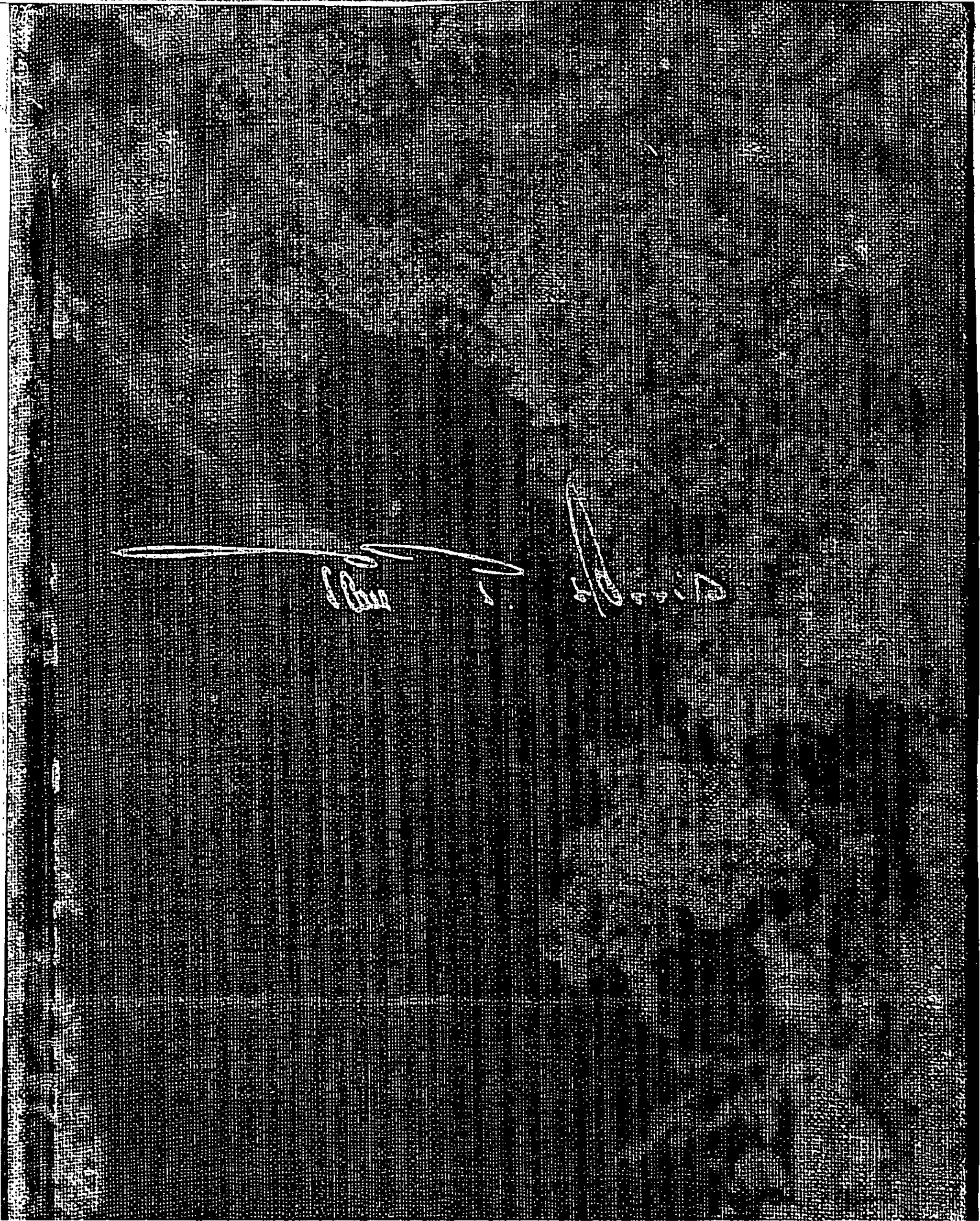
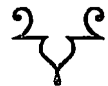


PAUL P. HARRIS

Reproduction of portrait in charcoal done by Rotarian John Doctoroff, of Chicago, and presented by the Chicago Rotary Club to Rotary International Aug. 10th, 1927.

The FOUNDER OF ROTARY

PAUL P. HARRIS



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By Paul P. Harris

THE STORY OF A LIFE OUT OF THE ORDINARY:

That of the Founder of Rotary, A Social Movement Which in the Span of a Few Brief Years Has Girdled the World and Served as an Inspiration to Many Other Organizations Different in Name but Similar in Purpose Now Following the Trail Blazed by Rotary.

FOREWORD

THIS little book is an intimate story of an eventful life from the pen of the man who has lived it. The writer is often called the Father of Rotary. Rotarians have been demanding to know more about him. This demand constitutes his *apologia* for the preparation of this autobiographical matter. In response to this demand he has written:

"He in whose mind the germ of Rotary found origin, he in whose heart the ideals of Rotary have ever been nurtured and cherished, tenders this story, trusting that its readers may prove to be as patient with the shortcomings of the author as the public has been generous in its judgment of the movement he represents."

I esteem it a high privilege to have known Paul Harris during the past twenty years, and a still greater privilege to have had the opportunity to assist him in sending Rotary

around the world. When I entered the Chicago Rotary Club I found him giving generously of his time and his thought to the success of the club and full of ideas as to the extension of Rotary to other cities of the United States. When in 1910 he became president of the united American Rotary clubs, his ideas had expanded to the extension of the movement to other countries. During the two years of his presidency, he was a driving force that inspired all of us who were associated with him.

At the end of his second term of office he suffered a serious physical breakdown from which he recovered only because of his indominable will to do so. He has constantly retained a deep interest in the movement, together with a keen desire for its successful development. This narrative is the sincere and frank story of a great man—and only a great man could tell us such a story of his life as Paul has told us in the fellowship of Rotary. What may he not have to tell us at the close of another quarter century?

CHESLEY R. PERRY.

THE FOUNDER OF ROTARY

PAUL P. HARRIS

PART I

ON THE shore of Lake Michigan, the second largest of North America's great inland seas, sixty miles north of Chicago and twenty-five miles south of Milwaukee, lies a small city called Racine. It is known throughout the United States because it is the home of several nationally important manufacturing industries. The people of Racine, however, are not entirely devoted to manufacture; there are cultural interests of which Racine College is the center.

The second mayor of the city and one of the two most prosperous citizens was Henry Bryan, a lawyer whose father had been one of the early settlers of the western part of the State of New York, whose grandfather was

born and raised in Massachusetts, and whose great grandfather had emigrated from Ireland, incidentally and for reasons unknown to the writer, emasculating the family name which had been O'Brien.

Henry Bryan organized, financed, and led a gold mining expedition to California in the feverish days of '49, and as a result of this adventure, when Henry died he had nought to leave his widow except a family. The youngest daughter, Cornelia, married George H. Harris, a merchant, the son of Howard Harris of Wallingford, Vermont.

The first child of the union of George and Cornelia was named Cecil; the second Paul, who was born April 19, 1868. They played together and also with the boys of the neighborhood, Cecil generally having the frequently intractable Paul in charge. They often strayed from home down the steep river bank to the railroad and on such occasions the task of dragging Paul up the bank called for most of the boy power of the neighborhood.

To Paul the middle of the street was the best of all playgrounds. Traffic regulation had not at the time become a necessity, so Paul

made rules of his own, invariably giving boys preference over vehicles. Cecil, realizing the error of his younger brother's conclusions, sometimes found it necessary to snatch him from beneath the hoofs of passing horses, and to the shame of Paul be it said that Cecil was not infrequently severely scratched for his pains.

Of all charges which might have been made against George and Cornelia, parsimony would have stood the least chance. They were both royal spenders. The idea of a family budget would have met with prompt and emphatic disfavor. The most approved plan was to spend the money and earn it—if possible, thereafter. The system was enjoyable while it lasted and it was made to endure far longer than it otherwise would have done, through the simple expedient of a long series of checks which were endorsed by George, but signed by his thrifty and indulgent father, Howard Harris, of Wallingford, Vermont. The officers of The Manufacturers' National Bank of Racine, early learned to admire the signature of the silent partner.

But all good things must come to an end

and so did the residence of the Harris family in Racine, Wisconsin.

One July evening in 1871, George Harris took the two boys to Milwaukee, where they embarked on the "Oneida," a steamship bound for Buffalo. They were on their way to the home of the father's parents. Cornelia remained in Racine, took temporary lodgings, and planned to care for the baby, Nina May, who in later years became the wife of the late Lucien Abbott of Denver.

Cornelia bore the burdens which adverse circumstances threw upon her with courage and with nobility of purpose worthy of her fine lineage.

A New England Home

As long as life lasts there will remain in the minds of the two boys the hallowed memories of the first night in Wallingford. Grandfather met the little group as they alighted from the eleven o'clock train from Rutland. There were no other passengers to alight, the station master had long since gone to bed, and darkness enveloped all except a little circle in

the center of which was a lantern and grandfather.

It was a solemn occasion and the solemnity was emphasized by the stillness and darkness of that first night in the peaceful valley nestling between two parallel ranges of the Green Mountains. Paul's little fist was held in the biggest, firmest, warmest hand he had ever felt —that of his grandfather. The light of the swinging lantern formed fantastic figures on a white fence as the group marched up the silent street of the little village.

Then came another scene which was everlastingly etched on the sensitive film of memory. She who was to mother the younger of the two boys stood in the doorway holding a kerosene lamp and peering out into the night. She was a wee bit of a dark-eyed woman weighing precisely eighty-nine pounds and she looked incongruous when she stood beside grandfather, blue-eyed towering in the lantern light.

She greeted her son and her son's children affectionately though anxiously. Will a story be written of the homecoming of sons who have been vanquished in life's battle?

Motherhood is at its best when the tender chords of sympathy have been touched.

Grandmother knew that milk was good for tired, hungry little boys and in the center of the dining-room table she had placed a huge pan of it and alongside the milk-pan was another dish, the contents of which the boys could not see, but which proved to be blueberries fresh from the mountainside. On each of the three plates stood a yellow bowl; one seemed formidable, the other two looked friendly and benignant to the eyes of the two little boys. Still another treat awaited them, their first introduction to grandmother's home-made bread. It is astonishing just how much vacant space there is inside of hungry boys, a fact of which grandmother was well aware, but which was made known that night to two kind-hearted yellow bowls!

The boys slept on the fattest bed they had ever seen and father explained that it had been stuffed especially for them with fresh clean straw. After prayers had been said, the boys were placed on top and all that Paul can remember before grandmother awoke him, with a kiss, to the blessedness of a good home

in the mountains, was a hazy dispute between himself and the bed as to which had been stuffed with bread, milk and blueberries, and which with straw.

Neighbor Coolidge

Seventeen miles over the east mountain in another peaceful valley another little boy was sleeping that night, making blood and bone to use in service as chief executive of a great nation. His name was Calvin Coolidge.

Declaration of War

The day broke clear and bright and there was nothing to indicate that then and there in that peaceful home was to be waged a conflict, but it had to come. Paul was three years of age and never until then had been known to lower his colors to an enemy unless perchance the "enemy" happened to be his father or his mother.

On the morning in question another personality began to present itself, helpful to be sure and a genius on bread and milk and blueberries, but imperative and commanding—his grandmother. Paul's idea of the way to help

a boy to dress was to say nothing and to attend to business, and yet this miniature old lady, almost a stranger, repeatedly issued orders. It was—"Paul, put your foot up here so I can lace your shoes"—"Do this and do that"—until he felt very much in the spirit of him of whom the poet said: "Burned Marmion's swarthy cheek like fire, and shook his very frame in ire."

When he at last felt that the business had passed the point of human endurance, he looked his grandmother straight in the eye and threw down his ultimatum, "I am not going to mind you. You are not my Mamma." There was a note of asperity in the voice of grandmother as she said, "We shall see."

Straightway she went to father and bringing him to the scene of trouble said: "This little boy says he won't mind me, Papa; that I am not his Mamma. How is that?"

Father said: "Young man, mind every word your grandmother says to you and it will be well for you to remember what I am now telling you because anytime you happen to forget, you and I will have to make a little journey to the woodshed."

Paul's perception was reasonably keen. He understood his father, particularly when his father spoke in that way. The game was up and he knew it. What did he do? He did what any sensible citizen of his size would have done under similar circumstances. He beat a hasty retreat without especial regard to its order, and later in the day—I relate this even at the hazard of Paul's being thought a shameless sycophant—after having climbed into her lap, he drew his grandmother's face to his—then he deliberately kissed the enemy.

I relate this commonplace incident at considerable length because it reveals a characteristic which continued in his later life, a characteristic the influence of which was felt even by the great organization which he was later to found. He has never permitted himself to nurse grievances or cherish bitterness toward his enemies of whom, in the course of events, he has not had many.

Boyhood Days

Days of interesting discoveries followed: the beloved Lake Michigan was wanting, but