



WINDOWS ON THE WORLD

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Alice Sankey

First Lady of the World

"Books were people that were alive. Everything I read became a living story."

The words are those of Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the best-known women in the world, who is admired, honored, and listened-to wherever she goes. For 12 years she held the position of First Lady; she has served as a delegate to the General Assembly of the United Nations and chairman of the Human Rights Commission. She writes a monthly magazine column, and her newspaper articles are syndicated three times a week throughout the nation. A popular public speaker, author of three autobiographies, and recipient of many awards for her work, Mrs. Roosevelt was this year's winner of the Constance Lindsay Skinner Award presented by the Women's National Book Association.

The above-mentioned comment on books was part of her response during presentation of the WNBA award. She had been introduced by four prominent members of the publishing world who have been associated with her for many years. She was described by McCall's editor, Herbert R. Mayes, as "wise, most gallant, with sympathetic heart and extraordinary mind—the world's first lady."

United Features editor, James L. Freeman, said that in 25 years of columning, she has expressed "a warm feeling for

others." Her philosophy—"fellow man must be concerned about his fellow men."

Helen Ferris, for 30 years on the Children's Junior Literary Guild, spoke of Mrs. Roosevelt's membership on the editorial board.

"She always does what she promises on time," she said. She quoted one of Mrs. FDR's comments on a book; "This author paints too rosy a picture. Life isn't the bowl of cherries this author thinks it is."

Publisher Cass Canfield of Harper's, said she has contributed to the world of books the outstanding impact of her personality through her writing.

"She is one of the great personalities of our time, and is unaware of it. With candor, compassion, courage and no thought of self-advancement, she comes to millions of Americans of all ages."

Mrs. Roosevelt said she deeply appreciated all that had been said, but "I don't recognize myself at all."

She spoke on "The Value of Reading," remarking that she couldn't think "of an audience that needs less to be told about the value of reading."

She said she would have been a lonely child, if it had not been for books.

"Nobody ever told me not to read anything. I never told my grandchildren not to read any book. The result to me is that it was never harmful."

She said there was one exception—in the Roosevelt family one never did on Sunday what was done on weekdays. A special book was provided on Sunday and taken away until the next Sunday—otherwise there were no restrictions on her reading.

“I wish I could say that I read as much now as I read up to the age of 15,” she said. “I would like to read for hours something I CHOSE to read.”

She spoke of the innumerable tasks consuming time, including reading mail and manuscripts.

“Innumerable youngsters would find it convenient if I would write their term papers for them. They want me to tell anecdotes never told before. Now I refer them to my books and hope they’ll read them.”

She was once asked what she did with her leisure time. Completely baffled for a moment, she finally said, “There isn’t any.” She said she likes to swim, walk occasionally, and show people through Hyde Park, all of which was leisure time, she said, but there was never time to stay. She has stacks of papers to be read, and takes them with her to read on the train when travelling.

“You never lose the habit of reading acquired when young,” she said. “Radio and television accentuate the need for the written word.”

She gave as an example the presidential candidate debates, when she said she wanted a second account in the newspaper the next day to be sure of what had been said.

“We could cultivate in young people an understanding of what a beautiful book is, a treasure to hold in the hand, to look at and guard. We could do a great deal more with young people to make them appreciate beautiful printing, beautiful binding, content, and everything that goes into the making of it.

“I sometimes think we older people do not give our young people a chance to learn that this can be a great enjoyment. If we could inspire our love, our enthusiasm, our enjoyment of reading in our young people, it would impart a great deal. Reading is more broadening, and never a time in history have we needed horizons extended as we do today. The world is so close to us, and as it grows smaller, our ability to reach the end of it becomes greater. We need to think in terms stretched to include greater thought. Nothing stands alone. Everything is tied to all other things.”

She stressed that reading was one of the ways in which young people must “stretch their horizons. It will prepare them for life in this changing world as nothing else will do.”