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## I MET ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

PROBABLY most of us have preconceived ideas of what famous people of our day are like and probably most of us are wrong. Few can be so wrong as I was in my general idea of what Eleanor Roosevelt was like. I had seen many photos, I had read "My Day" from time to time, and I had read a spate of newspaper accounts of her. I had thought her to be forceful, even dominating, rather loud-voiced and harsh in her opinions, perhaps a woman who would push her way through anything, a woman endlessly restless, anxious to assert herself and perhaps also to be in the public eye, if not for her own sake at least for her husband's.

Then she came into the room—and I knew at once how wrong all my judgments were. They say a camera cannot lie, but it can fail to tell the truth. Mrs. Roosevelt was taller than I had expected and slimmer. Although she had completed an exhaustive tour of tropic islands, had flown the previous day to Auckland, had there held a press conference, been accorded a public reception, had then travelled down to Wellington overnight and only arrived a short while before; although she is a grandmother who might well have rested and slept for several hours without excuse after all these exertions, Mrs. Roosevelt walked into the room as fresh and buoyant as though she had just come back from a long holiday. Her voice was soft and pleasant and her face so full of life and charm that I wondered why her photos did her so little justice.

"I AM so sorry I am late," she said, "but I just had to get the coral dust out of my hair and it took longer than I thought it would. Now where would you like me to sit and what questions would you like to ask me?"

At once she showed herself natural and sincere. Many people, especially if they are not born and bred to high positions,

feel that they have to live up to themselves—and nothing can be more of a strain than to have to live up to a conception of what one ought to be.

Mrs. Roosevelt is just herself. She happens to be the wife of one of the most notable United States Presidents of all time and a niece of another, but she is still more herself than a President's wife. I can easily accept the report that the only people with whom she is at all cold or distant are those who treat her with undue formality.

She can talk with ease to crossing-sweeper or king. Far harder, she can go over a large military hospital or armament factory and speak to every patient or every worker individually. It is this quality of putting people at their ease that is the core of her popularity. And how does she do it? By the fact that she does not think of herself as the President's wife doing her duty. She is just a human being intensely interested in the world and all that is going on in it, and especially in people.

It is said that it was only after her husband began his upward climb to public importance in the States that Mrs. Roosevelt forced herself to take an active part for his sake in public affairs. She has never tried to shine and that is why she succeeds in shining. If she sits unperturbed before a battery of cameras it is not because she thinks that they may show her up in a good light. I should doubt if she worries at all about whether a photo is good or bad. All I have ever seen of her are bad, because none can show the grace, and the smile which is not, as in a photo, a permanent fixture, but which flashes and changes and which covers a modesty and simplicity that is genuine.

THERE must be many people in New Zealand who tuned in to hear Mrs. Roosevelt speak over the air on the Sunday evening. A great many women in Wellington had the opportunity of hearing her, but only through an amplifier, at the Majestic Theatre. Many more who hoped to see and hear her were turned away. The majority of women appeared to be just ordinary housewives, all eager and curious. All came away enthusiastic.



At the State reception in Wellington, Mrs. Roosevelt talked with senior officers of Women's War Services. From left: W.A.A.F. Assistant Superintendent, Squadron-Officer Mrs. E. N. Carlyon; Miss M. Malempré, Dominion Secretary, W.W.S.A.; Mrs. V. E. Jowett, Chief Commandant W.A.A.C.; Miss H. Fenwick, Assistant-Director W.R.N.S.

Leaving the theatre I listened for comments.

"She isn't a bit as I expected."

"I thought she would have a harsh sort of voice."

"Isn't she natural, and doesn't she speak well?"

"I like her voice, and her face is so much nicer than her photos!"

"Hasn't she a gracious manner?"

And so on. A large theatre and a microphone could hardly do her justice, because her greatest qualities are personal to her. She had been on her feet the whole day inspecting hospitals and Red Cross units and she had walked at least one of her entourage off his feet. Yet before the large audience she showed no trace of weariness. It is true that she read part of her address, but every now and then she would look up and interpolate some story or incident, and then her face would light up. It was typical of her that before showing the film which she had brought from America (a film which had been sent her by the British Ministry of Information, showing parts of her tour in England last year), she prefaced the screening with an apologetic explanation.

"You know," she said, "the Ministry of Information has been very kind, sometimes too kind, to me. It sometimes makes me feel a little embarrassed. But I want to show you how much the women of England are doing. When you are living in safety right away from the battlefield, you may think that you know what it is like, but you don't." It was an unassuming little apology for the fact that she was showing a film that was almost entirely about herself.

ONE is apt to forget that Mrs. Roosevelt is, among other things, a best-selling journalist. Few can have more readers in the United States than "My Day," by Eleanor Roosevelt, and yet "My Day" is neither specially witty nor specially revealing. It is just Mrs. Roosevelt's daily diary, no more and no less. It does not even give the impression of being written to catch the public eye and interest.

(Continued on next page)

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