

## DOROTHY THOMPSON

SEVEN million, five hundred and fifty-five thousand readers of 196 newspapers in the United States read the column called *On The Record*, whose author is Dorothy Thompson. Five and a half million radio listeners every week in the United States hear Dorothy Thompson discuss politics.

Dorothy Thompson is read, believed, and quoted by millions of women who used to get their political opinions from their husbands. She has also written six books. Her opinion is valued by Congressional committees. She has been given the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters by six universities, including Columbia, and has received a dozen medals and special awards for achievement. She is the only woman ever to have addressed the Union League Club, the Harvard Club of New York, the National Association of Manufacturers and the U. S. Chamber of Commerce. She is prodigiously informed, self-confident, and inconsistent.

Three years ago Dorothy Thompson had won some fame as a foreign correspondent. She had

written a few articles for *The Saturday Evening Post* and was considered an intelligent journalist; but she was a reporter and no pundit. Then, in March 1936, Mrs. Ogden Reid, super-club-woman vice president of the New York *Herald Tribune*, hired her to write a column. It was to run three times a week, presenting the woman's point of view toward such public matters as women could be expected to grapple with.

Dorothy Thompson surprised everybody, including her employer and herself, by turning out a column that was sensationally informative. To a sound reportorial instinct she added an astonishing capacity to read and absorb vast quantities of printed matter. She re-established contact with old friends in Europe, who gave her inside gossip. As Mrs. Sinclair Lewis she had become a hostess to Manhattan literati; now she invited to her house more and more experts on foreign and domestic politics, economists, historians, and educators, whose minds she assiduously pumped. She had tremen-

dous energy and insatiable curiosity; she wrote lucidly and was not afraid to pour into her column whatever emotion she felt.

Today, after writing nearly a million words for *On The Record*, she has lost some followers and gained more. Liberals have regretfully come to the conclusion that she is a conservative, a fact which she freely admits. Conservatives do not altogether trust her. Radicals hate and fear her. But to those Americans who live in smaller cities and towns, and especially to the women, Dorothy Thompson is infallible—not so much because of what she thinks as because of what she is. To them she is the embodiment of an ideal, the typical modern American woman they think they would like to be: emancipated, articulate, and successful, living in the thick of one of the most exciting periods of history and interpreting it to millions. What they do not see, although it shines through everything she writes, is that she is also restless, dissatisfied, and nostalgic for the past, when life must have been simpler for everybody. If Dorothy Thompson were a contented woman, she would not be so influential as she is.

Her father was a minister who moved from parsonage to parsonage. Dorothy loved him and hated her stepmother, who appeared on the scene soon after her mother's death, when the future columnist was seven. At 14 she was sent to Chicago to live with an aunt, who saw her through school and junior college. Then she went to Syracuse University because the tuition was free to children of Methodist ministers. When she took her A. B. in 1914 she was a chubby, grave-faced maiden of 20. She had had an unhappy childhood and she had to earn her living.

She went to Manhattan, took teachers' examinations, and flunked in English grammar (Mr. Lewis still has to correct her speech). She tried writing short stories, then drifted into social work. But she disliked it and so she got a job addressing envelopes in the woman's suffrage headquarters in Buffalo. That gave her the chance she wanted. Soon she was stumping all over upper New York State. She was husky and exuberant, she needed a cause, and the pay left her something to send home. She used to get up at six in the morning to catch the milk train and loved it. She loved the

rough-and-tumbled arguments she got into, the job of talking down the mayor and the local minister and the village trustees until they let her speak. In one town she always got a contribution from a rich old woman who said she couldn't see any sense in the suffragette movement but gave money to it because it was such a good show. That was why Dorothy Thompson liked it. And she was part of the show.

She left suffrage work after three years to take a copy-writing job in a Manhattan advertising agency. She hated that, too, and went to Cincinnati to help start an experiment in preventive medicine. Her employers sent her back to New York and the next thing she knew she was in love. When that seemed to be turning out badly she ran away to Europe, as everybody did in 1920.

She crossed on a liner with a shipload of Zionists, and by the time the boat reached England she was full of the Zionist cause. This got her job covering the Zionist conference in London for International News Service and made her a newspaperwoman. To her new career she brought the same mixture of romanticism and vitality that had made her a successful suf-

fragette. She got interviews with prominent personalities and at Warsaw she covered the Pilsudski revolution in evening dress. She was almost shot in Bulgaria. In Vienna she established a salon of sorts and entertained politicians, refugees, psychoanalysts, novelists, musicians, and spies. In Budapest she married a Hungarian named Josef Bard, who was just as restless as she.

When she met Sinclair Lewis in 1927 Dorothy Thompson was restless again. She had just divorced the elusive Josef Bard and Lewis was being divorced by his first wife. After their marriage in 1928, she plunged into her new career, as wife of the No. One American Novelist; as energetically as she had followed her previous ones. She entertained famous people, calling herself Mrs. Sinclair Lewis. She had a baby. For two years she hardly read a book. She wrote some articles and short stories, but they were not enough to keep her busy. Following her inevitable pattern, she was restless and dissatisfied again. The columnist's job saved her from boredom and turned her burgeoning energy into the channels from which she could derive the most personal satisfaction.

The job of conducting a column requires a peculiar admixture of journalistic talents. A columnist must be receptive and selective, absorptive and digestive, and must be both an introvert and an extravert, a reporter and exhibitionist.

Dorothy Thompson wakes up at ten o'clock and reads furiously for two or three hours in bed. Along about noon she gets up, dresses fast, then dictates her column. She has three secretaries, named Madelein, Madline, and Madlon (she distinguishes them by their last names). One is always at the *Herald Tribune* answering mail and digging up research; and one or two go to her apartment to help her while she works. Miss Thompson seldom goes to her office because the telephone never stops ringing.

She usually has a luncheon date, to make a speech, receive a medal or talk politics with somebody. After lunch she reads some more, paces around her apartment, with a pencil and a pad of yellow paper in hand, and generally gets curious about something and starts telephoning people. She runs up tremendous telephone bills calling Washington and London. At tea-time people start dropping in: friends, experts, and refugees. She

almost always goes out to dinner, or has a flock of people to her apartment. She seldom talks anything but world affairs and seldom stops taking them. Her husband has been heard to shush her after hours of it. When she is alone again late at night, if she is worked up about something, she will sit down and write a column at white heat, and these columns are usually her best.

Dorothy Thompson believes the United States should be governed by the Cabinet; and nowadays she has her own private cabinet which governs the thinking of her column. Her chief adviser on economic problems is Alexander Sachs, an economist who used to be head of NRA's economic research division. On foreign affairs she consults Hamilton Fish Armstrong, John Gunther, Quincy Howe. If she wants to know what the British are doing she calls Jarold Nicolson in London. About France she talks to Raoul de Roussy de Sales, U.S. Correspondent for *Paris-Soir*.

For writing her column, speaking over the radio, doing a monthly article for the *Ladies' Home Journal*, and delivering lectures, Dorothy Thompson was paid \$103,000 last year. Her business

expenses were \$25,000 and she contributed \$37,000 in taxes, which left her \$41,000 to live on. She gave 20% of that away.

To the career of being a mother Dorothy Thompson devotes herself with gusto. She does everything that way. She eats enormous meals and loves heavy Viennese food. Two hours after a big dinner at her house sandwiches are brought in. She smokes in chains and drives too fast. She dresses sloppily most of the time, but when she decided about two years ago

that she needed more feminine clothes she went down to a very fashionable shop and bought a bunch of evening dresses at \$250 each.

She is a plump, pretty woman of 45, bursting with health, energy, and sex appeal. She thinks, talks, and sleeps world problems and scares strange men half to death. This is too bad because she likes men better than women, and when she takes a train she rides in the smoking car.—*Condensed from Time.*

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### STUPID OR FOOLISH?

ALPHONSE, King of Naples, had a court fool whose custom it was to enter all the stupidities committed by his superiors in a large notebook. One day the King entrusted a huge sum of money to a Moor in his employ with which to travel to Arabia and buy horses. The fool jotted this incident down in his book. Idly thumbing its pages shortly after, the King discovered the entry and called the jester to his presence to explain. "Well, Sire," began the fool, "it was monstrously stupid to give a man so much cold cash—you'll never see it again!"

"And if he does come back?" asked the monarch.

"Then I'll cross out your name and put his there instead!" was the fool's reply.—*Reclam Universum.*