

Elliott Roosevelt: A Paradoxical Personality in an Age of Extremes

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Elliott Roosevelt, the enigmatic younger brother of U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, is a compelling study in contradiction. Though several of Elliott's closest family members—from his brother to his daughter, Eleanor—became important figures on the national stage in twentieth century America, he has largely been forgotten. The reasons historians overlook Elliott, including his obscurity and the calamitousness of his lifetime, are not unlike the motives that drove his family to similar reticence. Yet, a deeper and more nuanced treatment of Elliott reveals much about late nineteenth century America and about a complicated personality with intrinsic connections to important historical actors. Like the Civil War of his childhood and the Gilded Age in which he lived, Elliott's life presents a complicated, often paradoxical existence. Born to a family dissevered by the Civil War, raised in aristocratic society but financially inept, devoted to social welfare causes but engaged in a life of frivolity and ostentation, praised for his likeability but disdained for his selfishness, raised on notions of temperance and morality but remembered for his intractable drinking and debauchery, Elliott resists simplistic, unifying definitions.

Unable to tease apart the bifurcated nature of Elliott's life, a more effective picture of his character can be presented by wading into the mire of his contrasts. Significant representations of Elliott's duplicitous reality and his conflicting conduct can be seen throughout his life. His household and family were wrenched by the Civil War. He was committed to helping the unfortunate and needy, but lived the life of Gilded Age boulevardier. While he was born into great wealth, he was so unsuccessful at managing

his own finances that Theodore would eventually request control of his estate. His church-going father and his presidency-bound brother were models of self-control, yet Elliott would blossom into an obdurate and self-destructive alcoholic. He showed great care and affection as a father, while simultaneously living a life of infidelity, even fathering a child with one of the family's housemaids.¹ Elliott not only crossed social boundaries, he overshot geographical constrictions with travels to the frontier-era western states and to the distant subcontinent of India. Extremes, divisions, and hypocrisies seem the hallmarks of Elliott's span, creating a tumultuous trajectory that his daughter, Eleanor, once described, in a tone of resignation, as "tragedy and happiness... walking on each other's heels."²

The grandson of one of Manhattan's "Wealthiest Ten," Elliott was born in 1860 to a notably privileged New York household.³ His own father, Theodore Sr., while not expanding on the several-million-dollar fortune, nevertheless provided a moneyed upbringing for Elliott and his siblings. Elliott recognized the fact by at least fourteen, writing to his father, "I don't believe there is any boy that has had as happy and care free of a life as I have had."⁴ Being raised in an advantaged, urban household in the 1860s may have been "care free" at times, but there were uniquely grave realities that connected nearly every family to the nation's fratricidal Civil War. For Elliott, a divided house, reflective of a fissured nation, was early on an unavoidable reality: his mother and her

¹ Kathleen Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Strenuous Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 140.

² Eleanor Roosevelt, *This Is My Story* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937), 5.

³ David McCullough, *Mornings on Horseback: the Story of an Extraordinary Family, a Vanished Way of Life, and the Unique Child Who Became Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 27.

⁴ McCullough, 147.

family were active Confederate sympathizers, while his father and his kin were staunch Unionist.

The Civil War was by design an internecine conflict, and the divisions that were playing out on battlefields had their counterparts in family circles.⁵ The Roosevelt household was particularly strained as a result of unharmonious maternal and paternal allegiances. Elliott's mother, Mittie Bulloch Roosevelt, raised in a patrician household in antebellum Georgia, was an ardent supporter of the Confederacy.⁶ Conversely, Theodore, Sr. threw himself wholly into efforts to support the Union cause, leaving home from 1861 to 1863 to lobby in Washington for an Allotment Commission allowing northern soldiers to send a portion of their pay home to their families.⁷ He was an active member in the Union League Club and in the Loyal Publication Society, Union-loyalist associations attended by New York's upper class.⁸ A vocal abolitionist Republican, Theodore, Sr. became remarkably intimate with President Lincoln, exchanging letters and spending time with him in D.C.⁹ Theodore, Sr. would have fought for the Union cause, but his wife had begged him to abjure on the grounds that "it would kill her for him to fight against her brothers," as the oldest of Elliott's siblings, Bamie, recounted.¹⁰

Elliott's parents were resigned to opposition in no small part because Mittie situated her identity in her Southern familial heritage. The Bulloch's were proud

⁵ Damon Eubank, *In the Shadow of the Patriarch: The John J. Crittenden Family in War and Peace* (Atlanta: Mercer University Press, 2009). Eubank's study provides an example of torn family allegiances during the Civil War.

⁶ H.W. Brands, *T.R.: The Last Romantic* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 17. Brands states, "Upon the outbreak of the war, a psychological fault line opened, running right through the center of the house."

⁷ McCullough, 58.

⁸ Dalton, 28.

⁹ McCullough, 59-60.

¹⁰ Dalton, 26.

descendants of Georgia's first " 'Revolutionary' Governor," Archibald Bulloch. Mittie's brothers, James D. and Irvine Bulloch, and her half-brother Daniel Elliott, were committed Confederates and, with the exception of Daniel, would be forced to remove to England at the close of the war due to their acknowledged participation in the secessionist cause.¹¹ During the war, James was something of a Confederate hero; he had acted as "one of Jefferson Davis' secret agents" to England, successfully commissioning the construction of the rebel warship *Alabama* in Liverpool.¹²

Mittie's consanguineous connections to the South led to open displays of loyalty; following one southern victory, remarks historian Joseph Lash, Mittie produced a Confederate flag, and hung it from their East Twentieth Street home.¹³ The display was an irreverent and dangerous act, one that had landed others in prison.¹⁴ Mittie's mother, Grandma Bulloch, spent the war years with Elliott and his siblings in the house in New York, and helped to "finance hospital supplies" for the Confederacy by selling family silver.¹⁵ Mittie's opposition to the Union, and her devotion to the South, did not go unrecognized by her children. A favorite game among Elliott and his siblings during the war years had been "run the blockade," derived from knowledge of their rebel Uncle James Bulloch's daring transportation of "cargo of contraband goods" through Union naval blockades.¹⁶ Mittie and her husband struggled to find common ground during the war years. Evidencing a relationship placed under strain by internecine division,

¹¹ Joseph P. Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin: The Story of their Relationship Based On Eleanor's Private Papers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 5.

¹² Dalton, 30.

¹³ Lash, 5.

¹⁴ Dalton, 29.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁶ McCullough, 55-57.

Theodore wrote his wife from Washington, “I wish we sympathized together on this question of so vital moment in our country, but I know you cannot understand my feelings.”¹⁷

Elliott, young as he was, witnessed confusing displays, or, in his younger sister Corinne’s revealing recollection, “much that was difficult and troublous.”¹⁸ A half-century later, Elliott’s brother, Theodore, would write in his autobiography that “towards the end of the Civil War, although a very small boy, I grew to have a partial but alert understanding of the fact that the family *were not one in their views* about that conflict.”¹⁹ Elliott, too, must have internalized the schizophrenic war allegiances that mingled in the Roosevelt house. The conflicted couple introduced their children to a world that was neither blue nor gray, but was instead an uncomfortable amalgam of the two, a disunited coalition of North and South, a house both slavocratic and abolitionist. On the subject of slavery, the Roosevelt couple was clearly conflicted; Theodore, Sr., described by a contemporary with the maxim “firm against slavery,” could not reconcile with Mittie’s unyielding support for the South’s peculiar institution.²⁰ She simply could not break from her Southern family’s dogmatic belief that slavery was justified and justifiable. Mittie’s father had, in fact, been a close friend of Alexander Stephens, the outspoken Vice President of the Confederacy, who asserted in no uncertain terms “the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man.”²¹ The conflicting views of Roosevelt-Bulloch

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁸ Dalton, 26.

¹⁹ Theodore Roosevelt, *Theodore Roosevelt: An Autobiography* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), 11. Italics not in original text.

²⁰ McCullough, 48.

²¹ Fordham University, “Alexander H. Stephens’ Cornerstone Address, March 21, 1861,” <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1861stephens.asp>.

couple, a response to overwhelming social and culture disunity, introduced Elliott to an anomalous reality.

Another of Elliott's southern descendents, Uncle Daniel Elliott, died during the war.²² The departure of Elliott's namesake was a solemn reminder that those family members so regularly depicted in Mittie's stories to her children were engaged in a life-and-limb rebellion against the forces of national cohesion. News of Uncle Daniel's death would have elicited a strange intermingling of sympathy and disdain if the children managed to connect him to their mother's brutal tale of his having murdered his personal slave "in a fit of rage."²³ Uncle Elliott was the embodiment of ambiguity: a violent authoritarian and supposed murderer who was simultaneously the object of the Bulloch women's worries and affections.

The existential discord and contradicting personalities Elliott experienced in his first half-decade of life continued beyond the war. Over the long term, Elliott maintained an affectionate and lasting connection with his surviving Confederate uncles, especially James D. Bulloch. Though James lived the remainder of his life in Liverpool, England, his closeness with Elliott is evident in their correspondence. When Elliott was in the propositional phase of his courtship of the blue-blooded beauty he would eventually marry, Miss Anna Hall, he solicited a letter from James that exhibited a profound connection with his southern relative. James' letter, written twenty years after the war, showed the persisting avuncular bond: "I, the near relative and friend [of Elliott]...having often seen him in childhood and in all the stages of approach to his present condition...do declare, that the said Elliott Roosevelt is a proper young man, and has always been

²² Dalton, 33.

²³ Ibid., 34.

dutiful as a son, tender as a brother, affectionate as a nephew, true and loyal as a friend...”²⁴ Elliott’s allegiance to his Confederate relations ran deep and, as historian Joseph Lash has suggested, probably encouraged both him and his brother to be “sympathetic with the restoration of white rule in the South,” and to accept the glaring failure of Reconstruction to improve race relations.²⁵

Elliott likely first met his Bulloch uncle when the man came to New York in 1865 or 1866, not long after the war’s conclusion.²⁶ Still being sought by Federal authorities, James traveled under an assumed name, a practice Elliott himself would resort to in his own later, troubled years, when detection, even by family members, was unwelcome.²⁷ With a deep abiding love for a man who, as Elliott knew, had illicitly delivered what may have been the Confederacy’s largest wartime arms shipment, Elliott would have understood that loyalty was complicated.²⁸ That James Bulloch could be “one of the best men I have ever known,” as Elliott’s brother described the veteran, and could also be an agent of antisocial causes and outright martial rebellion was a Gordian conflict.²⁹

The fissures of the Civil War years eventually gave way to the paradoxes and paroxysms of the post-bellum period. The Gilded Age, Mark Twain’s enduring appellation for the era 1870-1900, was coined before the end of the period it intended to reference. Twain’s pithy designation is, therefore, freed from questions that might arise about applying a term in retrospective inquiry or historical analysis; it is a

²⁴ Elliott Roosevelt, *Hunting Big Game in the Eighties: The Letters of Elliott Roosevelt Sportsman*, ed. Eleanor Roosevelt (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1933), 147-148.

²⁵ Lash, 27.

²⁶ Theodore Roosevelt, 12.

²⁷ For Uncle Bulloch’s clandestine visit see Theodore Roosevelt, 12. For Elliott’s assuming a false identity, see McCullough, 369 and Lash, 52.

²⁸ McCullough, 55-56.

²⁹ Theodore Roosevelt, 13.

contemporaneous phrase. Twain invoked the aphorism as the title for his co-authored 1873 novel of the same name about the corrupting material excesses of the period, and he intended it to be a comment on the glaring social, economic, and political disparities of the time.³⁰ He was determined to show, as historian Rebecca Edwards said, “that America glittered on the outside while it rotted at the core.”³¹ Ambivalence and socio-economic disparity reigned, especially in the large American cities like New York. Elliott’s reality was a United States that “combined modern technology with race hatred, eager consumerism with grinding poverty, greed with good will, humanitarian impulses with designs for economic empire.”³² Conflict and disparity were the defining elements of the period, just as conflicting and paradoxical actions were the signature elements of Elliott’s person.

The references to concomitant “greed and good will” and hypocritical “humanitarian impulses” can be directly applied to Elliott Roosevelt’s existence. He wore the dual-hat of selflessness and selfishness. As a young man, Elliott’s New York was one of conspicuous socio-economic disparity. His own family home, a Victorian architectural showpiece, was not far from the “squatter’s shanties” that had sprung up on Manhattan’s West Side.³³ A Chinese diplomat who visited New York in the period of Elliott’s upbringing invoked a classical poem to describe the scene: “Crimson mansions reek of wine and meat, while on the road lie frozen bones. Rich and poor but a foot

³⁰ Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 4-5.

³¹ Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: American in the Gilded Age, 1865-1905* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

³² *Ibid.*, 6.

³³ Lash, 5.

apart; sorrows too hard to relate.”³⁴ It was estimated that as many as twenty thousand homeless boys roamed the streets of New York in the 1870s and 80s.³⁵ While still just a boy himself, Elliott registered the human disparity, and responded to the economic imbalance with simple attempts at redistribution. Here was Elliott’s humanitarian, affectionate aspect. One remarkable act of compassion occurred on a cold winter morning, when a seven-year-old Elliott came upon a ragged child in the street and, in an effort to correct the circumstance, gave his new coat to the unfortunate youth. When Elliott returned to the Roosevelt’s stately home he was asked where his coat had gone, and he proudly recounted his corrective action.³⁶

Elliott’s precocious humanitarianism reflected his father’s devotion to the disenfranchised residents of the city. For Theodore, Sr., “philanthropy and civic enterprise” came before business interests; humanistic causes were Sr.’s focus, and he played an active role in founding the charitable Orthopedic Hospital, aggressively funded the Newsboys’ Lodging House, befriended the great social reformers of his era like Charles Loring Brace, and offered a Mission Class for impoverished young men.³⁷ One acquaintance of the elder Roosevelt pointed to his being unique among New York’s moneyed circles in his interest in the poor: “At a time when most citizens of equal fortune and education” neglected to assist the less fortunate, Sr. “was always engaged” in philanthropic enterprise.³⁸ Elliott accompanied his father, even as a boy, to the Newsboys’ Lodging House, an influential tradition he would continue to act on for many

³⁴ Edwards, 100.

³⁵ McCullough, 28.

³⁶ Elliott Roosevelt, ix.

³⁷ Lash, 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

years, taking up the mantel after his father's death.³⁹ In the late 1880s, Elliott's own daughter, Eleanor, accompanied him on trips to the same Lodging House. Eleanor, a future champion of social welfare, claimed that one of her earliest memories, probably in the late 1880s, was of her father taking her to a Christmas dinner for the newsboys.⁴⁰

Throughout the 1880s, Elliott made his altruistic presence felt by New York's poorest residents. If, as Henry George had written in his *Paradox of Capitalist Growth*, "the association of poverty with progress" was "the great enigma" of the era, Elliott sought to provide some answer to the question of economic inequality with his own personal acts of charity.⁴¹ The "great enigma" did not go unrecognized by Elliott, but was, instead, made a lasting part of his reality by his constant devotion to philanthropic action. *The New York Times* carried an article in the spring of 1885 describing "the kindness of Mr. Elliott Roosevelt."⁴² Elliott and his wife furnished a turkey dinner for the West Side Boys' Lodging House, another of the charitable institutions Sr. had originally been familiar with. The boys "ate until their clothes didn't fit," and then Elliott offered some encouraging remarks. The article closed by praising the Roosevelt couple as "among those who make the boys happy." The *Times* again recognized Elliott's charitable nature in December 1886 in an article aptly titled "Making Many Happy: Good Dinners for the Poor and Those in Prison."⁴³ The article began:

At the West Side Newsboys' Lodging House, No. 400
Seventh-avenue, the 120 inmates had their Christmas
dinner...It was furnished by Elliott Roosevelt, brother

³⁹ McCullough, 247.

⁴⁰ Eleanor Roosevelt, 27.

⁴¹ Leon Fink, *Major Problems in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1993), 6.

⁴² "Boys With Significant Names," *New York Times*, April, 30, 1885.

⁴³ "Making Many Happy," *New York Times*, December 26, 1886.

of Theodore, and a few of his friends. These gentlemen, attired in full dress, served the boys before going home to their own dinners.

Along with the meal, Elliott paid for “all-wool flannel shirts” to be distributed among the boys. Elliott had taken it upon himself to act as more than a distant fiduciary benefactor to the newsboys: he was a physical presence in the lives of these least fortunate young citizens. He had to enter the sphere of the impoverished children, as his father had. He had to embrace the enigmatic disparity Henry George had indicated.

Elliott carried this charitableness with him even during the gravest periods of his life. During his tragic final years, 1892 to his death in 1894, Elliott was forced by his brother to accept a temporary exile in Abingdon, Virginia.⁴⁴ After Elliott’s death, the *Richmond Times Dispatch* published an account of the “charming gentleman” who had spent his final years in the vicinity.⁴⁵ The account described Elliott’s charitable nature as a defining feature of his presence: “he had an almost uncanny knack of learning about cases of sickness and distress around him and a way of quietly sending money, or delicacies, or flowers, or words of comfort and cheer as the occasion required. At Christmas he would buy hundreds of turkeys from the farmers and have them distributed to the poor.” Elliott, whose life was, in the reporter’s estimation, “a daily practice of the golden rule,” harbored the philanthropic impulses of his father, the celebrated social reformer whose own obituaries had called him a “generous public spirit,” a devotee of “high moral purpose.”⁴⁶ Despite his apparent devotion to others, his record of giving to

⁴⁴ Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt, Volume One, 1884-1933* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1992), 73.

⁴⁵ Goodridge Wilson, “When a Roosevelt Found Health in Virginia Hills,” <http://richmondthenandnow.com/NewsPaper-Articles/Elliott-Roosevelt.html>.

⁴⁶ McCullough, 185.

the needy, Elliott was simultaneously inclined to an “epicurean” existence, a word Theodore used to describe his brother’s questionable behavior.⁴⁷

It was his father, once again, who introduced him to the duplicity of feeding the poor on one evening and, on the next, sitting down to a multi-course meal that was prepared and served by domestic workers. McCullough, in his close study of the elder Roosevelt, described him as “one who could work for the welfare of others without being an ascetic.”⁴⁸ Sr. combined his charity work with his love of high-class living. A striking example of his periodically uncomfortable amalgamation of prosperity and poverty occurred when he hosted a fundraiser for the Orthopedic Hospital at his opulent 57th Street home. In the dining room, perched atop a large, undoubtedly expensive table, Sr. placed “several pathetically crippled children” in order to solicit the donations of his party-goers.⁴⁹ The scene must have been shocking in its duplicity; the city’s wealthiest men and women, like Mrs. John Jacob Astor, who was apparently moved by the spectacle, stood in the ornate dining space of the Roosevelt’s uptown mansion while on the table sat several crippled children who doubtlessly came from the city’s poorest quarters.

Edwards noted the “greed” that countervailed the better impulses of the Gilded Age personality, and though Elliott was more inclined to spending than saving, he was certainly familiar with the lifestyle of New York’s *haute monde*. Although he was committed to philanthropy, he lived like an English aristocrat, “riding to the hounds” at his estate in Hempstead, playing polo at the Meadowbrook Club in Long Island, traveling

⁴⁷ Lash, 11.

⁴⁸ McCullough, 138.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

to the garish estates in Newport, Rhode Island during summers.⁵⁰ In his final years, Elliott took to writing and produced a thinly veiled depiction of his egotistical, unproductive life among the well to do. His story's protagonist--Sophie Vedder-- admits, in a reflective moment, "life has been a gamble. I have lived for pleasure only. I have never done anything I disliked when I could possibly avoid it."⁵¹ The character continues to offer explanatory aphorisms; "live and let live"; "never miss an opportunity of enjoying life, no matter at what cost." Indeed, Elliott was guilty of neglecting his moral and fiduciary responsibilities. Edith Carow Roosevelt, the wife of Theodore, remembered Elliott with unflattering clarity. "He drank like a fish," she said, "and ran after ladies. I mean ladies not in his own rank, which was much worse."⁵²

After Elliott married Anna Hall, "one of New York's most beautiful women," he spent increasing amounts of time in the pursuit of expensive pleasures. According to researcher Mason White, the couple were "prominent members of New York society and were invited to dinners, dances, or theater parties nearly every night."⁵³ In the immediate aftermath of Elliott's tragic end, the *New York World* paid tribute to him as one of the great, but forgotten, *bons vivants* of the age: "There was a time when there were not many more popular young persons in society than Mr. and Mrs. Elliott Roosevelt."⁵⁴ When the couple had been married in 1883, the event was hailed in the *New York Times* as "one of the most brilliant weddings of the season."⁵⁵ The *Times* reporter struggled to

⁵⁰ Cook, 46.

⁵¹ McCullough, 248.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 247.

⁵³ Mason White, "Elliott, the Tragic Roosevelt," *The Hudson Valley Regional Review* 5 (1988): 22.

⁵⁴ "Elliott Roosevelt Dead," *New York World*, August 16, 1894.

⁵⁵ "The Roosevelt-Hall Wedding," *New York Times*, December 2, 1883.

convey the unmatched expense of the event with depictions of the attendees' garish outfits and the costly decorations like "banisters trimmed with fern and ivy." The guest list alone placed Elliott among the Nation's stratospherically wealthy; listed were Astors, Vanderbilts, Bigelows, and Livingstons.

There was a vast gulf between "Elliott the sportsman extraordinaire" and "Elliott the philanthropist." Each time Elliott ventured to go from one extreme to the next, it was like crossing an invisible dividing line in society. Henry George's "paradox" of the Gilded Age may have been defining an existential disparity, but it neglected to illustrate that individual men like Elliott were enigmatically to be found in both realities. All the going-back-and-forth, from offering support for the needy on one evening to partying uncontrollably on the following one, eventually seemed to rend Elliott's internal world. He lost the ability to retain control of his mental state, becoming an unpredictable, Janus-faced character to those closest to him.⁵⁶ Theodore, an aspiring politician in the 1880s, was disgusted with his brother's "frivolous" living and did not doubt that the devotion to ostentation was exacting a toll on Elliott. In a letter to their sister Bamie in 1888 Theodore was brutally honest about Elliott's undisciplined existence, specifically referring to the drinking and gaming conducted at his new home on Long Island: "I do hate his Hempstead life. I don't know whether he could get along without the excitement now, but it is certainly very unhealthy, and leads to nothing."⁵⁷ Elliott's life appeared frivolous in other ways, as well: he lavishly spent money, but never succeeded in a single financial venture.

⁵⁶ Cook, 58.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 50.

This fact, that Elliott failed to profit even as those around him, like the Vanderbilts, for example, were acquiring immense fortunes by investing in industries like railroads, mining, and manufacturing, is almost too strange to measure.⁵⁸ Theodore, for his part, had chosen politics even before he was finished with college.⁵⁹ But that Elliott should have been unable to find some means of gain was probably the result of thinking like that of his imagined protagonist Sophie Vedder. In the Vedder story there is a direct reference to financial hardship, alluding to Elliott's own stress: "wondering how long one's funds are going to last, takes the edge off of every pleasure in life."⁶⁰ Perhaps he was simply spoiled by his affluent upbringing. After all, the generations previous were historically successful, even if the fortune had waned. While Elliott's father had inherited two million dollars, Elliott's inheritance was a comparatively meager \$125,000.⁶¹

Elliott's forebears had been a tightfisted and frugal set, furiously driven to balance their personal accounts in the direction of profit. Cornelius Van Schaak Roosevelt, grandfather to Elliott, assured his future wife that "Economy is my doctrine at all times, at all events till I become, if it be so, a man of fortune."⁶² Van Schaak went on to co-found the Chemical Bank of New York, one of few banks to survive the Civil War, and would make millions in plate glass importation. Elliott's father, while not driven to great business ends, was equally attentive to the balance of income and expenditure. Theodore, Sr. once offered his namesake advice about his secret for maintaining financial stability:

⁵⁸ Ray Ginger, *Age of Excess: The United States from 1877 to 1914* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1965), 93.

⁵⁹ McCullough, 208.

⁶⁰ Cook, 74.

⁶¹ McCullough, 205.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 24.

“keep the fraction constant.” The fraction, of course, was income-over-outlays, and Sr. seems to have been true to his own aphorism. McCullough reports that despite an “extravagant” lifestyle, Theodore Roosevelt Sr. was more than just solvent.⁶³

Elliott often admitted to “laziness.” In a letter written to Bamie from the antipodes of Asia, Elliott, just into his twenties, seemed to suggest a reason for his inaction. Explaining why he had gone to India, he wrote

There seemed little for me to do in New York that any of you, my own people, could be proud of me for, and naturally I am a pretty lazy fellow...If some of the wise and strong among you don't make a *good* chance for me on my coming home I'll make but a poor one for myself I fear.⁶⁴

Here Elliott's laziness seems a self-deprecating cover for another issue altogether. Elliott had always been economically reliant on others, and now, despite his having reached adulthood, others, “the wise and the strong,” would determine whether or not he found a profitable enterprise. Lash suggests that this learned entitlement, absorbed in his younger years, combined with the “strong pull” of the social environment, had prevented Elliott from finding success in the business world.⁶⁵

It may, in fact, have been a fantastically ruinous investment that portended Elliott's physical death. Surely, Elliott's peculiar end followed other devastating personal tragedies, including his wife's death from diphtheria, followed by that of his son, Elliott. But the financial disaster he suffered in 1893 was a true blow to his waning optimism. The Panic of 1893, a widespread economic depression, caused the failure of

⁶³ McCullough, 206.

⁶⁴ Lash, 13.

⁶⁵ Lash, 10.

Elliott's banking and mining interests in Abingdon, Virginia. Abingdon reporter Goodridge Wilson described the downturn as a paralyzing force, and noted Elliott's desperate but finally failing attempts to raise investment capital.⁶⁶

In a letter written only days after Elliott's death, Theodore acknowledged his brother's enigmatic and impenetrable two-facedness: "I suppose he has been doomed from the beginning; the *absolute contradiction* of all his actions, and of all his moral even more than his mental qualities, is utterly impossible to explain."⁶⁷ Theodore saw with cold clarity the troubled inconsistencies in Elliott's life. Most shocking for the aspiring politician were the moral ambiguities that seemed to cling to Elliott. Later in his writing, Theodore called Elliott's life "strange," which seemed an admission of Theodore's inability to understand the tensions that had pulled his brother apart. Whether he was speaking of his deceased brother's infidelity and alcoholism, or he was groping for a recollection of Elliott's better qualities when he wrote about moral "contradiction," Theodore was more content to remember the family myth surrounding Elliott's "old, generous, gallant self," even if, or perhaps especially because, the notion of a Elliott as a singular character, uniformly good or bad, was hard to comprehend.

The paradoxes of Elliott's character, the gulf between his likeability and his selfishness, became most apparent in his relationships with his wife and his daughter, Eleanor. In part, his incongruousness was the result of something heretofore unexplored; namely, Elliott's alcoholism. While his brother seemed to get "fighty" when he drank, as the future President once admitted, Elliott was prone to bouts of maudlin contemplation that gave way to great spasms of exuberance. Most present-day historians that confront

⁶⁶ Wilson, "When a Roosevelt Found Health in Virginia Hills".

⁶⁷ Cook, 89.

Elliott's drinking place it at the center of his personal failure and ultimate ruin. Lash's chapter on Elliott's final years, titled "The Crack Up," described a capricious alcoholic, traveling abroad at great expense to half-heartedly attempt sobriety.⁶⁸ Historian B.W. Cook concluded that Elliott was, by the late 1880s, "increasingly mercurial" as a result of his "excessive" consumption of alcohol.⁶⁹

Even in death, Elliott was physically indecisive, restless for upheaval. The Roosevelts would initially have him buried in their family plot at Greenwood, but after his wife's family asked that he be laid with his marriage partner and son in Tivoli, his body was exhumed and driven north, following the treed watercourse of the Hudson.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Lash, 34-35.

⁶⁹ Cook, 37.

⁷⁰ Cook, 91-92.



Elliott Roosevelt with Elliot, Jr., Anna Eleanor, and Hall
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Elliott_Roosevelt_and_Children.jpg



Theodore and Elliott Roosevelt
<http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-OUIUlhErA7w/UFQkEpIG4eI/AAAAAAAAAj8/GdYy-xKD6qY/s640/Roosevelts.jpg>