

Roosevelt and Prizefighting (July 30, 1910)

A few days ago, according to reports, three men of national prominence in the East were discussing Roosevelt. All three concluded that he was insane, a madman. Whether they are right or wrong is not for us to say, but the evidences are certainly multiplying that the Sage of Sagamore is in a bad way. For instance, in the last issue of *The Outlook*, of which he is the reputed associate editor, Lyman J. Abbot,¹ reformed preacher, being the editor-in-chief, he discusses prizefighting over his own name.² This epistle is certainly self-contradictory enough to be regarded as the effusion of a disordered mind. Admitting that he has been a patron of the ring, that he has attended a number of prizefights and enjoyed them, that it is a “manly” sport, that he numbers some professional pugs among his personal friends, he concludes by advocating the suppression of the game and forbidding even the pictures of these “manly” exhibitions.

Can anyone conceive of Lincoln sending a telegram of congratulation to a prizefighter after he had beaten his opponent into pulp and matted gore? That is what Roosevelt did to Bob Fitzsimmons³ while he occupied the executive seat of the nation.

How is that for a “moral example” by the president of the United States? And what have the preachers and purists to say about it? And what would they not have to say about it had Roosevelt been a Socialist instead of a Republican?

Socialists have been accused by Roosevelt of having low morals but there is not one among them all whose morals are so low that he would not blush for shame to have Roosevelt’s record, public and private, on the subject of prizefighting.

The many thousands who crowd about a prize ring to see two brutes maul and mangle each other into bloody, insensible wreckage, most of them plug-hatted and patent leather-shoed, with the president of the United States as a guest of honor, are all opposed to socialism on the ground that socialism is a menace to public morals.

Socialists are not patrons of brutal, degrading prize rings and are not the personal friends and associates of prizefighters. Socialists are at their humble cottages with their families, reading sound literature, studying the

science of society, and yielding the distinctions of bloody prize ring and its disgraceful associations to Roosevelt and the bourgeoisie of whom he is the idol and patron saint.

Published in *Appeal to Reason*, whole no. 765 (July 30, 1910), p. 3.

¹ Lyman J. Abbott (1835-1922) was a Congregationalist minister from Massachusetts who assumed editorship of *The Christian Union* in 1881 and transformed it in 1893 into *The Outlook*, which became one of the leading news weeklies of the progressive era. His son Lawrence Fraser Abbott (1859-1933) was a personal friend of Theodore Roosevelt.

² Theodore Roosevelt, "The Recent Prize Fight," *The Outlook*, vol. 95 (July 16, 1910), pp. 550-551. In this article Roosevelt reaffirmed his support for the sport of boxing but noted that large cash prizes inevitably generated crooked results, served as a nexus for gambling, and created an atmosphere which contributed to race antagonism. He found the new trend towards motion pictures of prizefights adding another layer of exploitation and social demoralization to the unsavory industry and advocated their prohibition. Roosevelt had previously assumed the role of associate editor of *The Outlook* on March 5, 1909.

³ Bob Fitzsimmons (1863-1917) was a British boxer who made history as the first fighter to hold world titles in three weight classes when he won a 20-round light heavyweight match against George Gardiner in November 1903.