

BURKHART

Interview with Dr. Harvey J. Burkhart,  
Director, Rochester Dental Dispensary

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Dr. Burkhart and Mr. Eastman got off on the right foot in their relations for Dr. Burkhart had said when first meeting him "A good understanding makes a long friendship" and asked that Mr. Eastman be open and frank regarding matters connected with the Dispensary and he would be the same. Mr. Eastman was frank--and helpful as well. He would often come into Dr. Burkhart's office and, half in joke half in earnest, would inquire "What's the worst you know today?" Dr. Burkhart would tell him--if there was anything of this nature.

William Bausch and Mr. Eastman had contributed to Rochester School Dental Clinics long before the Dispensary was founded, Dr. Burkhart says, but Mr. Eastman wanted to establish work of this and similar nature on a more efficient basis. Along this line of thought Dr. Burkhart recalls a humorous remark made by Mr. Eastman when an intensive tonsil-adenoid clinic was being held in Convention Hall in 1920 "We'll put these kids on a belt and pass them along at top speed!" He said this of course, in a pleasant whimsical way, suggesting that the faster and more efficiently the operating system worked the more children could be helped in a given time.

Dr. Burkhart believes that Mr. Eastman's interest in preventive dentistry arose from troubles he had with his own teeth. Dr. Burkhart inferred from Mr. Eastman's jaws that he had pyrohoes

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and had lost some from that when quite young. Mr. Eastman was wearing artificial dentures when Dr. Burkhart first met him and he made him a set of more comfortable and better looking ones. Mr. Eastman liked them so well that he made the joking remark "Let's pull out the kids' teeth and make plates for them, because I haven't been so comfortable in my life as since I've been wearing these you made for me." Dr. Burkhart's son, Richard, who is a dentist in New York City, made new dentures for Mr. Eastman every couple of years. He "opened up the bite"--counteracting the tendency of the nose and chin of toothless persons to meet--and "padded" the plates to fit the contour of Mr. Eastman's facial structure.

Mr. Eastman was interested in preventive rather than remedial dentistry for young people. He said "You want to get hold of these children early. If you keep their mouths in good condition you will help their digestion and general health for the rest of their lives. It's better to work on young people for as far as we old fellows are concerned we are nearly through and it doesn't make much difference anyway." Dr. Burkhart believes it possible that early stringency in Mr. Eastman's life, and later his intensive activity, prevented him giving proper attention to his own teeth in the earlier years of his life.

Mr. Eastman was interested in dental education as part of the process of helping young people to get started in life with the best possible teeth. Dr. Abram Flexner, an authority on hospital equipment and organization, once visited the Dental Dispensary, accompanied by Dr. Rush Rees, and gave it the highest praise. This occasion was one of Mr. Eastman's early contacts with the Rockefeller Foundation which in time was led to put up \$5,000,000

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against \$5,000,000 from Mr. Eastman for a medical school in Rochester. Young persons training to be dentists have benefitted from this medical school because they now study medicine for their first two years with the medical students, and during their last two years they have practical dental training at the Rochester Dental Dispensary. Also the University of Rochester Medical School now has a Dental Research Fellowship to which the Carnegie Fund contributes \$25,000 yearly. Mr. Eastman was highly pleased with the achievements of the Dispensary, regarding it as an investment that paid big dividends. In a letter to Mr. Cyrus Curtis, of the Saturday Evening Post he once wrote that he "got more, dollar for dollar, from his investment in the Rochester Dental Dispensary than from anything else to which he contributed money."

The inventive genius and the ingenuity of Mr. Eastman were put to use in many ways in the dispensary. He had the Eastman Kodak Company construct, in 1921, the Dental Camera used in orthodontia. (Next to tonsillectomy Mr. Eastman was interested in "remaking faces" as he called it, with the straightening of teeth helping to improve the appearance.) Pictures are taken from time to time of the front view and profile of patient's faces. When this camera is used there is no variations in position or size and pictures of orthodontic progress are strictly comparable. Then, in making the first Ritter Dental Unit Mr. Eastman gave some pointers to Mr. Otto Pieper, the engineer, regarding its construction and installation. Also Mr. Eastman, in collaboration with Dr. Burkhart, devised the present improved Dental Cabinet which has a wash stand at one end and a sterilizer at the other. When this cabinet is used, the operator doesn't have to waste

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steps by leaving to wash his hands or to sterilize his instruments.

Those who feel that Mr. Eastman had no sentiment would believe otherwise if they had witnessed him during one of the exceedingly rare tonsil operations at the Dispensary that seemed likely to be fatal. (There have been only four casualties in 35,000 tonsillectomies owing to careful examination of patients before operation and rejection if they have temperature, colds or other unfavorable symptoms.) One day Mr. Eastman happened to be in the building and had looked into the operating room just as it became apparent that a child, who was a "bleeder" was in danger of fatal bleeding. Mr. Eastman turned pale. "I can't stay here and see this" he exclaimed and hastily retreated. He called up the Dispensary later to relieve his anxiety regarding the child and was greatly relieved to find that a transfusion was given and the child's life had been saved.

Dr. Burkhart recalls other incidents reflecting the Eastman character, such as his faculty for occasionally making people feel ill at ease. Once some prospective lighting equipment for the Dispensary was being tried at Kodak Office and the salesman was a youngster who had only recently come with the company he represented. Dr. Burkhart went with the lad to Mr. Eastman's office and Mr. Eastman hurried out to see the display when it was set up and rushed back again brusquely. Next day Mr. Eastman remarked to Dr. Burkhart "That fellow on the electric light business seemed to be stalling me yesterday." Dr. Burkhart, who talked frankly with Mr. Eastman, politely disagreed "He wasn't stalling. He's a new man and he didn't feel confident and at ease in your presence. Many people don't, you know." Mr. Eastman looked thoughtful. "I don't know" he said. "That may be so"

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Anyhow, the young salesman got the contract.

Dr. Burkhart spoke of Mr. Eastman's latter days when he would often drop into his house on the way downtown in the morning or on the way home at night (He lived near Mr. Eastman). If he found Mr. Eastman lying on the couch in the living room he might sit and quietly smoke or read, thinking he might be asleep. Sometimes Dr. Burkhart would get up to leave and Mr. Eastman would rouse from his apparent slumber, apparently afraid that he would be left alone, and plead "Don't go! I just like to have you sit there!" Mr. Eastman nearly until the close of his life would also frequently come to Dr. Burkhart's office, being driven to the back door and then coming in to smoke and talk. After they had kidded each other for a time Mr. Eastman would make a customary remark "I guess I've got everything out of you that I can this morning" and he would leave. Their topics were not serious and among other things they might talk on politics (Dr. Burkhart was formerly Mayor of Batavia) or hunting. (Dr. Burkhart's son, Dick, had done big game hunting. He was Mr. Eastman's dentist.)

In the January or February before he died Mr. Eastman would repeatedly ask Dr. Burkhart when he was going to Europe as the trip had been postponed once or twice. When the conclusive date was given Mr. Eastman did not mention the subject again. Dr. Burkhart feels that possibly Mr. Eastman may have been waiting for him to be out of the country before he killed himself. Dr. Burkhart noticed that Mr. Eastman shuffled one foot in his last year. His mother had been confined to a wheel chair in her last years and perhaps Mr. Eastman ended his life because he feared such a fate and didn't want to drag and have to be lifted and carried about.

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At that last meeting Dr. Burkhart and George Eastman sat on a couch in the living room in front of the fireplace. They were discussing the problems of the dental clinic in Italy and Dr. Burkhart intimated that Mr. Eastman might eventually wish he had never heard of the G-- D--- things. Mr. Eastman suggested that Dr. Burkhart should know how to tell them to go to Hell over there to which the latter replied that they didn't go there when you told them to. "Well, make them go!" was Mr. Eastman's hearty response. In spite of this hale language, however, he was not in high spirits. "I've been a pretty sick man" he pondered aloud, "I may not be here when you get back." "Oh, Hell" responded Dr. Burkhart brightly. "The weather will soon get warm and you'll get down to Oak Lodge. Then you'll get your strength back and you'll be all right when I come back." Mr. Eastman stubbornly insisted "No, I've been pretty sick and I may not be here then." These words came back to Dr. Burkhart's mind several months later when he got a wire from Lew Jones, Mr. Eastman's business associate, telling of George Eastman's passing.

Even a couple of months before his death Mr. Eastman was heard to make an expression of pleasure in living. There had been a sleet storm one night and the following morning Dr. Burkhart came into Mr. Eastman's upstairs room, where he been sitting without looking out of the window, and said "Say 'governor', you ought to take a look at your East Avenue view this morning. It's one of the most beautiful things I ever saw." So Mr. Eastman slowly walked to the window and glanced with appreciation at the tree boughs laden with their crystal covering of sleet. Said Dr. Burkhart encouragingly "It's a beautiful world!" Mr. Eastman assented "It certainly is."

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One of the outstanding Eastman traits, says Dr. Burkhart, |  
was modesty. He never liked to appear at anniversary exercises,  
dedications and the like. When the time came to dedicate the Rochester  
Dental Dispensary the Dental Society of the State of New York acted  
as sponsors. They appropriated \$500 to buy a testimonial for George  
Eastman but he learned of this plan through the newspapers and said to  
Dr. Burkhart, "I don't want any loving cup or anything of that sort  
and I wish you'd take the money and buy something for your Dispensary  
with it." As Dr. Burkhart was on the Dental Society testimonial com-  
mittee he prevailed upon his associates and they decided to establish  
a small museum (purchased from Ward's) and place it in the Dispensary  
as Mr. Eastman's testimonial. Another expression of dislike for praise  
and testimonial was manifested at a public luncheon at the time of  
the tonsil-adenoid clinics. At a meeting where George Eastman and  
Dr. Burkhart were at the speaker's table the speaker of the day began  
to compliment Mr. Eastman very highly. Mr. Eastman muttered "Cut that  
out" and Dr. Burkhart quietly passed this desire along to the speaker  
who was just beside him and the compliments were soft-pedalled, much  
to Mr. Eastman's relief.

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