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Mrs. Roosevelt

I Have Shaken Hands With Sen. McCarthy

By ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

HYDE PARK—A challenging letter came in my mail this week.

It said: "Dear Mrs. Roosevelt, is it true that you would shake hands with Russia's Vishinsky and you would refuse to shake hands with Sen. McCarthy as stated on the radio recently? Your friends think you should refute this most disgusting statement, either in your daily column or in McCall's Magazine. A group of us are quite indignant about it."

The note was signed. And there was a P.S. which said: "We are anxiously waiting for your reply."

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THE obvious answer is that, as far as I can recall, I have never refused to shake hands with anyone. I have shaken hands with Sen. McCarthy a number of times, and certainly would do so again. I have shaken hands with Mr. Vishinsky on a number of occasions, and I would certainly do so again.

Mr. Vishinsky is a diplomat, a representative at the United Nations, so it seems to me that anyone meeting him would shake hands in spite of any differences that arise between us. Mr. McCarthy is a Senator, and one of my compatriots. I may differ with him, but I certainly would shake hands with him. And this leads me to a few remarks about our habit in the United States of shaking hands.

We shake hands indiscriminately with anyone we meet. If we have never seen people before and they are introduced to us, we shake hands. If they just introduce themselves, even when we know nothing about them, we still shake hands.

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IN India, no one shakes hands. Their form of greeting is entirely different. They put their hands together, almost as tho in prayer, and bow slightly.

In New Zealand, the Maori people have a customary greeting, which is to press the foreheads together. This, of course, brings the noses in contact but not the mouths. The meaning of this greeting is that intelligence greets intelligence—thought speaks to thought.

In Japan, the women just bow to each other and to the men.

And I suppose the world around everybody has different forms of greeting. Because you happen to dislike some people, or do not think well of them, is no real reason for refusing to greet them.

According to our own lights, we make our own decisions on whether we like or dislike people, or whether we think they stand for something good or bad. Because it is wise for people to have convictions and work for them, we write, and speak, and do things to prevent what we do not believe in from being either done or accepted.

From my point of view, that should not prevent people from greeting each other. Human beings are fallible. They make mistakes and they may change their minds. The bridges which keep communications open between individuals should not be closed, any more than they should be closed between nations.

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