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Random Reminiscences of Men and Events: Autobiography

John D Rockefeller

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PREFACE Probably in the life of every one there comes a time when he is inclined to go over again the events, great and small, which have made up the incidents of his work and pleasure, and I am tempted to become a garrulous old man, and tell some stories of men and things which have happened in an active life. In some measure I have been associated with the most interesting people our country has produced, especially in business—men who have helped largely to build up the commerce of the United States, and who have made known its products all over the world. These incidents which come to my mind to speak of seemed vitally important to me when they happened, and they still stand out distinctly in my memory. Just how far any one is justified in keeping what he regards as his own private affairs from the public, or in defending himself from attacks, is a mooted point. If one talks about one's experiences, there is a natural temptation to charge one with traveling the easy road to egotism; if one keeps silence, the inference of wrong-doing is sometimes even more difficult to meet, as it would then be said that there is no valid defense to be offered. It has not been my custom to press my affairs forward into public gaze; but I have come to see that if my family and friends want some record of things which might shed light on matters that have been somewhat discussed, it is right that I should yield to their advice, and in this informal way go over again some of the events which have made life interesting to me. There is still another reason for speaking now: If a tenth of the things that have been said are true, then these dozens of able and faithful men who have been associated with me, many of whom have passed away, must have been guilty of grave faults. For myself, I had decided to say nothing, hoping that after my death the truth would gradually come to the surface and posterity would do strict justice; but while I live and can testify to certain things, it seems fair that I should refer to some points which I hope will help to set forth several much-discussed happenings in a new light. I am convinced that they have not been fully understood. All these things affect the memories of men who are dead and the lives of men who are living, and it is only reasonable that the public should have some first-hand facts to draw from in making up its final estimate. When these Reminiscences were begun, there was of course no thought that they should ever go so far as to appear between the covers of a book. They were not prepared with the idea of even an informal autobiography; there was little idea of order or sequence, and no thought whatever of completeness. It would have been a pleasure as well as a satisfaction to dwell with some fullness upon the stories of daily and intimate companionship which existed for so many years with my close partners and associates, but I realize that while these experiences have always been to me among the great pleasures of my life, a long account of them would not interest the reader, and thus it happens that I have but mentioned the names of only a few of the scores of partners who have been so active in building up the business interests with which I have been associated. J.D.R. March,1909.

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