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RATIONAL ROTARIANISM

By Paul P. Harris.

National President.

If by interposition of Providence I some day were to find myself standing on a platform in some great Coliseum looking into the eyes of every living Rotarian, and were to be told that I could have one word to say, without an instant's hesitation and at the top of my voice, I would shout "Toleration!"

It was in pursuit of it that the pilgrim fathers embarked in their frail craft upon the stormy waters. It was from the chrysalis toleration that lustrous winged liberty, awakened by the music of the sweetest toned bell on earth, sprang and floated away that July day in Philadelphia, while the world dreamed and wondered.

If this Rotary of ours is destined to be more than a mere passing thing, it will be because you and I have learned the importance of bearing with each other's infirmities, the value of toleration.

Rotary is entirely without precedent in the history of clubdom. We have had no rules except such as have been gathered from the creative imagination of the men who have been responsible for our destinies. As mariners, long before the invention of the compass, successfully navigated perilous and unknown seas by the guidance of the stars, so they, the forefathers of Rotary, observing the rules that have from time immemorial influenced the lives of men, skillfully guided their craft in perilous, unknown and trying circumstances. May we never, in time to come, depart from the safe course of rational toleration and humane consideration of the convictions of others.

If I, as above said, were by Providence to be placed on a platform in some great coliseum where I had the eye and the thought of every Rotarian on earth, I would like to propound this question: "What is the philosophy of Rotary as you understand it?"

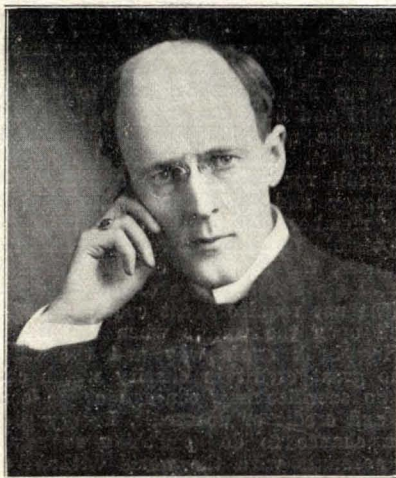
In my mind's eye I can see a multitude of hands go up and I can see myself realizing the hopelessness of arriving at accurate conclusions through process of haphazard individual expressions of opinion.

However, I might well ask another question:

"How many believe that Rotary philosophy is to give and to influence business to and to get business from fellow members and persons influenced by them?" The result would probably be that all, except a very few, would arise.

To narrow the question down to an even finer point, I might ask: "How many, if any, of those present think it either dishonorable or unethical to join a club for business purposes?" That shot would reach home. A few might arise amid numerous murmurs of disapproval.

However, if such result were to be, I would think it but fair to give the minority a hearing. I would ask, "Mr. Ethical Standard" to express his views. I can readily anticipate them. He would just about say:



President, Paul P. Harris

"This business-getting feature of Rotary looks dangerous to me. What will people think of us? I am a member of several clubs and societies all of which rank high in our city and I know it to be a fact that in one of them at least soliciting business is strictly prohibited and in all it is tabooed. In my personal estimation it constitutes the personification of bad form. Clubs are meant for club purposes and not for business purposes. If a man is to continue to grind away at business all day and all night, why does he not remain at his desk or store? One of the chief purposes of clubs is to take one away from business cares, to afford one rest and recreation. I have lived for forty years now and have never in all my life known or heard of a club whose very constitution and by-laws violate this fundamental principle."

Here a cynic might interpose, "Did the thought that your great grandfather lived all of his life without ever having been on a train of cars, ever enter your head? And if so, did you ever happen to arrive at the conclusion that your grandfather's inexperience constituted no valid argument against cars?"

But were it to be my good fortune to choose, I would certainly ask to hear from "Mr. Vigorously Definite" on the subject. From what I know of the man, I can tell you in advance many of the points he would score. Some of his words might be:

"Whether or not it is dishonorable to join a club for business purposes, depends upon the club, its principles and what one professes to join it for. There is no more culpability about joining a business club for business purposes than there is about joining a social club for social purposes, an athletic club for athletic purposes, or a political club for the acquisition of a pull."

"If any one tells you that it is reprehensible to try to make a dollar or two for the wife and babies from club associates in straightforward business transactions, tell that person that some foreign substance has gotten into his carburetor. Legitimate business transactions are

profitable to both sides. If it was necessary to skin a man every time one does business with him, there might be reason in the view point, but I know my goods, and I know that I am doing the other fellow just as great a favor as I am doing myself, when I give him a chance to trade with me. The trouble with the philosophy of Mr. Ethical Standard is that he has gleaned the information that in certain particular clubs of which he is a member, business soliciting is either prohibited or tabooed, and the moment he gleaned that information his lights went out.

"If they had stayed lit a second longer he could not have escaped getting rationality back of his conclusions. He would have come to a realization that straightforward business is never what the lawyers would call *malum per se*, that is, wrong of itself. It may be what they would call *malum prohibitum*, that is, wrong because prohibited or made wrong by some rule of conduct which we are bound by law or by our oaths to respect.

"No true Rotarian ever permits his tail feathers to droop just because some outsider makes the remark that business is one of the key notes of Rotary. Then is when he gets cocky. 'Business? Yes, of course. Why not? I'm proud of it, aren't you? If your business is good enough to talk in your shop, and even your home is not too sacred for its consideration, on what theory do you exclude it from your club?"

For us to be ashamed of business would be unpardonable in view of what business has done for each of us. With nearly equal reason and propriety a man might be ashamed of his own father or mother. Business is the mainspring of civilization. Cut business out and the great hands of time will whirr backwards to aeons B. C."

I never like to have a good subject exhausted at one brief hearing and so I would give an instant's thought to the possible proximity of the rock "Intolerance" and modify my question. I would ask: "Does Rotary stand for any thing beyond or besides giving business and influencing business to fellow members and getting business from fellow members and persons influenced by them?"

Business Gets Another Boost.

By this time we would see "Mr. Cash Discount" on his feet and desirous of telling us just what he thinks about this matter.

I have known Mr. Cash Discount for some years. He has good qualities. Among other agreeable habits of his is that of paying his bills when they are due, or before if there is a cash discount. He will never be worth more than a million because he doesn't think in larger sums, but, barring the possible chance of a cyclone's digging up the safety deposit vault in which he plants, and distributing its contents into the lake or the sea, he will always have his knuckle of ham, and will never become a charge on the county. He would say:

"I have been a member of our Rotary club ever since it was first organized in our city. During that time I have given business direct to seventy-five different members and have influenced business to thirty-two more making a total of more

than one hundred members whom I have helped. The total volume of the business given and the business influenced by me to club members has been \$2,148.16 and the total business which I have received has been \$1,971.65 of which all but \$83.95 has been paid. I think that I have done my share and that there is a balance in my favor in the ledger. I would like it if you would all come down to my shop. I can show you each item and the man who got it, or whom I got it from.

"I joined Rotary Club because the man who induced me to join told me that it was a club made up of men in different lines of business who came together for business purposes; and it appeared to me to be a very rational plan. It would be like having two or three hundred solicitors, live wires all the time looking out for business for me. Pretty nearly every one on earth of whom I have had either goods or labor to buy is in some kind of a combination. I have been, in one form or another, paying daily tribute to combinations for twenty years. On the one hand I buy my oil from the oil trust, matches from the match trust, beef from the beef trust, coffee from the coffee trust, sugar from the sugar trust, and on the other hand, all of my employees are unionized and I get it there. I feel like a grain of wheat between upper and nether millstones.

When this Rotary scheme was presented to me I was ready for it but it seemed almost too good to believe. It was just like it was handed down off the Christmas tree. Business is what I am here for. It is my idea that a club can be either a business club or it can be a society club or something else. I don't know how it's going to be two or three different kinds of clubs and succeed in any one of its purpose. There are plenty other clubs that are organized for social and public purposes but there is no other Rotary. I am a hard working man. I attend to business twelve hours every day and even when I go to Rotary club I figure that I am attending to business except that it is in a different way. Otherwise I would not feel that I could afford the time.

"You may talk all you please about the duties of citizenship and all that, but its business that gets the money and its the money that we are all after. I know of one of these reform fellows who was always shouting about doing something for the city. I wish he would try to do something for me. He owes me \$1.75. If I spent all my time reforming and attending to other people's business I would probably be owing some one else \$1.75 and if I mixed in bridge whist and those other folderols I don't know what would become of me. No, Rotary, as I understand it, is a business proposition, and as such it is doing all right, or as near to it as can be expected, and, in my estimation, it had better leave well enough alone." Thus finishing Mr. Cash Discount would seat himself.

A Broader View of Rotary.

But there is one more man to be heard from. He will represent the class of Rotarians who have not as yet been heard from in the debate. For want of a better name I shall call him "Mr. Altruistic Equilibrium." Coming, as he does, last, he will have had opportunity to review in his own mind all the points raised by his opponents but he is always last because he is a good listener.

He will start out:

"Whether or not business is the only thing to be thought of in Rotary depends largely upon one's view point. If one has been in the habit of thinking of Rotary in the light of the question, 'What is it worth in dollars and cents?' then it is to such person a business club pure and simple and nothing else. Viewed even entirely in its aspect as a business instrumentality it is a good thing, an asset of value. It is also true that a man of the calibre of my friend Cash Discount who takes a purely business view of

Rotary may be an undeniable advantage to the club in his way. We all have our living to make and his helping hand is very welcome.

"The real subject now under debate is the question: 'Is Mr. Discount's way the only way?' Is there to be no place in Rotary for the man who believes that Rotary ought be something more than a mere business exchange? Is there no place in Rotary for him who recognizes the fact that he, as an American citizen of this day and age, has been the recipient of a vast heritage, the result of the efforts of generations who have passed on beyond, and who thinks it his duty to do something toward balancing his account by doing something for the public present and for generations that are yet to come.

"I have been thinking of the Rotary scheme as a compensatory arrangement. It makes it possible for one to do something for his community and to pay his personal and business expenses, and probably make something besides, while he is doing it. Most commercial organizations call for considerable sacrifice both of money and of time on the part of their members for which there is almost no possible prospect of return. In many instances, the members can ill afford it. Now, I am not unaware of the fact that it does not require great courage to cast bread upon the waters when the tide is flowing back one's way and that there is no great credit in charity which calls for no sacrifice but, courage or no courage and credit or no credit, Rotary gives us a chance to do something to square our accounts with the world without entailing the necessity of loss of money or time.

"While you are at work doing something for your brother Rotarian or something for your community through Rotary your brother Rotarian is doing something or saying something for you; and did you ever stop to think how much more one can accomplish when he is working for another fellow than he can when he is working for himself? Words carry much further when separated from the appearance of selfish interest because they are believed. It would be a mean old prank to play upon the world but what would be the result if you spent all of your time judiciously booming my business and I did likewise in regard to yours? Why, we would just about treble our earning power, that is what would happen. But all of that is aside from the present question. Is business the only thing to be thought of in Rotary?

"Beware of the scheme which is so obviously good that it presents on its face no objectionable features. There are many species of gold brick in this world of ours but there is no royal road to success nor to wealth. Even Rotary as an open sesame to unlimited riches would be a failure. We might just as well look these facts in the face now as to let them bump us unexpectedly in the future.

"The Rotary scheme on the face of it looks theoretically correct. It looks almost too correct. The idea of having two or three hundred men in non-competitive lines looking out for your interests all of the time looks wildly seductive. If it worked out in practice as it does on the face of it in theory, we would soon corner all of the business there is in the world. But we won't, and thank fortune we don't desire to, but why won't we? Because human nature is human nature. While it is true that it is human nature to desire to sell in a non-competitive market it is also true that it is human nature to desire to buy in a competitive market.

"Man is so constituted that he can and does at one and the same time both love and hate competition. He loves it on one side and hates it on the other and when one both loves and hates a thing my advice to him is to go easy or he is likely to do something to it that he will be sorry for. Don't attempt to kill off poor old competition. It has served us

long and faithfully. It's a tractable brute if treated right. Save it if only for the good it has done. We may need it most anytime. If we totally annihilate competition, sooner or later some one, who will view his membership as a rich opportunity for easy plucking, is bound to get in our club and he will be followed by others of the same ilk. Let it be known that loyalty to Rotary requires no man to pay higher prices to Rotarians than are charged by their competitors. It is a characteristic of the American to revolt against conditions which bind him to do certain things. He will do freely and voluntarily for persons whom he highly regards every thing without reason. The most valuable asset to your business and mine is the man who patronizes us because he likes us or likes our goods. One man of that character is worth more to us than a city full of men under coercion to patronize us.

A Mark of Quality.

"The Rotary mark must become a guarantee of quality. Membership in a Rotary Club must be equivalent to an A1 rating as to credit, goods and service.

"I believe in every word that has been spoken by Mr. Vigorously Definite. There is nothing dishonorable about straightforward business find it where you will. Business is not undergoing trial in this tribunal.

"Our friend Cash Discount has drawn a very vivid and impressive picture of the possible efficacy of Rotary as a money making machine and within limitations and with allowances for attributes of human nature which he has not seen fit to consider, the picture is true but all that he has said and more could with equal truth be said of Rotary as a power in civic affairs. If perfection could be attained in Rotary we would have a club in which every line of business and every profession would be represented. This would mean that we would have a point of contract, so to speak, at which our club would come in touch with every person in our respective cities who is engaged in business or the practice of any profession. It would be interesting to observe a test of the power of Rotary working for some common but altruistic cause.

"It is true, as stated, that nearly every city has its commercial organizations but there is room for more and moreover most of these organizations are so busy shouting Greater New York, Greater Chicago, etc., that they have no time to shout Better New York, Better Chicago, etc.

"Rotary is a new concentration of forces and possesses potentialities which no other club or organization possesses. This may be said of it even in its local aspect. When considered in its National aspect it occupies a position which is unique, without parallel. There is no civic or semi-civic organization in existence which is in a position to exercise the influence on national affairs that Rotary is. Intrenched as it is in every important American city its power to sway national legislation to the right is supreme in all clubdom.

"May our visions become enlarged. We need a wider perspective and a fuller patriotism in Rotary.

"We must keep up the standard of membership. One's loyalty to Rotary may often be measured by the calibre of the men whose applications for membership he brings in. If he reaches up above himself for his candidates, it means that he has the welfare of Rotary at heart. If he stoops down to drag a makeshift of a business friend or customer on board, it generally means that he has his own individual welfare at heart and thinks to derive business benefit from the favor he has conferred. It would be difficult to fathom the depth of the injury such motives can be responsible for in Rotary.

"I am going to say to you Brother Cash Discount that it is my own belief that Rotary will get the best results, even if those results be measured in dollars and

cents, if it does not spend all of its time in bookkeeping and in counting money gained by its influence. Why? Because a too frequent urging of the business exchange idea will be distasteful to some of the biggest, broadminded and most desirable members. Straightforward business can never be dishonorable, but it may sometimes be inexpedient. It is human nature to desire a little variety in life and, moreover, it is easier to accomplish results, whether business or other results, if one is well thought of in his community. The same thing may be said of clubs. Rotary's growth will be stronger and more permanent if it is well thought of in the communities in which it is planted.

"The way for a person or a club to be well thought of in its community is to do something for the community. The American people have been educated up to the point where they make insistent demand for a certain measure of civic activities on the part of clubs. If you have never done anything in that line before it is time that you began. I wish that you could have observed the activity with which our club absorbed the good fellow idea last month and how the fellows went to all parts of our city delivering Christmas toys to toyless kids. The opportunities to do things are simply legion and becoming more numerous as civilization advances. It is marvelous how easy it is when once you have started. If you can't serve at first actively you can at least serve passively. You can sit and listen to some public speaker while he talks on some live subject of local interest. It will be an education to you and a good advertisement for your club. The papers will give the speaker some space and the people of your city will be brought to a realization that you are at least passively interested in public affairs.

"The business part of your program should quite frequently be given a rest. An occasional bit of fun will help some, but I don't need to boost that game. You will get it anyhow. A few years ago, fun would have filled every requirement, but we are getting to the point where recreation and frolic do not necessarily seem synonymous. The mind of the normal adult of this day and age turns for its recreation toward the consideration of things which do not pertain to self.

The Golden Rule in Business.

If Rotary is ever accused of anything disagreeable, it will be accused of selfishness. Our exclusiveness may subject us to criticism on that score. Tell accusers that the antithesis of egoism is altruism and Rotary gives members an opportunity to help as well as be helped. Many members who, in joining, have been animated largely by a desire to be helped, have, on the maturing of acquaintance, found their chief pleasure in helping.

"What a satisfaction it is to take or to send business to a friend. This is particularly true in large cities where the vast majority of the people are unknown to each other. What a pleasure to emerge from a swirling current of strange faces with its river like tides and back tides, eddying pools and rapids, into the haven of a friend's shop.

I have never felt myself under positive obligations to patronize anyone in Rotary and yet I do patronize Rotarians. I can't help it but I have a mortal dread of strangers. The habit of patronizing Rotarians is becoming more fixed as time goes on. Nearly every month I find myself opening up a new account with some Rotarian. I consider my membership worth while, if only for the opportunity it affords me to patronize friends.

"In a nut-shell my ambition is to do as much for the other club members as any one in our club. I will take my chances as to the recompense, and after I have gotten through doing things for individual club members, I want to do something specifically for the good of the club and for the good of the city in which I live.

"Acquaintance begets business. That is certain. The very formation of Rotary makes business exchange inevitable. As a business asset memberships will increase greatly in value, not daily but yearly. Good things come slowly. Business relations, once started, will continue. You are given opportunity to mingle with men, none of whom is a competitor with the other. This is the only really logical club that has a business plank in its platform that was ever devised. I am an architect. What sort of a chance do I have of getting business when I attend a meeting of the Architects' Club. Every man present is a rabid competitor. How about my chances of getting business out of our Commercial Club? There are one hundred and forty-six architects besides myself in that organization, but in Rotary every member is a possible client of mine. While it is my belief that business should be the cement that binds the parts of our structure together, it should not constitute the entire structure.

"We are liable to put our good friend business in the center of the platform and keep him there all the time. I am opposed to this:

"First, because I think that a little change once in a while will do us good and that we will become narrow and contracted in our views if we permit ourselves to think business and count dollars all the time, and besides altruism is men's fun.

"Second, because I think that a little change once in a while will do business good.

"Third, and last, but not least, because I believe that a little change once in awhile will do Rotarianism good and lead to its being highly respected in our cities, our states, our country and throughout the world."

Thus closing, Mr. Optimistic Equilibrium resumes his seat.

My closing remarks on an occasion of that character would be very few. It would not be unlike me to say that it has given me much pleasure to hear the earnest words of the four speakers, Messrs. Ethical Standard, Vigorously Definite, Cash Discount, and Altruistic Equilibrium, the Allegorical Quartette, and that I believe that nearly all of the members of every Rotary Club in existence would readily fall into one or another of three classes.

First. Those who believe with Mr. Ethical Standard that business should have no part in the club life of Rotary.

Second. Those who believe with Mr. Cash Discount that business should constitute the entire club life of Rotary.

Third. Those who believe with Mr. Altruistic Equilibrium that life in Rotary should consist of a rational mixture of business with civic activities and good fellowship.

Perhaps near one or the other of these view points, lies that which shall generally be accepted as true Rotarian philosophy, understood and respected by Rotarian and non-Rotarian alike. There should be no occasion for meeting behind closed doors. If Rotarianism cannot stand the test of trial before a jury comprised of the entire American people, then it lacks rationality and should be changed. The perfection of wisdom has not as yet been attained by finite mind. To develop is to live and not long after the cessation of development comes the day when it becomes necessary to lead something out behind the barn and perforate it. Then come the crowd dressed like pall bearers.

No doctrine is immune from criticism. It is the part of wisdom to profit from rational criticism, not as much because of what other people think of us as because of what they cause us to think of ourselves.

Let us be in a position to defend ourselves in the event that Rotary undergoes trial, not by stentorian shouting of meaningless words but by logic that convinces. It is human nature to try people. Martin Luther was tried by the diet at Worms, and the accused became accuser. If we put Rotary on the highest possible

plane and keep it there, we shall experience no difficulty in obtaining witnesses the day our case is set. A grave responsibility lies on your shoulders and mine and let us for a moment hark back to the monoverbal text of the first preceding pages "Toleration" then devote ourselves; first, to serious thought; second, to expression thereof. Rotary is a huge, powerful machine. Unguided, it could thrash down the aisles of time a menace to all mankind. Well directed, it will become a humanizing instrumentality of which we need not be ashamed. With the realization of power, come men's greatest temptations and in their subjugation, the greatest and most lasting satisfaction.

Now, Rotarians of the United States and of Canada what say you? Which side of the debate would you take and why? We want to hear from you.

Yours fraternally and very sincerely,

PAUL P. HARRIS.

Chicago, January 1, 1911.

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