

STREAMLINED CINDERELLA

THERE is nothing essentially new in the story of Eva Peron, save the speed with which she has risen from obscurity to notoriety; nor is there anything novel about the methods which she has used to attain power, unless it be that she has used radio to reinforce her personal attractions. But a good deal of nonsense has been written about her in the last few months. This profile (which appeared first in the London "Observer") may help to correct false impressions.

"OUR century will not be known as the century of the world wars, not even as the century of atomic energy, but as the century of triumphant feminism." Thus Eva Peron in a recent broadcast from Madrid during her more than regal progress through Spain and on to the Vatican.

What an outing it was, of a lavishness and *panache* altogether unheard of in our drab days. And who was the heroine of Franco's somewhat hectic version of a royal reception? A young woman of humble origin who had risen from almost nothing to the dizzy heights of world-wide publicity in little more than a couple of years.

It is of course her own triumph that is meant when she proclaims the century

of "triumphant feminism." In her ringing voice there is pride, challenge, victorious boast, quivering ambition. But she seldom actually speaks of herself. This extravagantly dressed young woman uses the language of a story-book revolutionary, invariably addressing herself to the poor, as if her triumph somehow avenged their poverty.

Senora Peron's career is usually discussed by the knowing in terms of anecdotes and piquant rumours: they say she is the *éminence rose* of Argentina. Looks, charm, audacity—of course, they are all there. But they are not unique to her and do not explain her popular success in her country, which is authentic. There are dozens of *provincianitas*, poor but lovely young girls from farms and villages who make their way to Buenos Aires every year in pursuit of adventure and happiness. A few make bourgeois

marriages, some a living on the stage, but most end in the hospital for poor people.

Maria Eva Duarte, the daughter of a poor farm labourer, arrived in the capital of Argentina not many years ago, scarcely knowing a soul. But this was no ordinary *provincianita*. It was a girl of boundless self-confidence and vitality who cared for more than a stage career or even a bourgeois marriage.

NOR did the ambitious politician Peron pick her up by chance and make her famous. She was already famous in Argentina when they met. First she had tried the stage and screen and become a minor star, but her artistry was not great and her personality too direct for acting. Then she went to the radio and there, where it is not a matter of looks, she succeeded. Her personality—warm, vibrant, witty, and emotionally generous—got across and home to the masses who listen in. For millions of Argentinos she became "Senorita Radio." And so it was that she was one of the persons of nation-wide popularity on whom Colonel Peron, not yet in full power, called in 1942 when he wanted to make a sensational appeal for a national fund

for earthquake victims. That was how they met, as two sincere and successful exponents of glamour demagogy.

PERON is famous for his many romantic affairs. Why should this particular friendship have lasted and become formalised, where so many had faded and passed? The answer might just be feminine artfulness. But Senorita Duarte would surely not still have been single if to "catch her man" had been her main idea. Such a forceful, self-made young woman must have turned down many marriage propositions which, from her origins, looked good enough. No, the less scandalous truth is that when Evita met Peron it was a meeting of twin souls. Both were highly energetic and ambitious with a love of adventure, drama and success. But, above all, both adored popularity and had the same feeling as to how it could be won.

Sincerely possessed, indeed infatuated by their idea, they set out to make the Argentinos happy by making themselves beloved of them. Their appeal was simply that they were against the very rich and the U.S.A., for the poor and Argentina. Their struggle, although short, was not entirely uneventful. In October, 1945, when Peron momentarily fell from power and was arrested, it was

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