MY RECOLLECTIONS
of
GEORGE EASTMAN

One of my earliest recollections of George Eastman dates back more than thirty years to a delightful visit with him on a New York Central train on route from Rochester to New York. He invited me to sit with him in his drawing room and during our conversation told me the story of his early struggles in the establishment of the great company that bears his name. We talked 'til two in the morning and never did time pass more quickly!

I remember very vividly his remark that on two or three occasions his company would probably have been wiped out had he done his original financing by means of mortgage bonds instead of the issuance of stock, which gave him time and opportunity to successfully cope with the many difficult and discouraging problems attending the establishment of Kodak on a sound and enduring basis.

As we left the train together, upon arriving at the Grand Central, we met Mrs. John VanVoorhis and her daughter who were on their way to Bermuda. I knew of Mr. Eastman's devotion to his mother and, therefore,
was not surprised at his chivalrous feeling towards all women, which, on this occasion, he displayed by picking up Mrs. VanVoorhis' hand luggage without waiting for a porter and escorting her to a cab. After seeing Mrs. VanVoorhis and her daughter safely off on their way to the steamship dock, we had breakfast together and matched to see who would pay the check. I well remember Mr. Eastman's kindly concern when I lost.

After that experience, I felt that I knew the real George Eastman, and my affection and admiration for him grew ever stronger through the years.

On another occasion when I visited him at his office, it was with great satisfaction that I told him, as we stood looking out over the City which his vision, keenness of intellect and indomitable energy had made known throughout the world, he would be remembered and honored not only for his material success but far more for his deep and abiding love for humanity which shone like a clear light in all his thoughts and acts, and, while he might not be a professing Christian, he gave a rare exhibition of most of the Christian virtues.

The immediate occasion for my remarks was his reply to a suggestion I had just made relative to the Tonsil Clinic at Convention Hall, which he helped organize and
Mr. Oscar N. Solbert,  
Eastman Kodak Company,  
343 State Street,  
Rochester, New York.

My dear Oscar:

In response to your letter, I am enclosing my recollections of Mr. Eastman.  
As I have already said to you, I am delighted that you are undertaking this work, and am glad to do my part in making it possible for future generations to understand and appreciate the real George Eastman.

Very sincerely yours,

Edward Harris

Enclosure
which he financed in its entirety. It seemed to me the children were being put through the ordeal of having their tonsils removed at too rapid a rate for their own good. I shall always remember the look of intense earnestness that came into his face as he replied: "You do not seem to realize that the health and future happiness of these children are in great measure dependent upon prompt medical and surgical attention, and I propose to do all in my power to see that they receive it. Every day counts."

At another time, I had occasion to confer with Mr. Eastman about matters of mutual interest, and asked him when it would be convenient for him to see me. He told me to stop in at his house that evening after the Concert at the Eastman Theatre. As I reached his front door, I noticed the house was in darkness, except for a dim light in the front hall. In response to my ring, Mr. Eastman came to the door apologizing for the lack of light, saying he had just returned from the Concert and had forgotten to tell his houseman, Young, of my visit. He put me entirely at my ease by telling me to make myself comfortable in the "sitting room" for a few minutes while he turned on the lights. To call this magnificently furnished room a "sitting room" was just an added proof of Mr. Eastman's natural simplicity and complete lack of pretense.
We sat for a long time before his log fire, while I listened with rapt attention to his reminiscences. He told me the circumstances under which his interest in photography was first aroused. It appears that while he was a bookkeeper at the Rochester Savings Bank, he went into the basement, as was his custom, to get his hat and coat preparatory to going out to lunch. While there, he happened to see the son of the manager of the building and in conversation with him he mentioned his intention to spend his vacation on a trip to the West Indies, to which this man replied that he had recently returned from a geographical survey in that part of the world and had taken some interesting pictures. He advised Mr. Eastman if he took the trip to take along a camera. Upon Mr. Eastman's replying that he knew nothing about photography, he said that for five dollars a certain photographer, whose name escapes me, would give him all the necessary instruction. Mr. Eastman said that while he never took this trip, he did take the instruction suggested.

After Mr. Eastman had established his company, he showed his appreciation to this man by making a place for him in his business, and when, after several trials, he became convinced that because of his habits he would have to dispense with his services, he pensioned him.
for the rest of his life.

That incident led Mr. Eastman to recall to mind William Carter, who left my father's employ as a coachman to drive for Mr. Eastman's mother and later became her chauffeur. It was, I believe, while Carter was driving Mr. Eastman to the station for the trip to New York when I had that memorable visit with him that he noticed Carter was very much the worse for wear by reason of over-indulgence in liquor, which, it appeared, had happened on a number of prior occasions. Upon arriving at the station, Mr. Eastman asked Carter if he felt equal to taking the car safely back to his garage, and, upon receiving an affirmative reply, told him that while he could no longer continue him in his employ because of his habits, nevertheless, he was free to take any employment he could find, and he would pension him for the rest of his life. There is no doubt in my mind that Carter's good fortune arose out of his many years of service to Mr. Eastman's mother.

All of the officers and employees of the Rochester Savings Bank who were there when Mr. Eastman was in that Bank's employ naturally treasured their association with him—none more so than Thomas Husbands, who, on the Fiftieth Anniversary of his employment by the Bank, received from Mr. Eastman fifty American Beauty roses and a
note in Mr. Eastman's handwriting. I happened to be with Mr. Husbands when he opened and read this note. While I never knew the contents, from the look of surprise and delight that illumined his face, I knew it had touched him very deeply, in fact, so much so that on his deathbed some years later, Mr. Husbands asked that this note be placed in his hand and buried with him.

Mr. Eastman and I were sick at the same time, both of us having the same type of pneumococcus bug in our system. I recall Dr. Mulligan's coming to see me after visiting Mr. Eastman and saying he hoped I would be more careful with my health than Mr. Eastman had been, and avoid getting chilled. Dr. Mulligan told me that on his visit to Mr. Eastman that morning, he had told him that under no circumstances should he get out of his bed, but that on his visit in the afternoon, he had found Mr. Eastman in his wrapper sitting in a chair talking to a caller. Said Dr. Mulligan: "George, you remember I told you to keep quiet and not leave your bed." To which Mr. Eastman replied: "I know it Ed, but I get so damned lonesome I just had to get up and see somebody."

On another visit with Mr. Eastman, he told me with considerable amusement of an incident that happened
at Oak Lodge on his birthday. After dinner, as he sat down to the card table, he noticed two new packs of playing cards and that the initials on the back were "G E". Turning to one of his guests, he said "It is certainly remarkable - the ingenuity displayed by the General Electric Company in keeping its name before the public". It was then that he learned that Ernest R. Willard, one of his guests, had had these cards made especially with his initials as a birthday present.

At one time, C. Schuyler Davis and I owned the property on Allens Creek Road known as "Mushroom Lodge", now occupied by Allendale School. I erected a Hodgson portable house with a lean-to kitchen - the scene of many a gastronomic masterpiece! On several occasions, Mr. Eastman gave us an exhibition of his mastery of the cooking art, and in my mind's eye I can see him in his shirt sleeves, a white apron tied around his waist, preparing a batch of dough, with the containers for the ingredients which he had carefully measured and packed at his home covering the work table, while I busied myself broiling steaks on a charcoal grill on the porch just outside the kitchen door. These parties were always held during the winter months, and in all my contacts with Mr. Eastman, I never knew him to appear happier or more
carefree than on these occasions. It was a real treat to see him as he marched with great dignity from the kitchen stove to the dinner table, bearing in his hands a dish piled high with delicious muffins! I remember Mr. Eastman always insisted upon helping to clear the table, after which we sat before the open fire and talked until time to pack up and go home. I wish I might once again know the feeling of peaceful pleasure and security of those evenings. They are a joy to remember.

Mr. Eastman remained on the Board of the Rochester Savings Bank after he had resigned from most of his other connections, except the Eastman Kodak Company. Finally he sent in his resignation as a Trustee of that Bank and I was delegated to call upon him in the hope that he might be induced to change his mind. I saw him at his office and while he received me very cordially my plea that he reconsider his decision made no impression upon him. He said that he could no longer perform his full duty as a member of the Savings Bank Board, and it was not in the Bank's interest for him longer to remain a member of it; that a man's value to any institution must be measured only in terms of what he himself could do in its service. I told him that he overlooked the
tremendous value it was to the prestige of the Bank to have his name appear in the list of Trustees. His reply to this was "That's just piffle!" Finally, I said: "Mr. Eastman, on the grounds of pure sentiment and for the sake of your old associations with the Rochester Savings Bank, I ask you to stay on the Board at least for a year or two more". He turned this idea over in his mind for a moment, nodded his head, and said: "All right, for those reasons I will withdraw my resignation". He did so and remained a Trustee for at least a year or two longer.

After Mr. Eastman developed his plans for the Municipal Hospital in connection with the Strong Memorial Hospital and Rochester University Medical School, he learned that Dr. George W. Goler, then City Health Officer, also had in mind the building of a new municipal hospital to replace the outmoded and inadequate establishment then serving city cases and which he expected would be a fitting conclusion to his long years of service to the City of Rochester. When he learned of Mr. Eastman's plan, he at once went to him and told him that in the public interest he very willingly gave up his ambition which he cherished so much and would do all in his power to assist Mr. Eastman in putting his ideas into effect.
It was not long after that that I saw Mr. Eastman, who told me of his talk with Dr. Goler, saying: "I have recently witnessed a splendid example of great unselfishness. From now on, whatever criticism is made of Dr. Goler or whatever he may say or do, I shall always remember with appreciation his splendid cooperation." Thus did Dr. Goler's forgetfulness of self win Mr. Eastman's everlasting friendship and esteem - an asset that anyone might envy.

When my former law partner James S. Havens was in his last illness, Mr. Eastman visited him. When he left, Havens said: "God never made a finer man than George Eastman." Certainly a wonderful tribute to Rochester's great citizen!

Edward Harris