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My Diary at the White House

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After a little bringing up to date about heat, magnolias and cherry blossoms in ~~hix~~ bloom early ---- "E. and I are going to a Farmers' Union dinner tonight. I have just called Helen Philip. So far, young Van Ness has come through that horror on Iwo Jima safe, - as of the 14th." April 4th - "Hopeless! I'll have to write it all up afterwards! Prisoners of War group here this morning, mostly airmen. I to Sgt. ~~grixygkxatixg~~ "What my boy tells me of the English cities - " Sgt. grimly gloating, "Lady! You should see Berlin!" He is the one who in speaking to Next of Kin of prisoners groups called his talk, "My Day in ~~Raxix~~ Germany." A grand 1st Lt. with ideas told me they held debates in their camp, and there was a majority agreement ~~that~~ on the value of their P. of W. experience,"<sup>4</sup> April 5th, en route to Charlottesville, "Rattly train, but I will at least try. Thursday morning, F.D.R. arrived for breakfast, looking terribly thin and worn and gray, and the resonance of his voice greatly affected by this aggravated sinus trouble ~~and~~ as well as his teeth, which were always bad, sloping inwards like so many Delano teeth and with gaps. All this is worse now. The most painful thing to watch is a marked tremor of the hands. E. and I had two long ~~4~~ talks about his physical condition. She says a loss of muscular control is noticeable. He no longer wants to drive his ~~car~~ own car at Hyde Park, - lets her drive, which he never did before, and lets her mix cocktails if Col. Boettiger is not present. She feels that, while the long years of smoking have something to do with it, it is only a wonder that it has not come sooner, seeing how impossible it is for him, in the drive of official duties, to keep his body in shape. She said simply, "I think he faced the fact, five years ago, that if he had to go on in office, to accomplish his work, it must shorten his life, and he made that choice. If he can accomplish what he set out to do, and then dies, it will have been worth it. I agree with him". His heart and blood-pressure are much better than last year - smoking having been so cut down. He takes no interest in his food. But I explained to her how sinuses finally rob you of all sense of taste. She said she had thought he meant a mere loss of appetite when he said, "Things don't taste right." But I told her I couldn't tell good coffee from Bad etc. A woman will go on eating systematically, just to keep up strength, but ~~4~~ a man eat for pleasure, and if their taste is dulled, lose interest. His alertness is mental and his spirit unwearied. She told me one day in the Pool, that she had to smile when people spoke of how tired he must be. "I am all ready to hand over to others now, in all that I do," she said, "and go

home to live in retirement; but Franklin said to me last Sunday, 'You know Eleanor, I've seen so much now of the Near East and Ibn Saud and all of them, when we get through here, I believe I'd like to go and live there. I feel quite an expert. I believe I could help to straighten out the Near East.' 'Can't you think of anything harder to do?' I asked. 'Well, yes,' he answered quite seriously. 'It's going to be awfully hard to straighten out Asia, what with India and China and Thailand and Indo-China. I'd like to get into that.' Does that sound 'tired' to you, Margaret? I'm all ready to sit back. He's still looking forward to more work." ---- Well, to get back to breakfast on Thursday, - I had found among C.S.F.'s endless papers a letter of Norman Thomas' dated 1932, at the time Charlie was trying to get Norman to come up and meet Franklin and work with him, - (Milk situation, - producer and consumer both at mercy of middlemen etc.) Norman wouldn't meet him but went on to give his opinion that Roosevelt was an awfully nice fellow, or something like that, - a whole paragraph. So I brought it to Franklin, and he was delighted. He apparently later did meet him, liked and admired Norman, and (as I had hoped) this hit the spot. He did so much for Charlie that I like to bring him the little <sup>e</sup>interests which help to offset strain. It is all a friend can do. We talked of our Chinese chestnuts, but mostly we talked of the Crimea. He told me of the trees that had been planted by the Russian aristocrats by the palaces, the Yousouppoff and the other royal one, (was it Livadia?) - including a row of sequoias, which had survived German destruction. And he told of the hideous demolition of Sevastopol. But most he wanted to talk of what a strong and remarkable character Ibn Saud of Arabia is. "The Jews don't stand a chance in Palestine," he said, "as long as Ibn Saud lives." He told me about Ibn Saud's delight in the wheel chair he gave him. (He is crippled by nine old battle wounds) Evidently, Franklin delights in the contacts with the leaders of all stripes. He told Eleanor that at Yalta the pull-together was infinitely better than at Teheran. (Actual words to Eleanor, when she asked about this were, approximately, "At Yalta, we started miles ahead of where we left off at Teheran.") At Teheran, he said, Stalin was cagey and suspicious of both Churchill and F.D.R. At Yalta, the Russian would oppose something, differ, F.D.R. as chairman would say "Well, let's sleep on it!" They would adjourn. Next day, Stalin would begin right away, "About so and so, I agree to the President's plan," and that was that. He seemed to have



about bodies!" (Of course this is not altogether his exact words but the sense of them) I said, "Yes, but I had an experience about cremation when our doctor died. I had supposed that that was less fuss, but it was much more." Eleanor had had a similar impression and chimed in with her disillusion. I told Franklin of the florid overdecorated St-Mark's-in-Venice-gone-mad mausoleum at Troy Crematorium, and Andrew Schillinger asking me to admire the "Prosaics". He accused me of making it up. Then one of his impish creative impulses <sup>seized</sup> ~~seized~~ him, so characteristic of Franklin, sometimes great plans for mankind coming as inspiration, Lend-Lease, or another, sometimes freakish jesting conceptions like the following. I tell it to show how natural he was, and how absolutely unhaunted by any thought or presentiment of his impending death any of us were, - including himself!

"You know, Margaret," he said suddenly, "You could make a lot of money out of death! (We had mentioned the problem of disposing of the cremated ashes.) You could buy a block somewhere on Seventh Ave. near the Pennsylvania Station, and build a 40-storey building, and tiers of sort of safe deposit boxes" - "Roman Columbarium up-to-date!" I interposed. "That's it!" he chuckled. "Why, people would just love it. Solve the whole problem, and you'd make a fortune." "Well, you can carry out your terrible idea, if you like," I said. "I think it's grizzly. Burial is much simpler." "Do you know," he said, cocking his head at me, "where I want to be buried? There's a spot in the ring garden at Hyde Park, where, to my certain knowledge, (He nodded emphatically at me, and these were his exact words.) have been buried one old mule, two horses and a dozen or so of the family dogs, and that's where I want to be buried."

And there, less than three weeks later, on Sunday, April 15th, his worn body was buried, while his spirit <sup>is</sup> ~~was~~ set free to do, at the San Francisco Conference, in this Nation, and <sup>throughout</sup> ~~in~~ the World, for all time, the work begun in the crippled, broken body, which he never allowed to dominate it. From this, it is clear to me, how truly he felt the cast-off body belonged with all dust, - the mule and the dog. He used it, imperfect as it ~~was~~ had become till it gave out completely and he was released with merciful speed, to go on "about His Father's business."

There was much more about Malta, but it is on the open page as it were. He delighted in the use the Soviets had made of the Crimea as a rest and play area ~~of the workers~~

for the weary workers. He described what the luxury of the Czarist Riviera palaces had been, and how the Bolshéviki had not destroyed, but adapted, ~~the~~ to the people's use all that was there. It took the blind ~~ravaging~~ ravaging of the German hordes to put the torch to all that they could reach! The Yousouppoff and Livadia palaces had been German H.Q. and they somehow didn't get to destroying those. I asked F. about Malta and he answered "Well, I'd seen that before, so that wasn't as interesting to me as the Black Sea and the Crimea. I'd always wanted to see that."

I recalled a talk seven or eight years before, when he had discussed with someone who had been in Rumania, the Hungarian and Rumanian countryside. He had followed keenly the journey she described and said causally, "Then you came out into that grain country, and no more forests, -" (She was some sort of a cousin or relative, I think). She said, astonished, "Why, yes! How did you know? Franklin?" He answered, "I've always wanted to travel through that region and the Black Sea and the Caucasus. You know, Eleanor, we could take two cars and a trailer, and Gus and Missy, - (You see it was long ago, when Gus Genrich was body guard and Marguerite Le Hand personal Secretary!) - and travel about incognito." At that, there was a howl from young Franklin and John, who had just been recognized and had some odd experiences in Spain the summer before. "You, incognito! With your face known in every corner of Europe!" etc. etc. The President sighed. "Well, I suppose we couldn't exactly be incognito. But we could travel as private individuals." How that thread runs through all my ~~am~~ memories of him in the last eight years! He longed to be a "private individual", no longer "an institution". (That was the phrase he used about trying to do without food coupons at Hyde Park that time!) But he was never again to become a "private individual" in life or in death! Mary Marvin gave me a very moving account of his burial at Hyde Park."