

OBITUARY

GEORGE EASTMAN

THE press and the public seemed instinctively to realize that Mr. Eastman's last message "My work is done; why wait?" and his dramatic termination of his career formed a fitting end to a remarkably consistent life. Certainly it is true that his close friends and associates view this ending as the final triumph of a man who all through life made his own way, made his own decisions and courageously followed the line of his convictions. Consider for a moment the full significance of his last words. He had invented the modern photographic plate; he had invented the photographic film; he had made the kodak a household object throughout the entire world; he had created a great business; he had established a great research laboratory which had strikingly fulfilled his faith in it; he had selected certain fields of education, health and art to which he had devoted his fortune for the benefit of the entire world; he had satisfied his instinctive desires for the excitement of exploration and big game hunting; he had no close relatives; the infirmities of old age had come upon him and were about to master him. He who had always been his own master remained so to the last.

George Eastman was born in Waterville, Oneida County, New York, on July 12, 1854, and lived there until he was six years of age, when his parents, Mr. and Mrs. George W. Eastman, went to Rochester, New York, to live, where in 1842 his father had founded Eastman's Commercial College. The father died two years later, leaving Mrs. Eastman without funds and with the eight-year old boy. By dint of hard work and self-denial Mrs. Eastman kept the boy in school until he was 14, when he became an office boy for Cornelius Waydell, a Rochester insurance agent. He stayed with the firm two years and then went with Buell and Brewster, afterwards Buell and Hayden, insurance agents. He studied at home in the evenings and later became a bookkeeper in the Rochester Savings Bank. It was while he was employed there that he began in his leisure hours experimenting with those photographic developments which were the foundation on which was built the Eastman Kodak Company.

In the very beginning period of Mr. Eastman's experiments, there were boarding with his mother a Colonel and Mrs. Henry A. Strong. Mr. Strong was a well-to-do partner in a whip manufacturing firm. He became interested in Eastman's experiments and his careful calculation as to what might lie ahead in the photographic industry, and in 1881 he made an investment of \$1,000 in Mr. Eastman's business, following it shortly afterward with an additional \$5,000.

For some years Mr. Eastman and Colonel Strong were business associates and together went through some of the early trials and tribulations of the business, for the story of the growth of the Eastman Kodak Company was not without its trials and tribulations, as the following illustration will show.

Late in 1881 or early in the following year, the output of the Eastman plant had risen to about \$4,000 worth of plates a month, all of which were shipped to wholesalers, who allowed the unsold plates to accumulate throughout the winter. Suddenly it was found that the Eastman plates had lost their sensitiveness, and complaints began to pour in on the young manufacturer. At great cost he called in and replaced all the defective plates.

Shortly after this episode another calamity came upon the company, for the art of making plates seemed to have been lost. The plates fogged easily and lacked sensitivity. During this period Mr. Eastman slept in the laboratory and carried out 469 experiments, all of them failures, in an endeavor to locate the cause of the trouble. During this time he became so nervous that he could not sleep, and lay awake at night reading cowboy and detective stories in order to rest his mind. Finally, after having been carried into debt, it was discovered that the difficulty was due to a defect in some of the constituents which had been purchased in a large order. Thereafter Mr. Eastman always made careful experiments in order to test new lots of material ordered for his film.

An eager and active research man himself, Mr. Eastman was always on the lookout for new ideas or developments from other sources, and gradually added to his staff young men from all over the United States and England who had shown the ability to contribute new ideas and developments to the photographic art. In this connection, he established his research laboratory, and his vision is shown by the fact that he stated that he did not expect results from it for ten years. His faith, however, has been amply justified by the development of new photographic products. In fact, only a few months ago Mr. Eastman expressed to the director of his research laboratory, Dr. Mees, his feeling of satisfaction in the fundamental strength of the company. He said that never before had such a fine lot of new products been put out and never before had the organization of the company been in so satisfactory a condition. He felt that the future success of the company was assured.

In the recent biography of George Eastman by Carl Ackerman it is stated that by the winter of 1879-1880 Mr. Eastman had established four fundamental business principles upon which he was to build his own

company. First, production in large quantities by machinery; second, low prices to increase the usefulness of his products; third, foreign as well as domestic distribution; fourth, extensive advertising as well as selling by demonstration. It was fundamental in his business policy that service should be given to the public. This is illustrated in the watchword in the early days of the kodak: "You press the button; we do the rest." It is illustrated now by the service on film and by the sale of kodaks which, after all, are simply a service and a means to increase the film industry since it is the film and plate industry which is, and always has been, the backbone of the business.

Mr. Eastman has been one of the world's greatest philanthropists. His benefactions during his lifetime exceeded \$100,000,000, with \$12,500,000 more added in his will. His first contribution to education was made in 1887 when he sent fifty dollars to the Mechanics Institute in Rochester. It was a modest sum, but it was the genesis of his giving. His salary as treasurer of the company was at that time under sixty dollars a week. Even at this early period in his career, he had strong convictions in regard to the relationship of the individual to the community.

By far the largest of Mr. Eastman's contributions have been to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and to the University of Rochester. He also made important contributions to the Tuskegee and Hampton Institutes for education of the Negroes. He felt a pride in, and a responsibility for, the city of Rochester, and made notable contributions for the benefit of that community, chief of which are the Eastman School of Music and contributions to the medical center of the University of Rochester and the dental clinic. In recent years he had also established dental clinics in several foreign countries. It is said that his interest in so doing was due in part to his desire to make some contribution for the benefit of people in those countries in which the business of the Eastman Kodak Company had prospered in its foreign contacts.

It is very certain that Mr. Eastman's philanthropies were never the result of emotionalism or sudden fancy. They were carefully thought out and calculated. They were generally preceded by a long study of the situation on his part before the recipient had any idea of what was in his mind. They generally came not as the result of a request to Mr. Eastman for assistance, but as the result of Mr. Eastman's own independent study of situations in which he felt that his wealth would be of benefit to the public.

In his first interview with Mr. Eastman thirty years ago, President Rush Rhees, of the University of Rochester, was told by Mr. Eastman: "You know, Mr. Rhees, I am not interested in higher education."

At least a part of the story of what caused Mr. Eastman to change his mind on this point and to become one of the greatest of all benefactors of higher education is given in the history of his growing interest in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

In 1891 Mr. Eastman asked Professor Thomas M. Drown, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, to "select a young chemist from the graduating class who can devote some attention from now until graduation to photographic chemistry. I do not want anyone who is not painstaking, thorough and thoroughly reliable. Harum-scarum youths are not of any account in this business. I have a great deal of confidence in the material you turn out of your institution."

During the next few years Eastman engaged several graduates of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and his enthusiasm for this "material" increased to such an extent that he began to read the annual reports of President Richard C. Maclaurin and to study that system of technical education. He continued for nearly twenty years to observe the value of technically trained men and posted himself in the history of this institution.

Finally, in 1912, Mr. Eastman expressed a desire to meet the president of the institute, and a meeting was arranged at the Hotel Belmont in New York City. As a result of that meeting Mr. Eastman wrote to the president that he was prepared to give the institute as a building fund the sum of two and one half million dollars, asking that his gift be anonymous, as he wished to avoid all fuss, his one object being to see a good thing done and not to hear people talk about it. In referring to his interview with Mr. Eastman in New York, Dr. Maclaurin wrote: "I could not fail to be impressed with his capacity to go to the heart of a problem quickly and to see immediately what the main points were and to keep to them in later discussions—an impression increased by later intercourse." Later, in 1913, Mr. Eastman increased his subscription to the building fund by five hundred thousand dollars, making his total initial gift three million dollars.

For eight years after the initial gift, the name of the donor remained simply "The Mysterious Mr. Smith," and it is possible that it would never have been divulged had not a later gift in 1919, which necessitated the transfer of a large amount of his own Eastman Kodak Company stock, made it inevitable that his connection with the gift would be discovered. Particularly throughout the construction and equipment period of the new technology, but also clear up to the end, Mr. Eastman maintained his very keen interest in the progress of the institution. Yet with all this interest, so far as I know, Mr. Eastman has never visited the institute, except on two or possibly three

occasions, and on those occasions he came unrecognized and left unknown except for the president and a very few of his associates. We have here a truly remarkable record. First, a study of the record and work of the M. I. T. for a period of twenty years, then a period of continued contributions to the institute amounting to more than twenty million dollars over a second twenty-year period, and yet during all this time only two or three brief and almost secret visits to the object of his benefactions. And yet this does not mean that he did not pay close attention to the progress of the institution. His letters to President Maclaurin are ample evidence of his very keen insight and sympathy with the educational problem. In my own single visit to Mr. Eastman about a year ago, I was astonished by his keen questions in regard to certain of the funds of the institute and their present utilization.

Mr. Eastman's last gift to the institute was his contribution to the Technology Student Loan Fund. Until last year he had consistently refused to allow his name to appear on the great buildings which his gifts have made possible. The corporation of the institute voted that in recognition of his generosity, the great court about which the main building is built should be designated as Eastman Court. Within the past year Mr. Eastman consented to allow his name to be placed upon the new Physics-Chemistry Research Laboratories, which are therefore to be known as the "George Eastman Research Laboratories."

At various times Mr. Eastman indicated his reasons for giving so generously to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. To a *Post* reporter he gave the following explanation: "Because Technology has two of the elements necessary for a great educational institution. First, its faculty, and second, the body of students. It lacked only the third great need of a successful educational institution—money. The same money might have been spent to start another school elsewhere, but such a school would lack these necessary elements—faculty and students; and a new school even with money might never have been able to supply them as Technology was and is. For many years I had been coming in contact with men from Technology, many of them right in my own employ here in this company. I'd been watching the progress of Technology for some time—I like to study things—and my special interest in Technology was due, no doubt, to the fact that I was constantly coming in contact with the men who had come from there. I had been watching the treasurer's reports from Tech, too, and so when I came to the conclusion that it was time to help Technology, I asked for an interview with President Maclaurin."

Of the various reasons given by Mr. Eastman for his gift to Technology, three stand out in special prominence:

(1) His appreciation of the needs of technical education of the highest type. He had seen this in his own business and observed it in others and believed that this need would be far greater in the future than in the past.

(2) His belief in the value of scientific training for executives. He knew, of course, that a good executive, like a good poet, is born and not made, but he believed that his training can contribute largely to his effectiveness, and his experience with men that he had employed demonstrated to him that men with a scientific training, and of course the right qualities of temperament and character, make first-class executives.

(3) His recognition of the duty of a man whose business is national to support national institutions and not only local ones.

President Rush Rhees, of the University of Rochester, to which Mr. Eastman's gifts exceed even those to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has kindly given me his estimate of outstanding characteristics of Mr. Eastman's philanthropy, based upon close personal relations with Mr. Eastman for a period of more than thirty years. The following paragraphs are quoted from President Rhees's letter:

"The first outstanding characteristic feature of Mr. Eastman's philanthropy, in my opinion, was his accessibility. I believe that beyond any other generous man of wealth, he saw every appeal that came to his office. He maintained no barrier of subordinates through whom alone he could be reached. By this I do not mean that you could walk up to his office and go in. Of course his secretaries protected him, and written appeals would very frequently be routed speedily to a scrap basket, but I believe that all appeals came under his eyes.

"The second characteristic that has impressed me was his independence in reaching decisions on philanthropic projects. Here in Rochester it has for many years been a commonplace remark that if he said with reference to any proposal 'I am not interested,' then that answer was final, nine times out of ten. His independence of mind showed itself, however, in the tenth case, in which, having studied the matter further, he changed his mind, and having changed his mind, would be likely to act with extraordinary broadness of vision. In my first interview with Mr. Eastman, thirty years ago, the remark with which he opened the conversation was 'You know, Mr. Rhees, I am not interested in higher education.' Tech, as well as Rochester, has had very convincing evidence

that in that particular he changed his mind, and also, having changed his mind, he proceeded to think of higher education on a scale that fairly astounded its advocates.

"I had another experience of the same sort in 1919 after he had made his initial gift for the School of Music. At that time we undertook to raise a fund of one million dollars to enable us to cancel deficits accumulated during the war period. I went to Mr. Eastman, among others. His first reaction, as firm as it was courteous, was 'I don't expect to give any more money to the University of Rochester.' To which I replied, 'I do not blame you at all; you have done marvelously as it is.' Then we talked over the problem a little further, and he answered, 'Of course I'll chip in,' and gave me one hundred thousand dollars.

"Third: I have referred to the broad scope of his conception of institutions in which he was interested. I remember his telling me with a great deal of pride, on that occasion when he remarked that he did not expect to give Rochester another dollar, that he regarded the Institute of Technology as the greatest educational institution in the world. You know better than anyone else how much he had then done and has since done to insure the realization of that conception.

"Fourth: When he made his great distribution of property in 1924 to you, Hampton, Tuskegee, and to us, I remarked to Mr. Hart, who was in Rochester for the execution of the agreement, 'Did you ever know anyone who "bunched his hits" like Mr. Eastman?' and Hart agreed that he never had.

"This might constitute a fourth characteristic. He did distribute his philanthropies widely, particularly here in Rochester. But he apparently preferred to concentrate his larger interests in a very few places. Relatively speaking, his gifts to Hampton and Tuskegee were phenomenal. I believe that they were due to the confidence inspired in him by Booker Washington, to which confidence Moton succeeded on Washington's death.

"In explaining his very large allocation of the 1924 funds to the University of Rochester, he expressed the conviction that Rochester was all set to become one of the best, though not necessarily one of the largest, universities in the country.

"Fifth: If you have read Ackerman's life of Eastman you must have been impressed with the very early conception of his business enterprise in international terms. I think that he carried over that natural attitude of mind in determining his chief gifts for education.

"Sixth: I would like to supplement what I said

above concerning his independence in forming his own decisions by confessing that I take unalloyed delight in a statement which Mr. Eastman made, after the 1924 distribution of his wealth, to a reporter who was interviewing him and asking why he did so much for the University of Rochester. His answer was, 'Mr. Rhees never asked me for a dollar!' I cherish this with delight, because it is not strictly true. I did ask him for money at that first interview when he told me he was not interested in higher education. I also asked him for help at that later time when he told me he never expected to give any more money for Rochester. But these are the only two occasions. The first resulted in a gift of seventy-five thousand dollars; the second, as I have stated, in a gift of one hundred thousand dollars. But, to paraphrase the words of the parable, What are these among so many other millions which have come to our hands?"

Mr. Eastman's feeling of pleasure and satisfaction over his philanthropies is indicated by the following sentence from a letter in which he refers to another educational benefactor: "I think that both he and I have good reason to feel that the money we distributed will produce more important results than if spent in almost any other way."

Mr. Eastman lived quietly alone in the big house on East Avenue, just outside the city proper. It is interesting and pleasant to know, in recalling the self-denials and hardships of his mother during the early years of her son's life, that she also resided in his beautiful home before her death. In fact, he built and furnished the house as a home for his mother. Since 1905 most of his activities radiated from there. Throughout the house are paintings by Millet, Winslow Homer, Corot and others, and for many years his home was open to musicians, artists and sportsmen. In the museum on the third floor are his trophies from Africa, Alaska and other sections. In the spacious conservatory palms and flowers in endless profusion give color and variety to the scene. Here his guests listened to the organ and other music that he provided for the entertainment of his friends, while good-naturedly professing to be a "musical moron." Here his body lay in state preceding the final funeral services.

His death came on March 14, 1932, in the East Avenue mansion. He died as he had lived—thoughtfully, purposefully and with careful attention to details. The world will always hold his memory in warm and admiring regard, and continue to honor the name of George Eastman.

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President

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY