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BY H. L. MENCKEN

The Philosophy of Rotary

ROTARY: A BUSINESS MAN'S INTERPRETATION, by Frank H. Lamb. \$2.50. 9 x 6; 128 pp. Hoquiam, Wash.: *The Rotary Club of Hoquiam*.

MR. LAMB is a manufacturer of machinery in the rising town of Hoquiam, Wash., hard by the celebrated Centralia and not far from Tacoma. In 1920 he became a charter member of the Hoquiam Rotary Club and its first president. In 1922 he was advanced to the governorship of the First District, and a year later he became a director and third vice-president of Rotary International. His advancement has thus been rapid, and his book shows why: he is a man of philosophical mind, and has focused its powers upon the problems of the great order he serves and adorns. Those problems, it appears, are of a considerable complexity, for in Rotary, as in other human organizations, there are two parties, one of which dreams of great achievements and the other of which is content to improve the passing hour. As everyone knows, it is the former party that chiefly breaks into the newspapers. One hears of its spokesmen announcing that Moses, or Homer, or St. Francis, or Martin Luther, or George Washington was the first Rotarian, and arguing gravely that, when the next war threatens, only Rotary will be able to stop it. The members of this party wear the club emblem as proudly as if it were the Garter, and spend a great deal of their time worrying about such things as the crime wave, necking in the high-schools, the prevalence of adenoids, the doings of the League of Nations, and the conspiracy of the Bolsheviki to seize the United States and put every Cadillac owner to the sword. They have a taste for rhetoric, and like to listen to speeches by men

with Messages. The boys of the other party are less concerned about such high matters. When there is nothing better afoot they go to the weekly luncheons, gnaw their way through the chicken patties and green peas, blow a few spitballs across the table, sing a few songs, and then, when the speech-making begins, retire to the wash-room, talk a little business, and then prevail upon Fred or Charlie to tell the new one about Judd Gray and the chambermaid at Hornellsville, N. Y.

Mr. Lamb does not belong to this atheistic faction. Being a Rotarian is to him a serious business, and he believes that membership should be very strictly guarded. As is well known, the rules of the order provide that only one man of any given trade or profession may belong to any given club. This provision, it appears, is frequently the cause of difficulties and heart-burnings. Suppose, for example, that a club is confronted by "two leading banks doing practically a similar line of business, each with an executive that is fully capable of exemplifying Rotary." What to do? If the executive of one bank is elevated to membership, then the executive of the other will be full of shame and repining, and the fact, I daresay, will show itself the next time any member of the club asks him for accommodations. Many clubs have resolved such dilemmas by the arts of the sophist. They have put down one executive as a "commercial" banker and the other as a "savings" banker, and then elected both, yelling merrily the while, and bombarding the candidates with ham bones and asparagus. Mr. Lamb is against such subterfuges. He looks forward to what is bound to happen when two grocers try to horn in, or two electrical contractors, or two bootleggers—one, perhaps,

disguised as a merchandise broker and the other as a wholesale druggist. The pressure from dubious men is naturally very great. They try to get into Rotary on account of the prestige and credit that membership gives, just as all the chiropractors in Washington try to get into the Cosmos Club, and all the social pushers everywhere in the Republic offer themselves for baptism in the Episcopal Church. If Rotary admitted them, it would soon descend to the level of the Shriners, the Moose, or the American Academy of Political and Social Science. But in small cities it is frequently hard to keep them out, for the only banker or newspaper editor or plumbing contractor available may be a palpably questionable fellow, with no taste whatever for Service. Thus the club is forced either to take him in despite his deficiencies, or to resign itself to staggering on without any representative of his important and puissant trade.

Such problems fever Mr. Lamb, who has a legal and moral cast of mind, and he gives over a large part of his book to a discussion of them. He believes that many of them would be solved if Rotary were confined strictly to the larger cities. The members of the clubs in such cities, going to a district or national convention, are often appalled on meeting their brethren from South Lockport and Boggsville. The former, as befits their high civic position, are commonly men of great austerity; the latter come to the meeting wearing flamboyant bands around their hats, carrying American flags and booster banners, and exhaling, perhaps, the feter of rustic moonshine. It is hard for men of such disparate tastes and social habits to consider amicably, and to any ponderable public profit, the inordinately difficult and important questions with which Rotary deals. As well ask elephants and goats to gambol together. The big city clubs themselves face other problems, and some of them give great concern to the more thoughtful variety of Rotarians. There are those, as I have said, which flow out of the consti-

tutional provision that but one member shall be admitted from each avocation. That rule frequently bars out men of the highest idealism, whose presence in the councils of Rotary would strengthen the organization and so benefit the Republic. The minute one wholesale grocer or patent medicine manufacturer is elevated to membership all the others in town are automatically barred, and among them, it appears, there are sometimes men of so large a passion for Service that they were plainly designed by Omnipotence to be Rotarians. Not a few classification committees, as I have hinted, stretch the rule to let such men in, but Mr. Lamb sees the danger of that sort of playing with fire, and sounds a solemn warning against it.

Another problem: what to do with active and useful members who change their occupation and so lose their classification? Suppose A, elected as a Ford dealer, abandons that great art and mystery for the knit underwear business? A representative of the knit underwear business, B by name, is already a member, and he naturally hangs on to the high privileges and prerogatives that go with the fact. Is A to be dropped, or is the rule against duplications to be once more invaded? Most Rotary clubs, according to Mr. Lamb, get around the difficulty by electing A to honorary membership, but as a purist he is against that device, for it simply begs the question. Moreover, it is unjust to A. If he is entitled to any membership at all, he is entitled to full membership, with the power to vote and hold office. The constitutional lawyers of Rotary have been wrestling with the problem for a long while, but so far they have failed to solve it. Mr. Lamb is naturally reluctant to discuss it in a doctrinaire manner, but I suspect that he is in favor of throwing A out altogether—a cruel scheme, certainly, but one that at least disposes of the difficulty. To permit A to hang around sucking his thumb while his successor radiates idealism is as indecorous as it would be for a lady married to her second husband

to stable her first in the spare room. Raised to honorary membership, he becomes a sort of club eunuch. It would be kinder to strip him of his accoutrements and heave him out.

From all of this it is evident that the conscientious Rotarian is by no means the gay and happy fellow that he appears to be in the newspaper reports of his doings and in the columns of "Americana." All the while he is lavishing Service upon the rest of us his own heart is devoured by cares. The government of Rotary, like that of the United States, is one of law, not of men. The most stupendous Rotarian, in the eye of that law, is of no more importance than the humblest brother. Well, law hatches lawyers, and the minute lawyers appear there is trouble. Even the Elks have found that out. At their annual conventions they put in many weary hours trying constitutional cases. Outside the band is playing, but within the chamber of their deliberation they have to listen to long arguments, with maddening gabble of precedents. An Elks' convention used to be a very lively affair, with the boys riding around in open barouches, covered with badges and throwing away money; now it is indistinguishable from a session of the Supreme Court of the United States. A Rotary convention becomes even worse, for Rotarians are more serious men than Elks. The idealism of the nation is in their keeping. If they took their responsibilities lightly there would be chaos.

A Book for Bibbers

WINE AND THE WINE LANDS OF THE WORLD,
by Frank Hedges Butler. \$4.50. 8¾ x 5¾; 271 pp.
New York: Brentano's.

MR. BUTLER is a wine merchant by inheritance, and a bibber and fancier by inclination—a handsome, bulky old gentleman, wearing a No. 23 collar and with a strong facial resemblance to the late J. P. Morgan. In the pursuit of his chosen art he has traveled all over the world, by ship, by rail and even by air—that is, over all parts

of it save California, which he nowhere mentions in his book. But this neglect of the American Rheingau and Côte d'Or is nothing new, for practically all the English writers on wines are guilty of it. Even the best of them, P. Morton Shand, author of "A Book of Wine," has very little to say about California's excellent vintages, and that little is ignorant and contemptuous. Why the English should be so unfriendly to them I don't know; perhaps there is a political reason somewhere in the background. The truth is that California, during the last ten years of the Bill of Rights, produced some Hocks that were almost as good as the ordinary run of genuine Rhine wines, and some clarets and Burgundies, notably Cresta Blanca, that were a great deal better than the stuff the average Frenchman drinks. The California chiantis, as everyone knows, were far superior to the Italian ones. They not only had a more delicate flavor and a greater fragrance; they were also more digestible. The Italian chiantis, even the best of them, are so high in tannic acid that the Nordic stomach is quite unable to deal with them. They cause its mucosa to blow up in large blisters, and paralyze the nerves which operate the pylorus: it is thus impossible for an American to drink them without employing formidable chasers of bicarbonate of soda. But the California chiantis were very bland, and produced no such disturbances. Even today, though they have gone off considerably under Prohibition, they are still very respectable wines, and much in esteem in New York. What passes for Burgundy in that town is usually chianti. The California Hocks, under Prohibition, have died the death: the stuff sold in the long bottles today is mainly clarified cider, with a shot of witch hazel added. But the so-called sauternes on tap in New York in these days are even worse. The only thing genuine about them is the sulphurous acid, which causes one of the worst varieties of *Katzenjammer* known to pathology.

Mr. Butler does not confine his book to