

## IT'S A WOMAN'S WORLD

March 15, 1935

Description: Eleanor Roosevelt discusses her daily schedule at the White House.

Participants: Eleanor Roosevelt

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“How do you do / all the things/ you do?”/ If I am asked that question once,/ I am asked it/ hundreds of times!/  
And at last/ I am going to bring myself/ to making the horrible revelation/ that the way things are accomplished/  
does not rest entirely with the individual/ who apparently does them./ That individual/ has perhaps one virtue/  
the gift/ of working well/ with other people/ and choosing good associates/ to work with./ Outside of that,  
the success in accomplishing a great many things/ simply means/ having expert assistance. (Pause - one - two -)

Of course,/ I can only speak for myself/ so I will tell you/ about the people/ who make it possible for me/  
to do a great many things./ For instance,/ take the mechanics of housekeeping/ in the White House./ Fifteen minutes/  
spent with Mrs. Nesbitt every morning/ is all/ that I have to do about that./ Of course,/ at first/ it did require a little time/  
to start things going/ and for us to work out a system. (Pause - one - two - )

Mrs. Nesbitt/ was a friend of mine/ who lived near me/ in the country/ and had worked with me/ in the League of Women Voters./  
I knew her/ to have executive ability,/ I also knew/ that she was a very good cook,/ that she had had/ a certain amount of experience/  
in various kinds of businesses./ Realizing/ that I had to change a number of things in the White House/ to cut down expenses/  
and simplify generally,/ I decided/ that I would rather have a friend/ who would think along the same lines that I would,  
who would be interested/ in the same things/ and who was not/ a professional housekeeper./ (Pause - one - two - )  
It caused/ a certain amount of sorrow/ to dear old Ike Hoover/ who entered in his diary the fact/ that I had no housekeeper/  
and who confided in a friend of mine/ his anxiety on the subject./ ~~However,/ after we had been at the White House a few days,  
life settled down/ into an even routine/ and has proceeded along it/ ever since.~~ (Pause - one - two - )

The pride in their work/ which inspires all those/ who have long served in the White House/ is a thing to be respected/  
and treasured./ ~~No money/ can pay for the kind of service/ which is given/ in the President's House/ and the fact/  
that Mrs. Nesbitt could appreciate this/ as well as I could,/ has been a tremendous asset.~~ (Pause - one - two - )

Mrs. Nesbitt's work/ consists in managing/ all the people/ who actually work in the house,/ both men and women./  
She plans the work;/ engages and dismisses people/ if for any reason a change has to be made;/ she buys all supplies,  
plans the meals;/ keeps detailed accounts;/ sees to the cleaning and general renovating/ or upholstery work,/ all of course,  
with my consent and approval;/ she watches over the china/ the silver/ and glass;/ and is always in the background/  
ready to meet any emergency/ during entertainments./ (Pause - one - two - )

~~We had a clear understanding at the start/ that her the<sup>3</sup> responsibility for a certain results<sup>6</sup>/ was hers,/ that she was free to come to me/  
every morning at a certain hour,/ between 8:30 and 10:30./ It has worked out beautifully/ and I do not think/  
that any one could ask for more efficient cooperation/ than I have had/ in this particular side of the White House.~~ (Pause - one - two - )

The next person to be seen in the morning/ is Mrs. Helm/ whose particular responsibility/ is the social correspondence/  
and entertainments/ given during the official season/ from November to June./ She makes up the lists of people/  
who should be invited/ to different entertainments./ She goes through the cards/ left at the White House/  
and arranges for all those to be received on my day “at home”./ She works with the people in what is called/  
the “social bureau”/ who get out all the invitations./ She helps me at receptions/ and teas,/ goes over the seating/  
of the official dinners and lunches with the State Department

and myself. / She brings me every morning/ the lists/ and the table seating/ if there is a party pending/ and also any questions or notes/ that have come in/ on entertainments or social functions of any kind. / She sees/ that I have a list of these functions on my desk/ kept up to date/ and reminds me again/ at the last minute/ who are to be my nearest neighbors at entertainments/ and last/ but not least/ she brings to my attention/ anything/ which she thinks/ would add to the pleasure/ and comfort of my guests. / She is, of course/ free at any[b] time/ to bring me her suggestions. / (Pause - one - two - )

Mrs. Helm/ takes all the telephone calls/ and they are legion/ on these subjects/ and notifies the head usher/ of all people on the purely social lists/ who are to be received/ and the hour of their arrival. / As nearly/ as human beings can run these things/ without mistakes/ it is done by the White House social bureau/ and Mrs. Helm/ and the State Department. / Considering the numbers/ that are constantly contacting the White House for some social reason/ I feel it most remarkable/ that Mrs. Helm/ has been able to do such an extremely satisfactory job/ and yet/ at all times/ to remain calm and unharrassed/ at least outwardly. / I have known her for several years/ and felt/ I was particularly fortunate/ to find her willing/ to join my group/ of "wheel turners". / (Pause - one - two - )

On the personal side/ I have a young colored woman/ who acts as my personal maid. / She keeps my clothes in order/ and packs them/ sometimes with only ten minutes' notice. / (Pause - one - two - )

The last/ and most important person/ is my own secretary/ Mrs. Scheider/ who is head of the whole social bureau. / Directly under her/ is the non-social bureau/ and by non-social I mean/ the force/ dealing with the regular mail/ which covers every possible subject. / Mrs. Scheider has been with me/ for fourteen years. / We worked together in New York/ and that work/ included a number of political campaigns/ both state and national/ when I was in charge/ of the<sup>9</sup> women's work. / From this experience/ we had already planned/ before coming to Washington/ a good system/ of working with people and mail/ in volume. / [.] We found, however/ on arriving there/ that we would have to do/ some reorganizing of our system/ as we found the mail and work/ much greater/ than we anticipated. / With the established force there/ it was easier in some ways/ as the members of that force/ and the men who head it/ were well versed/ in the ways of White House mail/ and were extremely helpful to Mrs. Scheider. / (Pause - one - two - )

The mail is brought to Mrs. Scheider's desk/ as it arrives from the post office/ she sorts it/ and takes out/ the personal mail/ which/ by long experience and a knowledge of my family and friends/ she has come to recognize/ and then the letters/ which seem to her important. / The balance is sent down to the mailing room/ in the basement of the White House/ to be opened/ read/ and classified. / The mail/ containing requests for information and assistance/ is routed to the respective departments/ without being answered in the White House. / There are requests for gifts for church bazaars/ and to these/ we send a photograph of the White House/ hundreds of which I sign in my idle moments;/ then there are requests for my autograph/ and these I sign/ in countless numbers/ in more "idle moments"/ on small cards marked White House. / There are letters asking me to speak/ , or to give interviews/ or to be patroness or to send messages/ - this is one classification. / Then/ there are letters/ which seem more important than others/ or rather/ which seem to require immediate attention/ this is another category/ and the third group/ contains the mail/ which can only be answered by me personally. / These are all returned to Mrs. Scheider/ who goes through them/ and answers all she can answer/ - the final balance/ comes to me for answering. / I usually spend/ two to three hours a day in the busy season/ on this mail/ marking new letters/ and signing those already written. / I simply write on the letters/ what I think should or could be done/ leaving the letters to be dictated in full/ by Mrs. Scheider. / Usually/ out of the daily batch/ I personally only have to dictate two or three letters. / The number of letters received in 1934/ was approximately/ one hundred and five thousand. / (Pause - one - two - )

Besides this/ Mrs. Scheider attends/ nearly all the social functions/ pours tea at "at homes"/ sees innumerable people whom<sup>12</sup> I am unable to see/ and who are satisfied to see her/ and tell her their problems. / She also attends/ the press conferences/ and takes notes on them. / In between all this/ she answers the telephone/ at five minute intervals/ and does a job/ which sometimes I think/ really requires twenty four hours/ out of the twenty four. / (Pause - one - two - )

In the midst of all this/ she takes the dictation/ of all my articles and speeches/ and these/ often have to be done over/ two or three times after I have revamped them. / Any difficulties in her bailiwick/

come to her to be settled/ so she has also outwardly to appear calm and peaceful/ regardless of what her inner feelings/ may be./ She usually goes with me/ on the trips which I take/ and that means/ detailed arrangements/ for the work during her absence./ (Pause - one - two - )

So now you can understand/ how one ~~busy~~ person/ is free to do the work which she does herself./ There are many other people/ who help me in my life in many other fields of interest/ and there are men/ as well as women/ who make the wheels go round in the White House/ but I have confined myself tonight/ to telling you/ about ~~the~~ those<sup>15</sup> women<sup>2</sup>s side/ whom I see daily. / (Pause - one - two - )

As a parting tribute/ to the particular people with whom I work/ I should like to say/ that though for all of us/ the work has been intense beyond anything we had ever done before,/ and though we have had times/ when we have wondered/ whether we were going to get through our tasks,/ still/ I do not remember/ ever having a disagreeable word/ or feeling of misunderstanding/ with any of these associates of mine./ (Pause - one - two - )

All honor to those/ who make the wheels/ go round!

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Transcribed by Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project staff.

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Transcribed from a script held in the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

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<sup>3</sup> This is a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>6</sup> The letter "s" is a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>9</sup> This is a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>12</sup> The letter "m" is a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>15</sup> This is a handwritten addition.