

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

By
Ida M. Tarbell

After close to one hundred years of almost steady agitation, for what at the start was called the "rights of women," comparative calm has settled on the feminist. Having now what she demanded, she is learning to use it--a stage of revolution frequently not bargained for by revoltes!

There is no manner of doubt but that valuable, if unforeseen, results are developing--one of the most significant and interesting is the new type of woman produced by a conscious grafting of the acquired "rights" on fine old feminine traditions. It is a broadened, energized, humanized type which if it multiplies and fulfills its promise will justify all the pother of the long and militant campaign which has made it possible.

Whatever this genuinely new woman lays her hand to soon takes on a novel, different, intensive quality. She not only "puts new life" into it, she develops unrealized possibilities. Who would have supposed fifty years ago that any woman would ever make something distinctive and freshly useful out of as highly conventionalized position as that of the wife of a governor of one of these United States--particularly an old state, like that of New York--yet that is what Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt, is doing.

It would be difficult to put your finger on a woman any-

where in our public life who has achieved a more perfect blend of the best of the old and the best of the new. She was born to fine traditions for she is not only a Roosevelt by marriage but by birth, her line like that of her husband dating back to somewhere in the seventeenth century--divergent lines through the third or fourth cousinship of the Governor and his wife is proudly recognized.

Eleanor Roosevelt is a niece of President Roosevelt--the daughter of a younger brother who died when she was but a child. Those who watched presidential movements as far back as 1905 will remember that in that year Theodore Roosevelt left his desk at the White House to dash up to Tivoli-on-the-Hudson to a wedding--a notable wedding--a Roosevelt--Eleanor--given away by a Roosevelt--her uncle, the president of the United States--to a Roosevelt! For days a curious public figured on the relationship!

One naturally wonders why Eleanor Roosevelt, coming from the great formalized world she does, should years ago have turned her mind to the thinking and the interests of one so different. She will tell you that her schooling in Europe had a great deal to do with it.

"I was an orphan by eight years of age living in the big house with my Grandmother where everybody was either

too much younger or too much older for me to have any real companionship. I spent my time in the library reading--multitudes of books. At sixteen they sent me to a French school, just outside London, kept by a marvelous woman--Mademoiselle Souvestre. Mademoiselle would be called a bolshevist now perhaps. At all events she insisted that her pupils see and understand different sides of life. The Boer war was going on. How she hated it! How eloquently she argued the Boer case to us!

"We must see all sides--all exhibits of life and we must learn to go on our own. We spent all our holidays in travel. The first thing she would do in a new city was to give me a guide book and say, 'Now decide what you want to see first and go out and find it.' For days I would be turned loose in Florence, Rome, Paris, finding my way about, seeing what interested me and then going home and talking it over with Mademoiselle."

Eleanor Roosevelt was awakened to the hard realities of life under Mademoiselle and when she came back to New York she immediately attached herself to the Rivington Street Settlement. Other young women from her set joined her with enthusiasm and goodwill but usually for a few days only. There were too many exciting events in their own world. But nothing could divert Eleanor. When she tells you about it she is apt to say, "I am afraid I was

something of a nuisance."

At twenty she was married. Then came five children but with their transfer into schools she again took up social work--soon she was deep in political activities. There was a relation between the two--one could strengthen the other, she saw. And she gave time and thought to both. Admirably placed she was too, for political work--the wife of a rapidly rising young statesman whose ambitions and points of view she shared.

Two years ago Franklin Roosevelt was elected Governor of New York State--new duties for Eleanor Roosevelt--not to her taste, onlookers said--but it did not take them long to see she was making a place in the state--giving something fresh--new to her job. What was it? Recently at her invitation, I went up to Albany to talk all this over with her.

A delightful experience, interviewing Eleanor Roosevelt, for when she has consented to an interview there is no self-conscious nonsense about her. She makes it easy and worth-while.

"What shall we talk about," she asked, ^{when} dinner over and the governor and a friend gone off for a confab, she led the way to her upstairs sitting room and settled herself before the fire with her knitting--white wash cloths, I think!

"How about this business of being a Governor's wife? What changes has it made in your daily life?"

It was interesting to see how, without hesitation, she plunged it--had something to say at once--said it easily--freely--without self-consciousness--evidently interested.

"To begin with there has been an enormous increase in my correspondence. People--women particularly--seem to feel that that is my business to consider their needs, their wants, to act if necessary as an emissary with the Governor--with the various departments. Many women ask pardons for men. Curious how a woman will insist that if a man is only given another chance he will reform, even though he may have had repeated chances and always as soon as he was released committed the same crime. They are very insistent. I look into all these cases, have investigations made. The pity of it is that as a rule I have to say that there is no reason to suppose that it will be wise to release their man.

"But if I cannot help them to what they want I can sometimes relieve their sorrow a little. For instance one of my most touching and regular correspondents is a mother whose son is in an institution--when she found I could not help her free him she begged that I go to see him which I did. Now she begs that I go weekly and read the bible to him.

"And the farmer's wives! We have a pension for the old now, you know. Many women seem to feel that I can get their money for them more quickly than if they trust to the regular channels. The other day I had a letter beginning, 'I am the farmer's wife that wrote you two years ago. You remember I laid out my case then. Will you now/^{see}that I get my pension?' ""The farmer's wife." when there are dozens of them daily!

"But they bring far less important matters to me than pensions and imprisoned loved ones. The other day I had a long and pathetic letter from a woman of eighty, so poor that she could not squeeze out money to pay the tax on her little dog--her only companion, she wrote. She had already applied to the State Supervisor of dog licenses but he had replied that he had no authority to give her an exemption. She sent me the "unfeeling letter" and begged that sometime when the governor was not tired I ask him to use his influence to have the tax remitted."

The upshot, of course, was that Mrs. Roosevelt being what she is paid the tax on the puppy.

Her reputation for always replying to a request--for finding a way to grant it--if that is possible--seems to have spread from the state and literally to have crossed the Continent. At the time of my visit she was much interested in a correspondence she had been having with

a woman in California, who after reading an interview with her on the education of children--she has definite views which she has well tested--had written a pathetic letter telling of her ambitions for her own brood and her perplexities in rearing them on practically no money.

'How can I do anything for my children? It is all I can do to keep them fed. I cannot keep them properly clothed. I have a boy who is ambitious. He might do something if he could get started in a little business--raise chickens--rabbits. He wants to do it, but I have no money to start him.'

"It was not a begging letter," said Mrs. Roosevelt. "It rang true and I wrote her saying that her desire to do for her children was in itself a great thing to pass on to them, that I was interested in the boy that wanted to start a rabbit farm. How much money would it mean? Possibly I could help her.

"It was sometime before I had an answer and then it came. Here in part is what she wrote--

'Your wonderful letter came to me as a great surprise. The children and I have been talking over your offer to loan us the money to ^{help} ~~xxx~~ with the rabbitry and for getting started with squabs. I wonder if you realize it would take close to two hundred and fifty dollars (\$250.00) to do what we would like. That seems like a very large

amount to borrow of anyone. If we borrowed it and couldn't make good as fast as we'd like we'd feel terribly chagrined and always under obligation. If we began it and couldn't make as much of a success as we'd like, we'd have only ourselves to suffer for it. We don't know what's ahead of us. Maybe you would be needing that money at a time when we didn't have it to pay. We have tried to think of it from every standpoint and we do appreciate from our hearts your expressions of love and generosity. All the more so, when we remember you do not know us personally. But we feel that it wouldn't be right of us to borrow from you when financial conditions are so close with us as they are.

P.S. As a little family we wish you and your family a very Merry Christmastide and a happy New Year season.'

"That pleased me better than if she had accepted the money," says Eleanor Roosevelt.

At present the greatest demands upon her and the Governor come from the unemployed. Late in the evening after we had joined the Governor a long distance call came through. A man wants to speak to the Governor, but the Governor has had a grilling day--his physician prohibits evening work, so it is Mrs. Roosevelt that answers. She has some difficulty in making the man understand that it is really the Governor's wife, Mrs. Roosevelt, that is talking to him.

That is an honor he has not conceived, but convinced he opens his heart. He has been four months out of work--he must have something--he must have it right away. He had had a promise from somebody in Albany to do something for him. Will not the Governor see that the promise is kept? If the Governor is too busy she will see to it herself, she assures him. She will do it the first thing in the morning and you know, listening to her, that she will do it, the first thing in the morning. Also that her gracious and kindly interest have already gone a long way to put heart into a disheartened man.

Not only do multitudes of people of New York State regard Mrs. Roosevelt as their particular friend at Court--whatever their need or distress--but the women seem to consider her as their particular official counsellor to be called in whenever they want a speech. She is most ~~dangerous.~~
generous.

"I do not often go to the big places," she says, "but often to the little places where they have difficulty in securing speakers. I don't do it as well as I wish I did but after all what they want is to see the Governor's wife. They feel in a way that I belong to them, that it is my duty to come and talk to them and they take what I say."

With her rich background--her hourly contacts with what

is important in public life--her familiarity with the world--she cannot but be stimulating and helpful. Indeed she is an unusually acceptable speaker--natural, apt, sincere.

It is interesting, as she talks, to realize that she makes no reference to social obligations, once supposed to absorb a governor's wife. I have to bring up the subject.

"Oh," she laughs, "that does not trouble me much." But if that does not trouble her much she really does all that should be expected of a Governor's wife. Every Wednesday afternoon she is home to all the world. Once a week there is a big formal dinner. There are innumerable receptions to this or that group, there is a constant procession of people who come to talk over some special matter and are invited for lunch--for--tea--for the night. Someone always there. But this procession seems to be little or no care to her. "Everything is done for me," she says. "I simply give the orders." She means that she makes the program. On Monday morning she has put the program for the week into the hands of the major-domo--a remarkable man who has been in the Executive Mansion for several terms and who runs the house with dignity and ease. It is she who O.K's the menus--assigns the coming visitor to one or another of the nine guest rooms of the Executive Mansion--directs which official car shall meet him--arranges how he shall be received if by chance she is not

at home at the time of the arrival.

All of this she does deftly, quietly, efficiently. Mrs. Roosevelt has a capacity for carrying an enormous amount of detail in her mind and of seeing that this detail is executed ^{without} ~~without~~ fluster. Indeed you rarely come across a person carrying a big job so free from bustle and hurry.

This is the more remarkable when one remembers that she is not only the manager of this many sided business of being a Governor's wife, the friend of every distressed person in this state, but that she is also a school teacher --not an intermittent school teacher--a substitute--but a regular one.

Every Saturday or Sunday night of her life she comes down to New York where the Roosevelt town house is always open and the next morning at nine o'clock she appears at the Todhunter school for girls where for several years now she has not only been one of the active managers but has taught regularly--classes in English literature and American history.

In addition to this she runs a weekly current event class. Not a current event class which is merely a rehash of news but one which gets down to cases. Last year the girls asked to study the Government of the City of New York and wisely Mrs. Roosevelt said, "Very well, but we will do it in the field." So weekly she goes

from one point to another showing these favored young women what it is all about--visiting the Women's Court--the Children's Court--the Probation Court--the Tombs--the City Hall--schools, like that of Angelo Patri's. It is a way of carrying out Mademoiselle Souvestre's requirement for an educated woman--that she see and understand all sides of life.

Mrs. Roosevelt is almost painfully conscientious about keeping these engagements with her classes. She laughs a little at her own persistency, and again she says, "I am afraid I am a nuisance to my friends sometimes." Certainly it is sometimes difficult to satisfy both the school and Albany. A few months ago Governor Roosevelt in a spirit of mischief, I imagine, hearing that the National Convention of Republican Women of the State of New York were to meet in Albany, sent a cordial invitation to their Chairman, Sarah Schuyler Butler, to come to tea at the Executive Mansion. The invitation was for one of Mrs. Roosevelt's school days, but it did not disturb her. She finished up her classes in the morning, took a train to Albany and was presiding in the best manner, when the Republican ladies overflowed the Mansion. That night she came back to New York and was smiling calmly at nine o'clock when her pupils came in for their first class.

How does she do it? You get the answer in watching

her function. Apparently her mind is always entirely occupied with the matter in hand--her tea-table--her classes--her committees--the call for help. "Mrs. Roosevelt was on our Board for a long time," the Editor of the Woman's Journal once told me. "She always had a multitude of other boards--quite as important as ours but when she came to ^{us} there was never a sign that her day had been hard, that there was work ahead. She was the same smiling, keen person that you always see. She knew our problems and her mind was on them. She did not hurry her departure--none of the frustrations that you see in the woman that does not know how to manage her business. But she went promptly."

The point is that when she went so promptly she did it easily, smilingly. It is not only a management of time but a management of mind. She has that excellent intellect of hers fully under control and she doesn't allow outside matters to hamper and boulder. Also she conserves her time. Those weekly trips back and forth from Albany are always utilized. As soon as she goes into the car up goes a table and on it she spreads her papers. They are a sign to people who do not use their time on the train that she wants to be let alone, otherwise she would be surrounded by a crowd of talkers. So the hours are used to play, to read, to study.

Then she keeps her schedule up to the minute. That costs her something sometimes. Spending a night with her in Albany, after a long evening of constant talk of which she did more than her share, we separate—I to bed. But the next morning she tells me over our coffee that she sat up, she's afraid a little too late, to do her accounts. For it is she who supervises the paying of the bills of this big establishment, bills that must be heavy enough. Then there is the New York establishment, numberless outside interests, the demands from the distressed in and outside the State. It all takes a lot of money, she admits, but she gets a real satisfaction, I think, in keeping the budget somewhere within bounds and knowing too that the largest item goes towards making the happiness of others.

"The happiness of others" is an instinctive concern of Eleanor Roosevelt's as it is of the Governor. It is written all over their family activities. Take the Roosevelt Christmas. They have always made a great day of it for family and friends. That is part of their tradition. But they go outside of this intimate circle and make a great day of it for a goodly number who otherwise would have had a slim reason for rejoicing, perhaps none at all.

The Roosevelt Christmas tree is no one-night affair.

It serves again and again for this or that group, particularly now that the family lives in the Executive Mansion. Its trimming is one of the great functions of their year. Governor Roosevelt, himself, usually superintends the placing of every light, every ornament, every gift. This last year he was not well. The work had to be done by the less competent hands of the family and it is going to be a long time before he gets over his grievance that this joyful task was snatched from him by a cruel Doctor and nurse.

The Governor has, with many other people, another grievance, the feeling that the modern Christmas tree is not what it used to be since electric lights replaced candles, but he does confess that when as in the Executive Mansion at Albany the tree has to be used over and over again it is convenient to be able to turn the lights off and on.

Of the groups the tree serves in Albany, the most exciting are the orphans--one hundred and fifty of them from the Asylum, just back of the Executive Mansion's green houses. It was like Governor and Mrs. Smith to have remembered these orphans at Christmas time, always to have given them a party and it is equally like Governor and Mrs. Roosevelt to have carried on. It is a great party. They come in relays, seventy-five at a time taking two nights of holiday week, enjoying the family tree and receiving every

one of them, a present wrapped up and tied by Roosevelt hands!

Mrs. Roosevelt buys all the presents herself for the successive groups and it seems to be one of the continuous interests of her year. I fancy that there is many a charity in New York City that is the richer for the things she picks up at bazaars and sales. One item that helps out her Christmas tree is the large number of children's books that she receives from publishers and authors, for in addition to other activities Eleanor Roosevelt is a specialist in books for children and youth. In one large New York publishing house she has been a consultant on this type of literature for a good many years--she is also one of the members of the committee selecting the books for the Juvenile Club. She tells you with pride that this is a paid job, the only paid job that I know of her having. She is very proud of the \$100.00 a month that comes to her from that. One wonders who profits by it. You can be sure it does not go into gee gaws for herself.

Besides the Christmas celebration in Albany there is also one in New York City. Very interesting how it came about. Mrs. Roosevelt has always been determined that her children should know the world of the poor, its hardships, its battles, its ambitions, its bravery--not so easy to manage for the world of the rich. One way she

took was to ask her friends of the Woman's Trade Union League to provide her with thirty-five or so children from families where otherwise there would be no Christmas whatever—the poorest of the poor—to bring them to her house Christmas Eve for a Christmas tree of their own. And she put it up to her young sons to be the hosts—trim the tree—buy the presents and acquaint themselves with the stories of their young guests. This has become a regular Roosevelt Christmas function and this last year when Christmas came on Thursday and the family had a full holiday week in Albany, the Roosevelts were all down Saturday night entertaining the lucky unfortunates in the New York house, the boys themselves had as usual prepared the tree.

"A lot of work," I said. "Oh yes, but you must remember how kind all our people are, young and old who carry on our households. We have had good luck with our people always, haven't we Franklin?" she said aside. "I do not remember that there is anybody that was ever anything but kind and helpful."

And the Governor said, "Yes, that is true."

You could hardly have a better recommendation for the heads of a great household than that.

A habit of regular work and an active, well-regulated brain, an interesting life wherever she finds it does

not explain fully Eleanor Roosevelt's efficiency, if we call it that. Back of it is a stimulating joy in doing the things she does. She gets a lot of fun out of much that the outsider might consider hard. Fun because she finds it so absorbing.

In these latter years she is finding fun--and health--in out-of-door activities. As a young girl she was not, I take it, greatly interested in sports. She much preferred a book. Of course she rode, drove, possibly swung a croquet mallet--all in a maidenly way!

After marriage the interests and demands of her rapidly growing family kept her in, rather than outside. When these cares were lightened by the growing up of her family of five youngsters it was to social and political matters that she turned rather than to active outdoor life. And I take it ~~undoubtedly~~ that if a real need had not arisen for her giving more time to healthy sports she would have remained indifferent to them.

When a need arises, however, you may count on Mrs. Roosevelt to attack it whole-heartedly. And this was a real need. Governor Roosevelt was no mean sportsman before infantile paralysis crippled him badly a few years ago. By his incredible bravery and determination he is conquering his handicaps, however, and little by little has been taking up active exercises. As soon as this

was possible Mrs. Roosevelt began training herself to do anything that he could do in the way that was best for him. They swim--and a swimming pool has been added to the Executive Mansion in Albany. Visitors coming in to dinner hear them telling how after the days' work, never ended I think before six, they have had their swim together.

Governor Roosevelt is again able to ride his horse though it has to be done under the watchful care of a member of the State police and organization whole-heartedly devoted to him. Mrs. Roosevelt looking on said to herself, "The day may come when Franklin will not be in the Government of New York State. The day when there will be no State police to ride with him. I must make ready." And she is ready. Should public life end for him--as, luckily, is highly improbable--Mrs. Roosevelt will be able to ride at her husband's side, knowing that if an emergency arises just what assistance he should have and how to give it--a far-seeing lady, Eleanor Roosevelt.

As we talk before the fire the Governor busy with his favorite night cap--a game of solitaire--another unusual activity of hers unfolds. Perhaps she had noticed that I was eyeing certain striking and uncommon pieces of library furniture: a high back chair in red leather, brass nails--a wonderful bench before the fire, broad,

long, the right height for a person of lengthy legs--and a table with a double top, the upper one turning so that a worker would bring whatever was on the far side to him without rising. "Copies of the working equipment that Thomas Jefferson designed for himself," she tells me, "made in our furniture shop at Hyde Park."

And here came out another story--a fine story of an activity born, as hers usually are, of her desire to help somebody. She and Mr. Roosevelt had often talked as they rode about the country, she will tell you, of the situation of the women on the back roads--not the farmer's wife who lived on main roads where all the year round there is movement, people, but the one in the back country where the roads are impassable at times and where there is nothing to do in winter. How could they help these people cut off from occupations and interests through the long winter months. One way they told each other, would be to establish little industries in the country villages and byways. So when later a friend eager to make good furniture came along there was born a furniture shop at their home at Hyde Park in Dutchess County, New York--the family home for many generations of Franklin Roosevelt. "The Val Kill Shop," as it is called, is manned by people in the neighborhood and is turning out replicas of fine old historical pieces--among the most

interesting these Jefferson library pieces--so elegant--so convenient and so calculated to make the worker who looks upon them envious.

And so it goes, wherever you touch this woman's life you find some good thing carried on intelligently, steadily, modestly--truly a brave lady this and a charming one.

There are two pictures of her and the Governor I shall always remember. The first--the night of Governor Smith's acceptance of the Democratic nomination. Albany had made tremendous preparations to broadcast his speech from the steps of the Capitol. A great crowd was insured and then a deluge of rain came and Doctors forbade his using his voice outside. But the crowd was outside, thousands upon thousands of them, and Governor Roosevelt, Lieutenant Governor then, unwilling that they should sit alone, stand alone, came out and sat with them. And by his side was Eleanor Roosevelt. That was their place--outside by the people, rain or no rain.

And a second picture is at the Executive Mansion. Late in the evening after long talking, she on Jefferson's red covered bench, her back to the fire, one leg curled under her, apparently her favorite position on a couch. How amazingly girlish, youthful, vital, she looks as she sits there, her beautiful hands busy with her knitting, smiling, laughing, interested, quite unconscious, absorbed

in her talk, while the Governor busy with his sight cap cards on Jeffersons table, turning the adjustable top to right or left, puts in a word now and then when she appeals to him or when something is said which particularly amuses or interests him.

A gallant pair—these two faithful public servants—Franklin Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor—splendid examples of grafting new outlooks on fine old traditions.