sail, and governesses and tutors to look after and teach him. They gave him the freedom to explore their large estate, with its woods and streams, and to pursue favorite hobbies, such as collecting stamps and mounting birds. They introduced him to important people and ex-

posed him to different cultures and customs. By the time he was 10, he had met writer Mark Twain, members of European royalty, and his first president, Grover Cleveland. By the time he was 15, he had been to Europe eight times. James and Sara also tried to meet their son's emotional needs. They gave him their undivided attention and instilled in him an abiding sense of self-worth. "As a matter of fact," Sara later recalled, "I do not believe I have ever seen a little boy who seemed always to be so consistently enjoying himself."<sup>4</sup>

James and Sara gave much to their son, but they asked much of him in return. Like them, Franklin had been born to a superior station in life, and they expected him to conduct himself accordingly. "May you always bear in mind," James once lectured his son in his kindly, quiet manner, "that in the past—on both sides of your ancestry—they have a good record and have borne a good name." "Only tell Franklin to be good, to be a good man," James told Sara. To James and Sara, being good meant being devoted to God, family, and community. It meant living a life of moral rectitude and thereby setting an inspiring example for others. One time, after a particularly nasty divorce in the family's circle of acquaintances, Sara counseled Franklin, "In this age when the morals and principles of many people seem to consist in want of principle and [in] immorality, we must all do what we can to have a good influence and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world—but to do it without priggishness and yet always have the courage to stand up for what is right."<sup>5</sup>

Being good also meant avoiding flamboyant behavior of any sort. Franklin learned from his father that a gentleman kept his deepest feelings to himself and did not unnecessarily burden others with his personal problems. Nor did a gentleman flaunt his wealth or put on airs. "The best bred people and the most refined," Sara told Franklin, "are simple and not only please their own sort but never offend those beneath them in intellect or station."<sup>6</sup> Being good certainly meant doing good works, especially for those less fortunate than oneself; but even in the performance of good works, ostentatious display was to be avoided.

When his parents thought of the future, they imagined that Franklin would follow in his father's footsteps. Years later, when asked what ambition she had had for her son, Sara responded: "Very simple—it might even be thought not very ambitious, but to me, and to him, too, it was the highest ideal I could hold up before our boy—to grow to be like his father, straight and honorable, just and kind, an upstanding

American.” The idea that he might enter public life seems never to have entered their minds, but neither do they appear to have ruled out a career in politics for their son. One time, Franklin told his mother that politics was a dirty business and that some men were too good even for high elective office. “I am thankful,” Sara retorted, “that you are young enough to alter your mind many times. For instance that anyone could be too fine or well bred for the White House or any great position is a fallacy.”<sup>7</sup>

In 1896, at the age of 14, Roosevelt left the world of his doting parents and attentive servants to enter Groton School, an exclusive preparatory academy near Boston. Groton’s founder and headmaster, the Reverend Endicott Peabody, sought to rear his young charges in the tradition of elite English public schools, such as Eton and Harrow, which prepared the sons of the upper class to occupy positions of leadership in society. He emphasized character-building and physical and mental discipline. In a departure from their pampered upbringings, the boys led Spartan lives. They slept in tiny, sparsely furnished cubicles and followed a rigorous daily schedule. The curriculum, in the classical mold, was also rigorous. Roosevelt’s courses over four years included Greek, Latin, French, German, English literature and composition, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Roosevelt compiled a respectable academic record. Obviously intelligent, he consistently placed in the top fourth or fifth of his class. Then, too, he acquired skills that would serve him well throughout his life. He developed a clear and uncluttered prose style, and, as a participant in compulsory debates, he received his first lessons in public speaking.<sup>8</sup>

He also received a healthy dose of Christian humanitarianism. In order to prick the consciences of his young wards, Peabody frequently brought in outside speakers to plead their special causes. One week, it might be urban reformer Jacob Riis describing the squalor of the tenements; the next week, an African missionary telling of his efforts to Christianize the natives. Whatever their cause, the speakers found a sympathetic ear in Franklin. “Last night,” he once reported to his parents, “a Mr. Wilson came here and told us about the Nova Scotia coal mines and asked for money for his hospital. I think it is a really worthy charity and gave \$2.00!” Inspired to do good deeds, Roosevelt joined Groton’s Missionary Society, took part in a summer camp the school sponsored for underprivileged boys from Boston and New York City, and

with the enthusiastic support of his mother, performed odd jobs for an elderly black woman who lived near the school.<sup>9</sup>

For Franklin, Groton was not an entirely happy experience. Like many an only child, he felt more comfortable in the company of adults than of his own peers. His combination of friendliness, deference, and obedience (he won the Punctuality Prize three times) quickly earned him the goodwill of his elders. Winning over that of his fellow “Groties,” however, proved to be more difficult. For one thing, because his parents had been so reluctant to part with him, he had entered the school two years later than most of the boys in his class, and by that time they had already made their own friends and broken up into cliques. For another thing, his appearance and manner set him apart from the others. Tall and willowy, with smooth features that had not yet taken form, he looked slightly effeminate. Owing to his isolation at Hyde Park and to his frequent travels abroad, he also spoke with the trace of an accent, which may have struck his classmates as affected.

Roosevelt tried mightily to break down the barriers that separated him from others. One time, in order to dispel his priggish image, he deliberately misbehaved in class. “I have served off my first black-mark today,” he proudly reported to his parents, “and I am very glad I got it, as I was thought to have no school-spirit before.”<sup>10</sup> Sports being another possible path to acceptance, Roosevelt went out for football, baseball, hockey, and boxing. But he never advanced beyond the second team. His only athletic success came in a peculiar and physically risky competition called the high kick, which involved kicking a tin pan suspended high over the floor from the ceiling. His winning kick, after which he landed full force on the side of his neck, attested more to his determination to win the respect of his classmates than to his athletic prowess.<sup>11</sup>

While he was at Groton, three of his family members, in addition to his parents, came to play increasingly important roles in his life. Coming from backgrounds almost identical to his own, they offered vivid models of what he might or might not become in life. One of them was Franklin’s half-brother, with the unforgettable name of James Roosevelt Roosevelt. Thirty years older than Franklin, Rosy, as everyone called him, was handsome, intelligent, and charming. Because of his own inherited wealth and because he married into the even wealthier Astor family, Rosy did not need to earn a living, a situation for which he was very grateful. Although he held several minor diplomatic posts in Europe and engaged in extensive charitable work, he devoted most of his time to the pursuit of leisure. He liked attending fancy dress balls, racing

yachts, riding to hounds, and hunting grouse in Scotland. His favorite pastime, which came to occupy most of his waking hours, was the enormously expensive sport of coaching. Long after stagecoaches had become obsolete as a means of transportation, Roosevelt and other gentlemen of leisure on both sides of the Atlantic purchased expensive old coaches, outfitted them with teams of horses, then drove them back and forth across country roads. Rosy Roosevelt was a typical product of old wealth. He was a good and decent man, well bred and cultured. But he made no significant mark on his place and time in history, nor did he have any ambition to do so. Franklin expressed great affection for Rosy, but it was clear that Rosy's path would not be his own.

Rosy's son, James Roosevelt Roosevelt, Jr., or Taddy, provided Franklin with a strikingly different model. Whereas Rosy was the quintessential aristocrat, Taddy rebelled against his upper-class heritage. At Groton, where he and Franklin were enrolled together, Taddy was an outcast, who, to Franklin's embarrassment, was constantly getting into trouble. Later, after dropping out of Harvard, he scandalized the family by marrying a Hungarian-born prostitute whom he had met while making the rounds of the notorious tenderloin district of New York City. In grand eccentric fashion, he refused to live off of his inheritance and went to work as an auto mechanic. When Taddy died he left his \$5 million fortune to the Salvation Army.<sup>12</sup>

Rosy and Taddy showed Franklin what he did not want to become in life. But in his fifth cousin, Theodore Roosevelt (TR), Franklin found the model of what he did want to become. Neither self-satisfied like Rosy, nor rebellious like Taddy, TR unquestioningly accepted his superior station in life, but believed that wealth and social standing carry with them certain obligations, most important, the obligation to serve and lead mankind. This he did with energy and flair. His career, which began in the New York State legislature the year Franklin was born, included stints as assistant secretary of the navy and governor of New York and later climaxed in the White House; with it, Theodore Roosevelt made politics a respectable calling for young men from respectable families. Not coincidentally, TR became Franklin's great hero at the same time Franklin's father, in his late sixties and suffering from heart disease, was becoming an invalid. At Groton, Franklin took vicarious pleasure in his cousin's much-publicized exploits during the Spanish-American War, and he cheered when TR was elected governor of New York. One of the few times Franklin ever expressed displeasure with his parents occurred when, for some unexplained reason, they decided that he could not ac-

cept an invitation to spend the weekend at TR's home in Oyster Bay, New York. "Please don't make any more arrangements for my future happiness," he wrote his parents.<sup>13</sup> He even began to take on some of his cousin's physical characteristics and mannerisms, and by the time he left Groton he was wearing pince-nez in the Theodore Roosevelt style.

In 1900, Roosevelt left one exclusive school and entered another, Harvard University. During the next four years he took courses from some of America's greatest scholars, including Frederick Jackson Turner and Edward Channing in history and Josiah Royce in philosophy. But none of his teachers made much of an impression on him. Nor, for that matter, with a C to B-minus average, did he make much of an impression on any of them. In truth, Roosevelt's main interests lay outside the classroom.

As at Groton, he sought the goodwill of others at Harvard. His quest met with mixed success. He tried out for the football team and the rowing crew, but in both cases failed to survive the final cut. He did, however, make his way into a half-dozen or so prestigious social clubs. But the most prestigious—and snobbish—club of them all, Porcellian, to which both his father and TR had belonged, turned him down, and those who know him best said that Porcellian's rejection left a permanent scar.<sup>14</sup>

Roosevelt earned at least some campus renown by virtue of his editorship of Harvard's undergraduate newspaper, the *Crimson*. His editorials took the form of earnest homilies extolling the virtues of friendship, civic responsibility, tradition, and school spirit. One editorial, which Roosevelt considered particularly daring, berated the football team for its lackluster performance against the Carlisle Indians. "All that is needed," he wrote, "is a spirit in the team of aggressive, vigorous determination—a spirit that will begin fighting when the game begins and will not vanish before the game ends."<sup>15</sup>

During his senior year Roosevelt became engaged to Eleanor Roosevelt, his fifth cousin once removed and the favorite niece of his hero, Theodore Roosevelt. Although Franklin and Eleanor had much in common, the circumstances of their upbringing had been strikingly different. Eleanor's earliest memories were of a beautiful but insensitive mother who, unable to conceal disappointment over her daughter's plain looks and awkward manner, called Eleanor "Granny," even in the presence of others. She had fonder memories of her father, Elliott, who was Theodore's brother and, oddly enough, Franklin's godfather. Elliott was warm



and generous, and Eleanor adored him. But he was also an unstable man who was given to bouts of depression, a habitual philanderer who made life miserable for his wife, and an alcoholic who spent long absences from home drying out in sanatoriums. Eleanor's mother died when she was eight, a brother died when she was nine, and her father died when she was ten. Eleanor, meanwhile, was shunted off to the home of a stern and repressive grandmother.

Eleanor's upbringing left her as shy and insecure as Franklin was outgoing and self-confident. She thought of herself as unattractive and unappealing, and at first she may have been surprised, perhaps even suspicious, of Franklin's romantic attentions. In fact, his attentions were not surprising at all. For despite Eleanor's self-image, she was attractive, intelligent, quietly engaging, and unusually mature for her 19 years. Moreover, as the niece of TR, who by this time had become the president of the United States, she was much more prominent than Franklin. When they announced their engagement, newspapers took much notice of Eleanor, almost none of Franklin. Years later, someone asked Roosevelt why, when he met a newly engaged couple, he always made a point of congratulating both the prospective bride and groom. He explained, probably only partly in jest, that when he was engaged, everyone had congratulated him for getting Eleanor but no one had congratulated Eleanor for getting him.<sup>16</sup>

Franklin's mother posed the only obstacle to the impending marriage. When Franklin and Eleanor first told Sara of their intentions, she got them to promise to keep their engagement secret for a year. They were so young, Sara explained, that they needed time to test the depth of their commitment. They were young: he was 21 and she was 19. But Sara almost certainly hoped that the couple's ardor would diminish, and that they would postpone or even call off the marriage. Sara had no specific complaint about Eleanor; if Franklin had to marry, she would be a perfectly suitable life's companion. But for the time being at least, Sara did not want anyone, including Eleanor, to come between her and her beloved son.

Sara's efforts were to no avail, and on 17 March 1905, St. Patrick's Day, Franklin and Eleanor were married in New York City. Franklin's old headmaster at Groton, Endicott Peabody, presided over the service. President Theodore Roosevelt gave the bride away and, as was his habit, became the center of attention. But Franklin seemed not to mind. Not only had he secured Eleanor, he had forged an intimate new relationship with the man he most admired in the world.

During the early years of his marriage, Franklin tried to find a niche for himself in life. His father, who had died during Franklin's freshman year in college, had always wanted him to be a lawyer. Upon graduating from Harvard in 1904, Franklin honored his father's memory by enrolling in the Columbia School of Law. But the intricacies of the law held little interest for him, and he withdrew from school after the first year. He had learned enough, however, to pass the state bar examination and to acquire a position as managing clerk with the prestigious New York City law firm of Carter, Ledyard, and Milburn.

Like his father, Franklin preferred a more active life, and before long he was considering a career in politics. Of course, there had been a time when he thought that the political arena was no place for a gentleman. But TR had changed that. And it was TR who was on his mind one day in 1907, when he and his fellow law clerks were discussing their plans for the future. When it came Roosevelt's time to speak, he explained that he did not intend to make a career of the law. He wanted instead to enter politics and eventually to become president of the United States. Like his illustrious cousin, he would serve first as an assemblyman in the New York legislature, then as assistant secretary of the navy, then as governor of New York. "Anyone who is governor of New York," he said in a matter-of-fact way, "has a good chance to be President with any luck." One of the law clerks later recalled that Roosevelt spoke with such sincerity and conviction that he made the grand scheme seem entirely plausible.<sup>17</sup>

In 1910 a chance encounter opened up for Roosevelt the possibility of a start in politics. Early that year, John E. Mack, the district attorney of Roosevelt's home county and a power in local Democratic politics, visited Roosevelt on a routine legal matter. Their business concluded, Mack asked the young attorney if he would be interested in running for the state legislature. Roosevelt said he would, whereupon Mack and other party leaders arranged for him to receive the Democratic nomination for a seat in the New York State Senate.<sup>18</sup>

At the outset of Roosevelt's campaign, it appeared that his political career would be short-lived. Only once since the Civil War had voters in his solidly Republican district sent a Democrat to the state senate. He even faced an uphill struggle in the working-class pockets of Democratic strength, where his patrician appearance—replete with pince-nez, dandified clothing, and cultivated accent—hardly seemed likely to inspire the confidence of wage-earners. In the beginning, Roosevelt's campaign manager calculated his chances at no better than one in five.

As the campaign progressed, however, it became clear that Roosevelt also had some powerful advantages. One was his magic name, which provided immediate and favorable identification on the part of voters with his famous cousin. A more important advantage was the weakened condition of the opposing Republican party, which by 1910 was hopelessly divided, both in New York and across the nation, between conservative and progressive factions.

It also became clear as the campaign developed that Roosevelt was in his element. Nothing he had previously done in his 28 years, be it at Groton or Harvard or in the practice of law, had so stirred his interest or brought out his best efforts as the race for the state senate. Early on, in order to cover the sprawling district, he abandoned the traditional horse and buggy and rented a shiny red automobile. On the stump, Roosevelt obviously lacked the skills of a polished orator. To Eleanor he appeared "high strung and, at times, nervous," and during some speeches he would pause so long trying to think of what to say next that she feared he would never go on. But what he lacked in poise, he more than made up for by the earnestness of his approach and by his obvious desire to please. Insofar as Roosevelt stressed any issues, they were the all-purpose ones of bossism and corruption in government. He was against both.

On election day the Democrats swept New York State and the nation. Roosevelt won with 52 percent of the vote. He had run a competent campaign, and had obviously ingratiated himself with the voters. But in the final accounting, the decisive factor in his election was the overall strength of the Democratic party. In this, his first political outing, good fortune was on his side.

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## RISE TO POWER, 1910–1928

Roosevelt's career between 1910 and 1928 followed with uncanny precision the course he had earlier described to his fellow law clerks. First, he occupied a seat in the New York legislature; then he served as assistant secretary of the navy; next, in 1920, he gained a position he had not predicted, the Democratic vice presidential nomination; and finally in 1928, he was elected to the governorship of New York, which positioned him for a future run at the presidency.

Yet Roosevelt's rise to power was far from a smooth ascent. Along the way, he experienced two crises, either one of which could have destroyed his career. A love affair with his wife's personal secretary threatened to break into public scandal, and his crippling attack of polio seemed to be an insurmountable obstacle. In the end, however, neither crisis prevented Roosevelt from pursuing the course he had originally set for himself. Indeed, in totally unexpected ways, his bout with polio may even have enhanced his political fortunes.

Roosevelt had the good fortune to enter public life during one of the most politically, socially, and materially productive periods in American history, a period historians later called the Progressive Era. During this era, which spanned roughly the first two decades of the century, the nation grappled, in mostly creative ways, with the problems caused by

industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. Progressive reformers demanded, among other things, curbs on corporate power, steps to alleviate the plight of the urban poor, and a more efficient political system free of corruption. Reformers looked to government to help meet these demands, and as a result, government at all levels expanded its power and influence at an unprecedented rate. The United States also began for the first time to play a major role in world affairs. Because Roosevelt entered public life during the Progressive Era, rather than during the quiescent periods before and after it, he came to accept as the norm change and reform and an expansive role for government, both at home and abroad.

During the formative years of his political career, he had the additional good fortune to observe at close range some of the greatest practitioners of the art of politics in American history. The era was unusually rich in leadership. Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson headed the list of luminaries, and together they laid the foundations for the modern presidency. With their competing philosophies of government, they also helped shape the ideological contours of politics in the twentieth century. Under Roosevelt's expansive "New Nationalism," government would regulate, rather than break up, large corporations and also establish a permanent apparatus to ameliorate social and economic problems. Under Wilson's "New Freedom," which envisioned a more limited role for government, the state would seek to restore business competition by intervening periodically in the economy to curb monopolistic practices. In addition to Roosevelt and Wilson, there were secondary figures of great distinction, most notably Robert M. La Follette, William Jennings Bryan, and Eugene V. Debs. All in all, it was an auspicious time for an ambitious young man to launch a career in public service.

No sooner had Roosevelt taken his seat in the state senate than unexpected circumstances thrust him into the political spotlight. When the legislature convened in 1911, its first order of business was to elect a United States senator, for at that time members of the upper house of Congress were still being selected by state legislatures. The selection process appeared at first to be a cut-and-dried matter. The Democratic party controlled the legislature; Tammany Hall, the powerful political machine based in New York City, controlled the Democratic party; and Charles F. Murphy, the machine's leader, controlled Tammany Hall. Presumably, then, Boss Murphy could dictate the choice of senator, and that was precisely what he tried to do. As a reward for past services to Tammany,

Murphy decided to award the senate seat to William F. Sheehan, known to all as “Blue-eyed Billy” Sheehan.<sup>1</sup>

A small group of Democratic legislators denounced Murphy’s high-handed tactics and organized to fight Sheehan’s election. Roosevelt, who had been nurtured on stories of Tammany’s villainy, immediately cast his lot with the insurgents. Because his name ensured them publicity, his wealth shielded him from possible Tammany-inspired financial reprisals, and his spacious rented house near the capitol served as a convenient meeting place for the insurgents, the Hyde Park senator became nominal spokesman for the anti-Sheehan faction.

The fight dragged on for many weeks, during the course of which Roosevelt attracted statewide and even national attention. Before it was over, the insurgents forced Murphy to withdraw the Sheehan nomination. In the end, however, the resourceful Tammany chief maneuvered the insurgents into supporting a candidate who was even more closely identified with the machine than Sheehan. Despite its inglorious ending, the Sheehan affair played an important role in Roosevelt’s early career. It allowed him to gain more publicity during his first months in office than most state legislators earn in a lifetime, and for the most part it was the right kind of publicity, for it identified him with the popular cause of reform.

Roosevelt knew a good thing when he saw it, and in the aftermath of the Sheehan fight he continued to denounce the bosses. Boss Murphy and his ilk, he declared, were like noxious weeds that must be “plucked out, root and branch.”<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, however, Roosevelt could derive only limited benefits from the single issue of clean government. People wanted honesty and efficiency in government, to be sure; but they wanted a decent standard of living even more. And to the extent that public officials helped them realize that goal, they were willing to tolerate a little corruption on the side. Thus, the “good government” theme was useful as far as it went. But if Roosevelt wanted to advance beyond the narrow confines of the New York State Senate, he clearly had to develop an interest in issues that bore more directly on the lives of ordinary citizens.

Eventually, he did seek to broaden his appeal. He endorsed, although without much feeling, such social welfare measures as workmen’s compensation and restrictions on the number of hours of work that employers could extract from women and children. He also supported the conservation of national resources, public control over electric power, and women’s suffrage. Despite his later claims to the contrary, however,

he played no significant role in any of these social and economic reform efforts.<sup>3</sup>

In 1912 Roosevelt delivered a speech in Troy, New York, that indicated how far he had come and the general direction in which he was moving. The wellspring of modern history, he said, had been the quest for individual liberty, but unfettered individualism had created problems of its own. The time had now come, he argued, to emphasize the blessings of community living and to recognize that community interest transcended individual interests. Thus, the community, acting through government, was justified in regulating individuals, groups, or businesses if their behavior injured the general welfare. As an example, Roosevelt pointed out that in the past landowners had been free to do with their property whatever they wished, even if it meant stripping the land of trees and foliage. But now, he said, “we are beginning to see that it is necessary for our health and happiness . . . that individuals and lumber companies should not go into our wooded areas like the Adirondacks and the Catskills and cut them off root and branch for the benefit of their own pocket.”<sup>4</sup> Roosevelt argued that the time had come for the age-old competitive struggle for personal advantage to give way to a spirit of cooperation in pursuit of the general welfare. Cooperation was the key, he said, making obsolete contemporary concerns over such problems as the trusts and the struggle between capital and labor. This speech, with its emphasis on community and national interest and its advocacy of an expanded government, clearly reflected the influence of Theodore Roosevelt. In fact, it was little more than an abbreviated, and much-simplified, version of the widely heralded New Nationalism address that the former president had delivered two years before. The breezy optimism that had the great problems of the day dissolving in the wake of good-hearted cooperation, however, was more Franklin than Theodore.

Roosevelt grew and matured in office, but he nonetheless remained an outsider. He neither sought nor gained entry into the inner circle that governed state affairs. He held most of his colleagues at arm’s length, as though he feared contamination. They, in turn, regarded him as an overly educated, overly privileged self-seeker incapable of understanding ordinary people and their problems. “Awfully arrogant fellow, that Roosevelt,” remarked one veteran Tammany boss. Another one, practically exhausting his stock of epithets, described Roosevelt as among “the snobs in our party . . . political accidents . . . fops and cads who come as near being political leaders as a green pea does a circus tent.”<sup>5</sup> Frances Perkins, a social worker and labor lobbyist, shared the disdain of the

bosses for the Hyde Park senator. “I have a vivid picture of him operating on the floor of the Senate,” she later recalled. He was “tall and slender, very active and alert, moving around the floor, going in and out of committee rooms, rarely talking with the members, who more or less avoided him, not particularly charming (that came later), artificially serious of face, rarely smiling, with an unfortunate habit—so natural that he was unaware of it—of throwing his head up. This, combined with his pincenez and great height, gave him the appearance of looking down his nose at most people.” Perkins, whose passion for social causes had been stirred by Theodore Roosevelt, believed that Franklin Roosevelt acted the way he did “because he really didn’t like people very much and because he had a youthful lack of humility, a streak of self-righteousness, and a deafness to the hopes, fears, and aspirations which are the common lot.”<sup>6</sup>

But not everyone held a low opinion of him, for even then he was capable of arousing strikingly different feelings in different people. “Almost at that very first meeting,” recalled a middle-aged reporter in reference to an interview he had had with Roosevelt during the Sheehan fight, “I made up my mind that . . . nothing but an accident could keep him from becoming president.”<sup>7</sup> The reporter was Louis McHenry Howe, who soon became the most important person in Roosevelt’s political life.

Gnomelike and slovenly, Howe defiantly boasted that he was so ugly that little children took one look at him and ran the other way. But he also possessed shrewd political instincts, including an uncanny sense of timing and an imagination rich in ingenious tactical devices. Addicted to politics but barred from playing a starring role because of his appearance and manner, Howe apparently projected his ambitions onto Roosevelt, and almost from their first acquaintance, worked tirelessly on his behalf. It was remarkable enough that Howe should have sensed great possibilities in the young state senator, but it was even more remarkable that Roosevelt should have sensed in the odd little reporter great usefulness to his own career. But Roosevelt had a talent for attracting selfless and capable subordinates and for quickly recognizing those qualities in them.

Howe proved his usefulness in 1912, when Roosevelt ran for reelection. Forced into bed by an attack of typhoid fever, Roosevelt summoned his new friend to run the campaign. Howe promptly took charge, saturating the senatorial district with full-page newspaper advertisements, circulars, and personalized letters, all proclaiming the virtues of the bedridden candidate. Roosevelt won handily.



Despite his victory, Roosevelt faced an uncertain future in New York State. His incessant attacks on the Tammany machine had deeply angered Democratic leaders and given them ample cause for seeking revenge. Although they had failed to deny him reelection to his senate seat, they had another weapon at their disposal: the power to thwart any ambitions he might have for higher office. So while Roosevelt was safe from reprisal as long as he retained his senate seat, his opportunities for advancement appeared to be slim.

A combination of good fortune and careful calculation on Roosevelt's part resolved this dilemma. In 1911, he had endorsed Governor Woodrow Wilson of New Jersey for the Democratic presidential nomination. He had doubtless hoped that if Wilson became president, his early endorsement might earn him a place in the new administration and thereby remove him from the corner into which he had painted himself in New York. Happily for Roosevelt, everything worked according to plan. In 1912, Wilson received the nomination, then went on to defeat his two major opponents for the presidency, Theodore Roosevelt, who headed the third-party Progressive ticket, and William Howard Taft, the hapless incumbent and Republican party standard-bearer. Franklin Roosevelt's reward, in the form of the assistant secretaryship of the navy, Cousin Theodore's old post, was not long in coming. It was ironic that TR's defeat in the election had helped Franklin continue to follow in TR's footsteps.

Just turned 31 and with no previous administrative experience, Roosevelt eagerly assumed his new responsibilities. With the faithful Howe installed as his assistant, he managed the day-to-day affairs of one of the largest and fastest-growing bureaucracies in Washington. In the process he greatly widened his circle of acquaintances. He talked naval strategy with ranking admirals, procurement matters with corporate executives, and labor conditions in the navy's shipyards with union chiefs. He also established useful relationships with newsmen, thus ensuring that his activities received the widest possible publicity. With his love of ships and the sea, Roosevelt carried out the routine ceremonial functions of the office with boyish enthusiasm. He took delight in the 17-gun salutes that greeted his appearance on fleet inspection tours; he even designed a special flag bearing an insignia for the assistant secretary, which he ordered run up the pole whenever he boarded a ship.<sup>8</sup>

To the chagrin of his superiors, Roosevelt also took delight in issu-

ing broad proclamations concerning military and foreign affairs. Clearly taking his cue from Cousin Theodore, a vociferous critic of the Wilson administration, he advocated naval expansion and a larger role for the United States in international affairs. The world was a dangerous place, he said, and the United States must be prepared to protect its interests. In 1914, when political unrest in Mexico threatened the holdings of American businessmen, Roosevelt wanted to send in the marines. “Sooner or later,” he told reporters, “the United States must go down there and clean up the Mexican political mess. I believe that the best time is right now.” His statement embarrassed him and the administration, for even as he spoke, cooler heads were resolving the crisis through diplomatic channels. With unquestioned faith in the superiority of American ways, Roosevelt supported the march of the flag into foreign lands not only to protect American interests but also to civilize supposedly backward peoples. The natives of Haiti, he once said, had been “little more than primitive savages” before the uplifting experience of armed American intervention.<sup>9</sup>

Roosevelt’s bellicose statements frequently set him at odds with other members of the administration, especially his own chief, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels. Roosevelt believed that the homespun, former North Carolina newspaper editor and reformer was a naïve idealist, hopelessly out of his depth as navy secretary. “The funniest looking hillbilly” he had ever seen, Roosevelt said of Daniels, as he entertained friends at social gatherings with mean-spirited imitations of his chief.<sup>10</sup> Roosevelt, who had demonstrated astute good judgment in the case of Louis Howe, badly misjudged Daniels, an intelligent and shrewd politician who often took a broader view of events than his inexperienced deputy. Moreover, Roosevelt seemed oblivious to the political realities inherent in his relationship with the secretary. Daniels wielded much influence in the Democratic party, and a bad word from him could have jeopardized Roosevelt’s career. But fortunately for Roosevelt, Daniels had a seemingly inexhaustible supply of patience. He genuinely liked Roosevelt, recognized his talents, and charitably attributed his excesses to the zeal of youth. Although several times Daniels would have been fully justified in firing Roosevelt for disloyalty and insubordination, he did nothing to hurt Roosevelt’s career and much to help it.

As his relationship with Daniels demonstrated, Roosevelt still lacked the cautious foresight of a seasoned politician. More dramatic evidence of that deficiency could be seen in his decision in 1914 to run as an avowed anti-Tammany candidate for a seat in the United States

Senate from New York, which by that time had implemented the new system of direct election of senators. Before entering the race, Roosevelt failed to take the elementary precaution of securing a presidential endorsement. Nor did he consult Howe, who, sensing the risks involved, almost certainly would have raised objections. Instead, he plunged headlong into the Democratic primary, only to find the Tammany Tiger with revenge on its mind, ready and waiting to pounce. Tammany's candidate, who emerged only after Roosevelt had already committed himself, was no Blue-eyed Billy Sheehan. Rather, he was James W. Gerard, a man of impeccable credentials whose position as Wilson's ambassador to Germany instantly neutralized any advantage Roosevelt might have derived from his affiliation with the Wilson administration. Gerard humiliated Roosevelt in the primary, winning by close to a three-to-one margin.

Roosevelt learned a lesson from this experience. He now knew that he had no future as a champion of the anti-Tammany cause. Thereafter, he carefully refrained from directly attacking the New York organization. Later, as president, he exercised similar restraint in dealing with big-city machines in other states. Roosevelt learned another lesson as well: he learned to adhere to the old political tradition of letting the office seek the man, and in subsequent elections he played the role of disinterested public servant heeding the call of his party.

Upon reassuming his duties in the Navy Department, Roosevelt brashly injected himself into the public debate over military preparedness, much to the dismay of Secretary Daniels and President Wilson. In August 1914 war broke out in Europe, and Roosevelt argued that the United States should respond by drastically increasing its military might, even to the extent of putting itself on a war-footing. Critics of preparedness feared that a program of the type Roosevelt proposed entailed great risks: it might undercut needed domestic reforms; it might enrich at the taxpayers' expense large corporations, especially munitions makers; and it might involve the United States in a war in which it had no clear interest. Unmoved by such concerns, Roosevelt lashed out at the political leaders and the large segments of the population that failed to share his views. "Most of our citizens don't know what national defense means," he said. "Let us learn to trust the judgment of the real experts, the naval officers. Let us insist that Congress shall carry out their recommendations."<sup>11</sup> Roosevelt went so far as to leak to Republican critics of the administration and to the press confidential information indicating that the United States was unprepared to defend itself in the event of attack. Justifying his actions to Eleanor, he wrote: "The country needs

the truth about the Army and Navy instead of the soft mush about everlasting peace which so many statesmen are handing out to a gullible public.”<sup>12</sup> Another motive, less noble than the dissemination of truth, may also have inspired Roosevelt’s actions. He almost certainly was angling for Daniels’s job, and if by chance a series of embarrassing revelations should force the secretary to resign, he, Roosevelt, would presumably assume command.

From the beginning of the European war, Roosevelt hoped that the United States would enter the conflict on the side of the Allied powers, principally Great Britain and France, and against Germany. In April 1917, he got his wish. Like Cousin Theodore at the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, Roosevelt immediately wanted to resign from his post and enlist in the armed services. Although he had frequently been a thorn in the side of their administration, Secretary Daniels and President Wilson turned down his request, telling him that he was needed in Washington. To his everlasting disappointment, when he later toured the battlefields of Europe, it was as an observer and not as a participant.

Roosevelt carried out his wartime responsibilities as though the fate of the world hinged on his performance. He not only helped mobilize the navy for combat, but also took it upon himself to advise military leaders on matters of strategy and tactics. One pet scheme of his, which was eventually implemented, called for a massive antisubmarine-mine barrage of the North Sea. Still, had he not gone on to future greatness his tenure as assistant secretary of the navy would have earned him no more than a brief footnote in the history of the period.

During the war, Roosevelt experienced a crisis that threatened to shatter his family life and destroy his political career. The crisis grew out of his love affair with Lucy Mercer. Almost from the beginning of their marriage, Franklin and Eleanor had been slowly drifting apart. One reason for this distancing was a difference in their personalities. Outgoing, sociable, and self-centered, Franklin loved the world and all its pleasures. First in Albany and then in Washington, he reveled in the social life. In the evenings after work he liked nothing better than to attend festive parties; sometimes, in the company of old college friends, he would stay out until three or four in the morning. On Sundays, when Eleanor thought he should be in church, he preferred to play golf with male cronies. Eleanor, by contrast, was serious and virtuous. “Duty first” was

her motto. At the parties Franklin so enjoyed, she felt shy and awkward, and she was further nagged by the feeling that everyone's time could be better spent on more important things. Moreover, with the example of her father and brother, both alcoholics, in mind, she believed that indulgence in life's pleasures too easily led to excess. From the beginning, Eleanor was clearly disappointed in the fun-loving, pleasure-seeking side of her husband's nature. As she later put it in her remarkably candid autobiography, "These first years I was so serious and a certain kind of orthodox goodness was my ideal and ambition. . . . But what a tragedy it was if in any way my husband offended against these ideals of mine—and, amusingly enough, I do not think I ever told him what I expected!"<sup>13</sup>

Problems of a more intimate nature may also have added to domestic tensions. Eleanor later confided to her daughter that she had possessed decidedly Victorian attitudes toward sex. But she performed what she considered to be her wifely duties, and one child followed another until she had given birth to six in all, one of whom died in 1909 at the age of seven months. Of this period, Eleanor later recalled, "I was always just getting over a baby or about to have one."<sup>14</sup> After the sixth child was born in 1916 and for the remainder of their marriage, Eleanor maintained a separate bedroom. Insecure in her new role as wife and mother, Eleanor fell under the domination of her well-meaning but strong-willed mother-in-law. Sara even went so far as to design, build, and decorate a home for Franklin and Eleanor and an adjoining one for herself, all without consulting Eleanor. Overwhelmed by her mother-in-law, unsure of herself, and disappointed in Franklin, Eleanor was unhappy. Through it all, Franklin seemed not to notice.

The demands of public life further strained their relationship. Franklin was so preoccupied with his career that Eleanor had to assume almost total responsibility for managing the household and raising their five children. In addition, she felt uncomfortable in the carefully prescribed role she was expected to play as the wife of a politician. That role required her to attend endless rounds of receptions and teas, to be charming and gracious at all times, to hold no strong opinions of her own, and never to offend anyone or to do anything that might embarrass her husband.

For the most part, Eleanor did what official Washington expected of her. But at least on one occasion she caused her husband acute embarrassment. During the war, when the government was asking citizens

to serve and to sacrifice, a reporter from the *New York Times* interviewed Eleanor about the economy measures she had implemented in the large Roosevelt household. Eleanor proudly explained that she and her staff were doing their part. At one point she said, "Making the ten servants help me do my saving has not only been possible but highly profitable." When the article appeared, Franklin was clearly annoyed by his wife's gaffe. "All I can say," he wrote Eleanor, "is that your latest newspaper campaign is a corker and I am proud to be the husband of the Originator, Discoverer and Inventor of the New Household Economy for Millionaires! Please have a photo taken showing the family, the ten cooperating servants, the scraps saved from the table. . . . Honestly you have leaped into public fame, all Washington is talking of the Roosevelt plan."<sup>15</sup>

Lucy Mercer, the other woman in Franklin's life, first entered the scene in 1913, the Roosevelts' first year in Washington, when Eleanor hired her as a social secretary. But it was not until the war years that her relationship with Franklin deepened into love. Descended from a distinguished old Maryland family that had fallen on financial hard times, Lucy was intelligent, charming, and beautiful, the sort of woman, people said, with whom men naturally fell in love. Franklin apparently found in Lucy the kind of uncritical acceptance that Eleanor was unable to provide. Lucy, for her part, thought Franklin to be the most beautiful and charming man she had ever met.

Eleanor suspected the worst as early as the summer of 1917. But her suspicions were not confirmed until a year and a half later, when, in the process of organizing her husband's correspondence, she came across some intimate letters that Lucy had written to Franklin. Eleanor thereupon confronted her husband with the evidence and with an ultimatum: either he would stop seeing Lucy, or he would agree to a divorce, which in those days would have ruined his political career. Accounts vary as to what happened next. According to some family insiders, Franklin's mother raised the stakes by threatening to cut Franklin out of the family inheritance if he abandoned his wife and children. In this version, Franklin, willing to forsake fame and fortune for the woman he loved, agreed to a divorce, only to find that Lucy, a devout Catholic, would not marry a divorced man. According to a more plausible account, Franklin was unwilling to sacrifice either family or career, and he agreed to terminate the affair.<sup>16</sup>

Whatever the truth of the matter, the end result was the same. For the time being at least, Franklin and Lucy broke off their relationship; soon thereafter, Lucy married a much older man; and Franklin and

Eleanor, their old intimacy lost forever, forged in its place a highly effective partnership that served both of them well. Additionally, some family members believed that the crisis toughened and matured Roosevelt, who until this time had had almost everything his way. But it was Eleanor upon whom this painful episode had the much greater impact, at once reinforcing her childhood feelings of inadequacy and, in the long run, strengthening her resolve to be her own person.

In 1920, having survived the first major crisis of his life, Roosevelt became his party's candidate for the vice presidency. Democratic power-brokers selected him for several reasons. He had a famous name; as a New Yorker, he provided regional balance for presidential candidate James M. Cox of Ohio; he had a good record as assistant secretary of the navy; and he was handsome, articulate, and energetic. Ironically, Roosevelt owed his selection in part to Tammany Hall, thus demonstrating the wisdom of the live-and-let-live attitude he had taken toward the machine following his earlier defeat in the senate race.

As a campaigner, Roosevelt still lacked polish. He continued to imitate Theodore Roosevelt, who had died the year before, but the effort did not always work to his advantage. "Franklin is as much like Theodore as a clam is like a bear-cat," observed the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>17</sup> During a speech in Montana, Roosevelt so overdid the imitation of his cousin's swaggering style that he got himself into trouble. Defending Woodrow Wilson's ill-fated League of Nations, he claimed that the United States would actually have twelve votes in the League instead of one because it would be able to control the votes of supposedly pliant Latin American republics. Not content with this realistic but imprudent assessment, Roosevelt boasted, falsely, "I have something to do with the running of a couple of these little Republics. Until last week I had two of these votes in my pocket. . . . One of them was Haiti, I know, for I wrote Haiti's constitution myself, and if I do say it, I think it was a pretty good constitution." The Republican presidential candidate, Warren G. Harding, promptly denounced Roosevelt's imperialistic-sounding pronouncement as "the most shocking assertion that ever emanated from a responsible member of the government of the United States." In the end, Roosevelt did what politicians usually do in such circumstances. He claimed that he had been misquoted.<sup>18</sup>

Despite his blunder, the campaign counted as a plus for Roosevelt. In the process of visiting 32 states and delivering nearly 1,000 speeches, he made a name for himself, established useful relationships with party

leaders throughout the country, and put together a highly efficient and loyal staff, most of whom remained with him after the election. Even though he and Cox went down to defeat, Roosevelt seemed certain to figure prominently in the future of his party.

As he awaited his next political opportunity, he practiced law and business. In the latter capacity, he engaged in a series of speculative, even foolhardy, ventures, including wildcatting for oil, marketing lobsters, and running a dirigible passenger service between New York and Chicago. Most of his schemes lost money; some were of such dubious probity that a prestigious business organization once admonished Roosevelt for lending his name to unsound investments. Some of his public pronouncements during the decade echoed the probusiness sentiments of the conservative Harding and Coolidge administrations of the 1920s. Government regulation of industry, he said, was too unwieldy and too expensive: "The public doesn't want it; the industry doesn't want it."<sup>19</sup>

Roosevelt's career as a businessman demonstrated the ease with which he adapted himself to changing circumstances. During the period of reform, he had been a reformer. Now, during the business-dominated twenties, he became a businessman extolling the virtues of the free-enterprise system. As the decade wore on and as Roosevelt sensed increasing public weariness with the indulgent excesses of the period, he began to talk once again of the need for idealism and reform. Then and later, Roosevelt moved effortlessly from one era to another, sometimes leading and sometimes following, but always in step with the times.

In 1921, Roosevelt experienced a crisis much more severe than the Lucy Mercer affair, a crisis that by almost all odds should have ended his political career. In August of that year, he and his family were vacationing at their summer home on Campobello Island, off the coast of Maine. For Roosevelt a vacation meant strenuous physical activity, for that was how he liked to unwind and relax. An avid outdoorsman, he loved to sail and swim and to play golf and tennis. Usually such activities left him feeling exhilarated. But one afternoon he returned home with the children after a typically rigorous outing feeling chilled and weary. Too tired to dress for dinner, he went to bed early. The next morning as he climbed out of bed, he detected numbness in his left leg. "I tried to persuade myself that this trouble with my leg was muscular, that it would disappear as I used it," he later recalled. "But presently, it refused to work, and then the other."<sup>20</sup> Before long, he was running a high fever and experi-



encing excruciating pain. He lost the normal functioning of his bowels and bladder and was unable to walk or even stand. Doctors eventually diagnosed the illness as infantile paralysis, the dreaded killer andcrippler that usually afflicted children.<sup>21</sup>

Franklin Roosevelt, at the age of 39, was now severely crippled for life. Although his digestive tract, bowels, bladder, and sexual organs eventually returned to normal, the principal muscles below his waist were almost completely paralyzed. Never again would he be able to walk without assistance. From now on, such routine tasks as getting into and out of bed, bathing, going to the bathroom, and dressing all required elaborate effort.

Given the severity of Roosevelt's disability, it would not have been surprising if he had decided to retire to the privacy of Hyde Park. This was precisely what his mother wanted him to do. But Roosevelt would have no part of it, and with the encouragement of Eleanor and Louis Howe, he resolved to make every effort to resume a normal life.

For him, a normal life meant walking again. Refusing to admit to himself or to anyone else that his paralysis could be permanent, he devoted the better part of the next seven years to rebuilding his hopelessly atrophied muscles. During those years, everything in the Roosevelt household was made to revolve around Franklin's single-minded pursuit of rehabilitation. He required everyone to subordinate their needs to his effort to walk again and resume his political career. Nurses and physical therapists were hired. Exercise equipment was installed. At Hyde Park, Sara had ramps built and an old elevator reactivated. To maintain his business and political correspondence, Roosevelt once again sought out Louis Howe, who left his family and moved into the Roosevelt's New York City townhouse, displacing from her room daughter Anna Roosevelt, who resented the intrusion of an outsider into the family's life. For her part, Eleanor, who had gained a measure of independence since the Lucy Mercer affair, now became more closely involved than ever in her husband's life.

In his struggle to walk, Roosevelt tried all the then-known cures and therapies; when one thing failed to work, he tried something else. Finally he placed his hopes for recovery in the buoyant, mineral-rich waters of Warm Springs, Georgia, a dilapidated health spa dating to the antebellum period. Roosevelt eventually invested two-thirds of his personal fortune in Warm Springs, transforming it in the process into a major center for the rehabilitation of polio victims. In the end, however,

the miracle he expected never materialized, although he never gave up hoping.

Although Roosevelt never regained full use of his legs, to a remarkable extent he did manage to compensate for his disability. Through strenuous exercise, he was able to lift himself into and out of a wheelchair. With the help of heavy steel leg braces, he managed to stand on his feet for long periods of time. Eventually, with those same leg braces and with a strong arm to lean on, he learned to walk short distances. He even had an automobile fitted with hand controls so that he could drive. Later, as president, he delighted in trying to evade anxious Secret Service agents as he sped across the back roads at Hyde Park and Warm Springs, which he knew like the back of his hand.

One of Roosevelt's greatest achievements was to focus unprecedented public attention on the plight of people with disabilities. For the rest of his life, he served as a source of hope and inspiration to the victims of polio and other crippling diseases, and he provided dramatic proof to the public as a whole that persons with physical disabilities could lead useful and productive lives. Moreover, Roosevelt played a major role in initiating efforts that ultimately led to the virtual eradication of polio in the United States. In addition to founding the Warm Springs Foundation, he helped establish the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, one of the first modern disease-fighting private organizations. Although Roosevelt did not live to see it, the National Foundation eventually financed the research that led to a successful vaccination for polio.

Significantly, although everyone knew that Roosevelt was a victim of polio, most people during his lifetime were unaware of the extent of his disability or of the excruciating pain he endured. This was no accident. Perhaps fearing that the public would be reluctant to elect a cripple to high office, he went to great lengths to conceal the severity of his impairment. For one thing, he prohibited newsmen from photographing him in a wheelchair, or in the act of being lifted into or out of an automobile, or being carried up a flight of stairs. One time, while giving a speech, Roosevelt leaned for support against an unsteady rostrum. Suddenly, the rostrum gave way and pitched Roosevelt off the stage. After being helped back to the stage, he resumed his speech as though nothing had happened. "No sob stuff," he had earlier warned the press, and the incident went unreported. Because of Roosevelt's elaborate precautions and because of the willingness of the press to cooperate in what one observer later described as a "conspiracy of silence," most people assumed

that Roosevelt's attack of polio had been relatively mild and that he had almost completely recovered from it.<sup>22</sup>

Then and later, there was much speculation about the effects of Roosevelt's struggle against infantile paralysis on his personality and character. In the presence of close friends and family members he occasionally showed signs of discouragement and depression. Most of the time, however, he appeared to maintain his cheery disposition and his optimistic view of life. But some people who knew him believed that the inner man had undergone a transformation. Polio, they said, had strengthened his character, purged him of the last vestiges of superficiality and arrogance, and most important, imbued him with a deep sympathy for the disadvantaged. Polio undoubtedly did toughen and mature Roosevelt, but there is no evidence that it produced any fundamental change in his political sympathies; he remained on the political spectrum where he had always been—a little to the left of center. The major change in Roosevelt that polio brought about was reflected in his temperament and style. He emerged from the crisis less impulsive and more cautious and calculating. No longer was he the self-righteous state senator baiting the Tammany machine, or the insubordinate assistant secretary of the navy challenging his superiors, or the outspoken vice-presidential candidate, barnstorming the country and boasting that he had written the Haitian constitution. Rather, when Roosevelt reentered public life, he was a mature politician whose every word and action seemed calculated for its effect on others.

In ways that no one could possibly have foreseen at the outset, polio turned out to be a great blessing for Roosevelt politically. Indeed, if he had not been stricken, it is entirely possible that he might never have been elected governor of New York or later president of the United States. For one thing, Roosevelt's struggle against infantile paralysis enhanced his personal appeal. Although he still had to convince skeptics that he had the physical stamina to withstand the rigors of public life, his triumph over adversity gave a heroic dimension to his life that had been missing before. In a way, polio did for Franklin Roosevelt what the Spanish-American War had done for Theodore Roosevelt.

More important, polio prevented Roosevelt from seeking public office at a time when such a quest would probably have damaged his career. As it turned out, the period of his convalescence was also a most unpropitious time for aspiring Democratic politicians. Riding the crest of eco-

conomic prosperity, the Republican party had firmly entrenched itself in power at the national level. The Democratic party, meanwhile, was in disarray. Preoccupied with the explosive issues of race, religion, and prohibition, Democrats were hopelessly divided along urban and rural lines. If Roosevelt had run for office in such circumstances, he probably would have been mortally wounded in the cross-fire between warring factions in his own party. Polio, however, left him no choice but to remain safely behind the front lines. Even after his condition improved, he found that ill-health provided a convenient excuse for avoiding politically risky situations. In the mid-1920s, for example, some of his supporters launched a movement to draft him for a senate race. As the clever Howe put it to Roosevelt, "I hope your spine is still sufficiently strong to assure them that you are still nigh death's door for the next two years. Please try to look pallid, and worn and weary."<sup>23</sup>

Prolonged political inactivity entailed even greater risks. But Roosevelt was not going to remain out of the spotlight for long, lest people forget him. In 1924 he made his first public appearance since he had fallen ill. The occasion was the meeting of the Democratic National Convention, where he was to place in nomination for the presidency the name of New York governor Alfred E. Smith. Assembled politicians did not soon forget the dramatic scene: when the time came for Roosevelt to address the convention, he slowly made his way on crutches to the podium. All eyes were fixed on him; spectators held their breath for fear that he would stumble and fall. When he finally reached the rostrum, he carefully laid aside his crutches, tossed his head back in his characteristic manner, and flashed a triumphant smile. The hall shook with applause. His performance was by all accounts the high point of an otherwise dismal convention.

Following his convention triumph, Roosevelt began corresponding with party leaders throughout the country. He also used his frequent visits to Warm Springs as an excuse to confer with powerful southern Democrats. In these and in other ways he worked himself back into the center of party affairs. Eleanor, too, helped ensure that people did not forget her husband. In New York she ably represented his political interests and also exposed him to a variety of important people and causes that otherwise might have escaped his notice.

In 1928, despite his own and Louis Howe's misgivings, Roosevelt ran for the governorship of New York. To Roosevelt and Howe, the timing seemed all wrong, for 1928 looked like another Republican year. But Al Smith, the incumbent governor and Democratic presidential nomi-

nee, pleaded with Roosevelt to make the race. Actually, Smith regarded Roosevelt as a political dilettante, not to be taken entirely seriously. But he believed that Roosevelt would strengthen the Democratic ticket in upstate New York and thereby enhance his own chances of carrying New York in the presidential race. Smith apparently also believed that if Roosevelt did win the governorship, he, Smith, would become the power behind the scenes. Roosevelt declined at first, but Smith persisted, and Roosevelt finally consented to run.

The candidate's health quickly surfaced as a major issue in the campaign. The Republicans, feigning sympathy for Roosevelt, criticized Smith for dragging a helpless invalid into making the race. In order to lay the issue to rest, Roosevelt conducted a strenuous campaign, exhausting his staff and the press in the process. Recounting the details of his hectic schedule to one audience, Roosevelt quipped, "Too bad about this unfortunate sick man, isn't it?"<sup>24</sup>

Roosevelt's estimation of Democratic prospects in the November elections was at least partially borne out. In the presidential contest Al Smith suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of Herbert Hoover. Roosevelt, however, won a narrow victory.

"Anyone who is governor of New York has a good chance to be President with any luck," Roosevelt had told his fellow law clerks many years earlier. Yet from the perspective of 1928, it appeared that the newly elected governor would need more than a little luck, for formidable obstacles remained between him and the White House. One of those obstacles was the thorny underbrush of New York politics through which he would have to pass. Another was the demoralized and divided state of the Democratic party. But the most imposing obstacle of all was the opposition party. With the highly competent and popular Herbert Hoover about to assume the presidency, it appeared that nothing short of disaster could interrupt Republican rule.