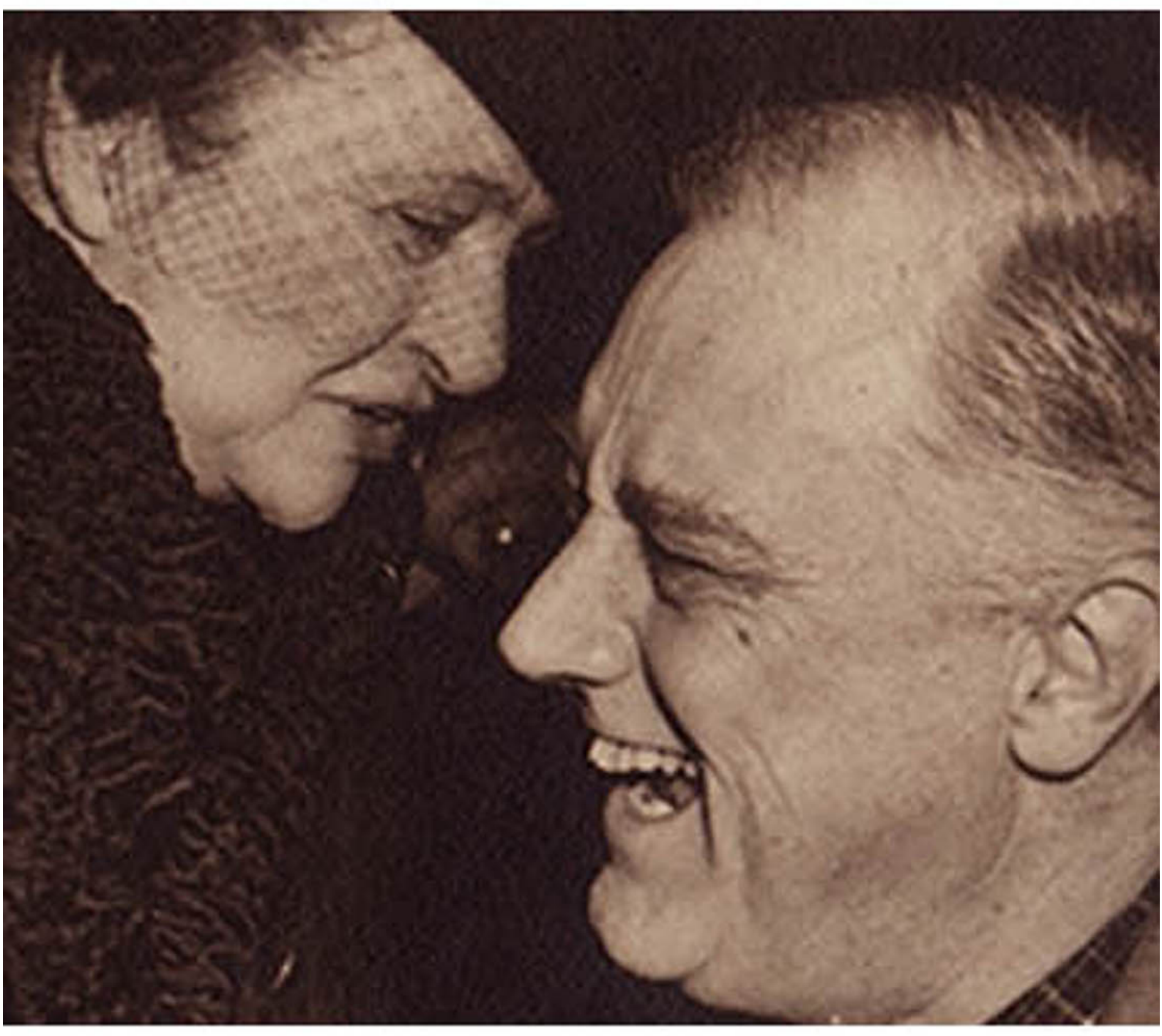
# THE ROOSEVELT *I* KNEW



## BY FRANCES PERKINS

**Here begins the first intimate portrait of Franklin Roosevelt by a woman who worked closely with him for nearly 35 years as political colleague, state government officer and Cabinet member. In this installment she tells how he won over Stalin**

## I: HE LIKED PEOPLE

FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT was not a simple man. That quality of simplicity which we delight to think marks the great and noble was not his. He was the most complicated human being I ever knew; and out of this complicated nature there sprang much of the drive which brought achievement, much of the varied sympathies which made him like, and liked by, such oddly different types of people, much of the detachment which enabled him to forget his problems in play or rest, and much of the apparent contradiction which so exasperated those who worked with him expecting "crystal-clear" and unwavering decisions. But this very complication of his nature made it possible for him to have insight and imagination into the most varied human experiences and into physical, social, geographical, economic and strategic circumstances which the times of his later life thrust upon him as responsibilities.

A good example of this skill was demonstrated during the meeting with Marshal Stalin at Teheran. The Russians interested and intrigued Roosevelt. He couldn't get the servants around the house to talk to him. They rendered efficient service, smiled broadly and charmingly, but said nothing. He liked them.

He had gone prepared to like Stalin and determined to make himself liked. He told me the story of his encounter with Stalin while I was trying to talk with him about a particular piece of legislation then in the Congress. He had the look in his eyes I often recognized as being way off somewhere as I tried to talk about the legislation and he replied, "Um-um."

Then suddenly he turned, as he often did, breaking in with what was in his mind. "You know the Russians are interesting people. For the first three days I made absolutely no progress. I couldn't get any personal connection with Stalin, although I had done everything he asked me to do. I had stayed at his embassy, gone to his dinners, been introduced to his ministers and generals. He was correct, stiff, solemn, not smiling, nothing human to get hold of.

"I felt pretty discouraged. If it was all going to be official paper work, there was no sense in my having made this long journey which the Russians had wanted. They couldn't come to America or any place in Europe for it. I had gone there to accommodate Stalin. I felt

pretty discouraged because I thought I was making no personal headway. What we were doing could have been done by the foreign ministers.

"I thought it over all night and made up my mind I had to do something desperate. I couldn't stay in Teheran forever. I had to cut through this icy surface so that later I could talk by telephone or letter in a personal way. I had scarcely seen Churchill alone during the conference. I had a feeling that the Russians did not feel right about seeing us conferring together in a language which we understood and they didn't.

"On my way to the conference room that morning we caught up with Winston and I had just a moment to say to him, 'Winston, I hope you won't be sore at me for what I am going to do.'

"Winston just shifted his cigar and grunted. I must say he behaved very decently afterwards.

"I began almost as soon as we got into the conference room. I talked privately with Stalin. I didn't say anything that I hadn't said before, but it appeared quite chummy and confidential, enough so that the other Russians joined us to listen. Still no smile.

"Then I said, lifting my hand up to cover a whisper, which had to be interpreted, 'Winston is cranky this morning, he got up on the wrong side of the bed.'

"A vague smile passed over Stalin's eyes and I decided I was on the right track. As soon as I sat down at the conference table, I began to tease Churchill personally about his Britishness, about John Bull, about his cigars, about his habits. It began to register with Stalin. Winston got red and scowled, and the more he did, the more Stalin smiled. Finally Stalin broke out into a deep, hearty guffaw and for the first time in three days I saw light. I kept it up until Stalin was laughing with me and it was then that I called him 'Uncle Joe.' He would have thought me fresh the day before, but that day he laughed and came over and shook my hand.

"From that time on, our relations were personal, and Stalin himself indulged in an occasional witticism. The ice was broken and we talked like men and brothers.

## Churchill Presents a Sword

"You know," continued the President, "he was deeply touched by the presentation of the sword which Churchill brought him from the British government. It was a magnificent ceremonial sword on a crimson velvet cushion, and Churchill made one of his best brief speeches. Churchill himself was pretty well worked up with emotion as he expressed the admiration of the British people for the Russians' gallant battle and for Stalin's magnificent leadership.

"As Stalin rose to accept the sword he flushed with a kind of emotional quality which I knew was very real. He put out his hands and took the sword from the crimson cushion and there were tears in his eyes. I saw them myself.

"As Stalin rose to accept the sword he flushed with a kind of emotional quality which I knew was very real. He put out his hands and took the sword from the crimson cushion and there were tears in his eyes. I saw them myself. He bowed from the hips swiftly and kissed the sword, a ceremonial gesture of great style which I know was unrehearsed. It was really very magnificent, moving and sincere.

"He is a very interesting man. They say he is a peasant from one of the least progressive parts of Russia, but let me tell you he had an elegance of manner that none of the rest of us had.

"Churchill brought along his daughter Sarah to act as a secretary and assistant. Naturally she wasn't in the conferences, but one day we were being photographed for the press, and Sarah came out on the porch where we were sitting, to bring her father something. Marshal Stalin rose at once on the entrance of a lady and looked slightly embarrassed because he wasn't sure who she was.

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"Churchill took her by the arm and said, 'Marshal Stalin, may I have the honor to present to you my daughter Sarah?'

"Stalin bowed from the hips, took her hand and kissed it in the old-fashioned, elegant European manner. The rest of us said 'Hello, Sarah,' or 'Howdy.' The contrast was marked and we all somehow felt that the Marshal had the best of that moment."

There was a bond between Franklin Roosevelt and the ordinary men and women of this country—and beyond that, between him and the ordinary men and women of the world. He was profoundly loyal to them, even when good reasons were presented for not carrying out a program that would be beneficial to them. He would examine, appreciate and even understand the arguments against a project: too much of an investment; too much government interference; too much control over people's affairs. He could see the logic but he would say: "Yes, but the people need it. They expect it," and he could not let them down.

His power to associate himself with others came to him rather gradually. He did not have it, for instance, when he held his first political job—as New York State Senator from Dutchess County. I was in Albany at that time as a representative of the Consumers League to work for passage of the 54-hour bill for women, known as the Jackson-McManus bill.

I have a vivid picture of him operating on the floor of the Senate: tall and slender, very active and alert, moving around the floor, going in and out of committee rooms, rarely talking with the members, who more or less avoided him, not particularly charming (that came later), artificially serious of face, rarely smiling, with an unfortunate habit of throwing his head up, which, combined with his pince-nez and great height, gave him the appearance of looking down his nose at most people.

Many stanch old Tammany Democrats in those days felt he did look down his nose at them. I remember old Tim Sullivan, the senator from the Bowery and himself the heart of personal amiability, saying after a bout with Roosevelt, "Awful arrogant fellow, that Roosevelt."

I can see "that Roosevelt" now, standing back of the brass rail, with two or three Democratic senators arguing with him to be "reasonable," as they called it, about something; his small mouth pursed up and slightly open, his nostrils distended, and his head in the air and his cool, remote voice saying, "No, no, I won't hear of it."

I think he started that way, not because he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and had a good education at Harvard (which in itself constitutes a political handicap), but because he really didn't like people very much and because he had a youthful lack of humility, a streak of self-righteousness, and a deafness to the hopes, fears and aspirations which are the common lot.

The marvel is that these handicaps were washed out of him by life, experience, punishment, and his capacity to grow. He never wholly forgot these youthful qualities himself. He once said to me when he was President, "You know, I was an awfully mean cuss when I first went into politics."

The change took many years and many experiences. During his campaign for the Vice-Presidency in 1920, for instance, his whirlwind swings around the country taught him that the interest of the people was in their jobs, families, security, rather than in political theories. Party platforms left them cold.

But the greatest change in him was wrought by his long illness. In August, 1921, while the family was at Campobello, New Brunswick, on a summer holiday, Roosevelt was stricken with

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**This set of six pictures was taken from a movie made while Roosevelt was speaking over the radio**

infantile paralysis. He escaped death by a narrow margin and then, through the force of his indomitable courage, he slowly began to fight his way back to health. In this struggle he had the unselfish support of Mrs. Roosevelt and Louis Howe.

Franklin Roosevelt underwent a spiritual transformation during the years of his illness. I noticed when he came back that there had been a plowing up of his nature. Years of pain and suffering had purged his slight arrogance. The man emerged completely warmhearted, with new humility of spirit and with a firmer understanding of profound philosophical concepts.

After he returned to active politics everyone close to him wondered what effect his affliction was going to have on his ability to appear before masses of peo-

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**When he spoke, Roosevelt talked and acted as though he were face to face with each of his listeners**

ple. I got the answer one night during his 1928 campaign for governor of New York when I saw him speak in a small hall in New York City's Yorkville district. The auditorium was crowded. The only entrance to the small stage was up the broad stairway from the street, then down narrow aisles. There was an emergency approach to the stage by way of the fire escape in the rear. This approach was devoid of crowds and was subject to police control. The only possible way for any candidate to enter the stage, without being crushed by the throng, was by the fire escape.

I remember standing in the wings backstage, being among the fifty-odd people who were to sit upon the platform that night. I realized with sudden horror that the only way Roosevelt could get over that fire escape was in the arms of strong men. That was how he arrived.

Those of us who saw this incident, with our hands on our throats to hold down our emotion, realized that this man had accepted the ultimate humility which comes from being helped physically. He had accepted it smiling. He came up over that perilous, uncomfortable and humiliating "entrance," and his manner was pleasant, courteous, enthusiastic. He got on his braces, adjusted them, straightened himself out, smoothed out his hair, linked his arm in his son Jim's and walked out on the platform as if this were nothing unusual.

Then he launched into his speech. I don't recall the speech at all. For me and for others who saw the episode his speech was less important than his courage. Before the campaign was over I saw similar episodes a good many times, and I began to realize what was meant by the great teachers of religion when they said that humility is the greatest of virtues, and that if you can't learn it, God will teach it to you by humiliation. Only so can a man be really great, and it was in those accommodations to necessity that Franklin Roosevelt began to approach the stature of humility and integrity which made him truly great.

## A Growth of Spiritual Strength

He never displayed the slightest bitterness over his misfortune. In occasional asides he revealed that he had also had a great strengthening of religious faith. He believed that Divine Providence had intervened to save him from total paralysis, despair and death. His understanding of the spiritual laws of faith and of association of man's feeble powers with God's great power must have come at this time.

Roosevelt's religion meant a great deal to him and when he was in Washington he attended St. John's Episcopal Church quite regularly—until he found that his presence attracted too many sight-seers. He had great tolerance for other sects and religions.

Once somebody reproached him because on Christmas Days, when he was in Washington, instead of going to his own church he was in the habit of going to one of the big Methodist or Baptist churches. "What's the matter?" he replied. "I like to sing hymns with the Methodys."

The year he took Winston Churchill with him, he said, "It is good for Winston to sing hymns with the Methodys."

He had an instinct for sharing the spiritual strength he developed during this period. During the war he made a great effort to go to the hospitals where the badly injured were, the men who must face life handicapped. Even in the last year of his life, when the strain was beginning to tell on him, he continued to visit the hospital wards. There is no question that his hearty "You'll make it, brother," helped to keep up the morale of those men.

Part of the secret of Roosevelt's ability to identify himself with great masses of people lay in the fact that while he could not know them all individually, he thought of them as individuals.

When he talked on the radio, he saw them gathered in the little parlor, listening with their neighbors. He was conscious of their faces and hands, their clothes and homes.

His voice and his facial expression were those of an intimate friend. I often sat in the White House as he broadcasted and realized how unconscious he was of the twenty or thirty of us in that room and how clearly his mind was focused on the people listening at the other end of the radio. As he talked, his head would nod and his hands would move in simple, natural, comfortable gestures. His face would smile and light up as though he were actually talking with the people face to face. People felt this and

it bound them to him in affection.

Nor was this bond between the people and Roosevelt confined to Americans. Early in the war there was a conference of the International Labor Organization in New York which many regular delegates could not attend because their home countries were occupied by Axis powers. Roosevelt addressed the final session of this conference and his words were broadcast all over the world. I was later told they were heard by former I.L.O. delegates in hiding in Belgium, France, Norway, Hungary and Spain.

**Roosevelt's remarkable ability to make people feel comfortable was clearly demonstrated during the visit of the King and Queen of England. Their physician had thought the trip would exhaust them; instead, it rested them**

## New Courage for Hunted People

One young woman told me how she, her brothers, parents and neighbors heard that speech, like others, in a stable with their radio under a pile of hay.

"I felt when he spoke," she told me, "that he was thinking of me, my family and all our troubles."

The quality of his being one with the people, of having no artificial or natural barriers between him and them, made it possible for him to be a leader without ever being or thinking of being a dictator. I don't think he fully appreciated this aspect of his nature as a part of his leadership, but he intuitively used it. It was this quality that made the people trust him so that they were glad to do what he explained was necessary for them to do.

In 1943 when there seemed to be a threat of a railroad strike, Roosevelt stepped in on the advice of James Byrnes, then Director of War Mobilization, and attempted an arbitrary settlement of the dispute.

The railroad workers were angry: first, because he attempted a settlement by direction; second, because he seemed not to understand that although they had gone through the motions of taking a strike vote, they did not intend to strike; third, because he didn't refer the problem back to the machinery of the Railway Labor Act, asking for another report by one of the committees.

Roosevelt had just returned from Teheran. Because the time was short, he had acted as Byrnes had recommended. He did not fully comprehend the situation.

The railroad men came to my office in protest the next day but despite their resentment, they said, "You know the President never would have done this if he had understood the case. He didn't have the thing straight. That is why he did it."

One man put in, "You know, he was using his arithmetic mind and not what his heart told him was the right thing to do."

This trust in him was reciprocated, for Roosevelt was essentially a trusting person. He never believed that anyone would willingly wrong or damage him.

He would not have liked to be thought of as an unsophisticated person. He often told the story of certain comments of Madame Chiang. He told it with such relish that one realized that it revealed a quality of his own nature that he was not aware of. He once asked Madame Chiang about Wendell Willkie's visit to China. She replied courteously that China had enjoyed having him.

Roosevelt said, "What do you really think of Wendell Willkie?"

Madame Chiang answered, "Oh, he is very charming."

"Ah, yes," he said, "but what did you

*really* think?"

"Well, Mr. President, he is an adolescent, after all."

Roosevelt tempted fate by saying, "Well, Madame Chiang, so you think Wendell Willkie is an adolescent—what do you think I am?"

"Ah, Mr. President," said Madame Chiang, "you are sophisticated."

As Roosevelt would tell this story there would be a gleam of pleasure and, shall I say, simple human vanity in his eyes—which indicated a quality quite the opposite of sophistication.

Roosevelt had a capacity for friendship with a great variety of people, which was partly the result of his complex nature. Mrs. Roosevelt, well aware of the extent to which he was imprisoned first by his illness and later by high office, made a point of bringing in, in an informal way, a great many people from all walks in life. They had always been hospitable people, and the old house in Hyde Park often had fifteen to twenty guests to lunch almost without notice.

All kinds of people from all parts of the world came to the White House and all were received comfortably, warmly and without ostentation. When Their Britannic Majesties were coming for their state visit, someone suggested to the President that it would be nice to assemble from museums and private homes some of the finest of the Early American furniture, rugs and hangings to furnish Their Majesties' rooms on the second floor of the White House.

The President vetoed the idea immediately. "I don't think they would like living in a museum," he said. "I think it would bore them. I think they will be tired when they get here. They would rather rest than sleep in a museum."

### Praise from the King's Doctor

How right he was—and how successful in bringing it about—was attested later at a dinner given for them by the President. I sat beside Their Majesties' personal physician, who said, "I've been delighted with this visit. Their Majesties have relaxed and rested and there has been no nervous strain at all. It's that President of yours, Mr. Roosevelt. He just makes them feel so at ease."

It was fairly easy for Roosevelt thus to get along with the British, but he had more difficulty with the Russians. The Russian people interested him and he wanted to know them better. I recall a conversation we had after the Teheran Conference. He said reflectively, "I wish I understood the Russians better. You know the Russians, Frances, don't you?"

I replied, "No, I'm sorry to say I only know the ones who have been here at the embassy and some White Russian refugee taxicab drivers in Paris."

"Well," said the President, "I wish someone would tell me about the Russians. I don't know a good Russian from a bad Russian. I can tell a good Frenchman from a bad Frenchman. I can tell a good Italian from a bad Italian. I know a good Greek when I see one. But I don't understand the Russians. I just don't know what makes them tick. I wish I could study them. See if you can find out what makes them tick."

"Do you mean that seriously?" I replied.

"Yes, find out all you can and tell me from time to time. I like them and I want to understand them."

Unfortunately, I had no time to make a profound study of the Russians, but I read a few books and talked with a few people who had lived in Russia. From time to time I passed on what I had learned to the President. On one occasion I told him how one man who had lived in Russia a great deal had responded to my question, "What makes the Russians tick?" with these words, "The desire to do the Holy Will."

I had reproached my informant with confusing the prerevolutionary and

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Roosevelt's sociability won him the almost universal admiration of newspapermen who covered him. Informality helped do the trick. Scene below is a Hyde Park press conference. The kettle on the table contains hot dogs

deeply religious Russian with the modern Russian, but he had insisted that the same quality persisted.

When I told this to the President he said, "You know, there may be something in that. It would explain their almost mystical devotion to this idea which they have developed of the communist society. They all seem really to want to do what is good for their society instead of wanting to do for themselves. We take care of ourselves and think about the welfare of society afterward."

Perhaps the most striking illustration of Roosevelt's sense of responsibility, his vocation of service to the people, came out in one of the last conversations I had with him. He had just come back from Yalta. He had been flown rather low, at his request, over Saudi Arabia. He could observe from the air the meager vegetation and the diffused, limited cultivation of the land. A cheerless, dreary place, it seemed, with little local food supply and no more possible because of the aridity.

He turned to one of the Army engineers traveling with him and asked, "Why don't they raise something here? Is the soil absolutely infertile?"

"No," answered the engineer, "it is good soil and could be used if there were any water at all."

"Can't they irrigate?" asked the President.

"They can't irrigate because there isn't any water here to irrigate with."

"But," said the President, "there must be some water here. The people must drink and the animals must be watered."

"Yes, there are wells here and there in an oasis, but water, as you know, is sold at a high price."

"Well," he said, "how do they get the wells? Dig them?"

"That is the answer."

"How far below the surface is the water table?"

"About 50 feet."

"Is there real water there?"

"Yes, I think there is plenty of water 50 feet below the surface."

"Well, the solution seems to be to bring out some good pumps to pump up the water and irrigate the soil."

"Well," said the engineer, "that wouldn't do any good. It is so hot here that the sun would evaporate the water before it has done the soil any good and would leave it caked and dry."

"But the nights are cool. Why not pump the water up and irrigate at night when it will have time to sink into the soil? They really ought to be able to raise food. There must be a way if there is water underneath the soil."

When he met Ibn-Saud, the king, aboard ship on the way back, Roosevelt told him he thought American companies could be found who would help water the desert.

The king looked uninterested. He said, "I am an old man, agriculture is not for me. Perhaps my nephew will be interested when he comes to rule."

"But," said the President when he told

me about it, "you know, there is something in that idea. The reason the Near East is so explosive is because the people are so poor. They haven't enough to eat. They haven't enough possible occupations. They need a food supply and they need to raise it themselves. That one thing, I think, would do more than anything else to reduce the ex-

On his way back from Yalta, Roosevelt talked with King Ibn-Saud of Saudi Arabia, dreamed of working there sometime

plosive qualities of these areas. Look what the Jews have done in Palestine.'

He paused reflectively, then went on "When I get through being President of the U.S. and this damn' war is over, I think Eleanor and I will go to the Near East and see if we can manage to put over an operation like the Tennessee Valley system that will really make something of that country. I would love to do it."

"There is plenty for you to do here," I replied.

"Well, I can't be President forever, and I don't know any people who need someone to help them more than the people in the Near East."

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*(This is the first of several articles b Miss Perkins. The next will deal wit Roosevelt as a politician and will tell among others, the true stories of hi breaks with Al Smith and John L. Lewis.*

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