

NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

REMINISCENCES. By Lyman Abbott. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915.

A great virtue of the sermons which Dr. Abbott used to preach at the Plymouth Church in Brooklyn was that in an unusual degree they fused common sense with religious faith. There is a similar potency in most of what Dr. Abbott has written, and this is pre-eminently true of his recently published book of reminiscences. His life-story has the charm of a simply written narrative of personal experiences and impressions. It illustrates and sums up many of the important changes that have come over the spirit of American life in the last sixty years. It is a record of interesting work and an expression of sane views. Moreover, it contains a variety of anecdotes, always pleasant and sometimes highly entertaining. All this, however, does not sufficiently explain the hold which the story keeps upon the reader's attention and sympathy. The fact is that Dr. Abbott's reminiscences reveal an attitude towards life at once serene and intense, practical and religious, commonplace and mystical.

He relates that soon after he began to preach from the pulpit formerly occupied by Beecher a woman left the congregation and went to sit under DeWitt Talmage, explaining that Dr. Abbott's sermons so excited her that she had to hold on to the pew to keep from calling out a response. On the other hand, a stranger who went to hear Dr. Abbott preach is reported to have said that the minister "did not preach that morning, but just gave a little talk on religion." These curiously opposite views doubtless represent mere personal idiosyncracies; yet they may serve as symbols of two distinct qualities in his self-expression. To speak in extremes, his life-story is in one point of view as full of common sense as the "Rollo Books" and in another as stimulating as *The Imitation of Christ*.

Dr. Abbott's *Reminiscences*, then, is primarily the story of a religious life, but of a life in which religion, far from being a mere absorbing interest, is the vital spark. Religion pervades the whole man—his moral and intellectual judgments, his experiences and feeling, giving unity and consistency to the whole; hence it is never felt as dogma or as emotionalism.

As a child, Lyman Abbott, like many other children who think,

sometimes suffered from religious depression. "In the evening twilight, when the dusk was gathering and the melancholy frogs were croaking, I used to go to my bedroom and try to think of all the wicked things I had done during the day, and as that was not enough, of my mother in heaven and my father in New York, and of myself, a lonely, homeless, outcast boy, in the vain hope that conviction of sin would come. But it never came." The truth is that to Lyman Abbott as boy and man religion could never be a gloomy thing. The note of his whole life and the atmosphere of his reminiscences is not, indeed, a blind optimism nor a determined cheerfulness, but a sense of harmony arising from a reconciliation of all the elements of normal human experience—actuality, intellectuality, spirituality.

It is the actuality—the human interest and warmth, the clear practical vision—of the story that makes the strongest immediate appeal. Dr. Abbott writes of his childhood with mature appreciation and with a rare power of living over the past in its pristine freshness. He tells zestfully of his college days, re-creating the atmosphere of the University of the City of New York as it was in the fifties and giving vivid glimpses of the condition of the metropolis in those days. His life, though not distinguished by outwardly dramatic or striking incidents, has been full of varied interests. As a lawyer, in partnership with his brothers, as a minister of the gospel, as corresponding secretary of the Freedmen's Union Commission, as an editor, he has always been in close and productive contact with men, with practical problems, and with the intellectual tendencies of his time. As a result, he is able to speak with uncommon directness and conviction of the industrial, the political, and the religious transformation which has occurred in America during his lifetime. His optimism is felt to be genuine, his point of view is seen to be not that of a specialist—not even of a specialist in religion or in journalism—but that of a man who has lived through the life of his time, surely, sympathetically, with adequate intellectual responsiveness and with adequate spiritual detachment.

These *Reminiscences* may be read with enjoyment as the diversely interesting record of a pleasant life-experience, and as a valuable commentary upon the history of recent times. But the special quality of the book lies deeper—in the conception of life which it expresses, in a comfortable union of the matter-of-fact with spiritual consciousness, such as few temperaments attain.

A VOICE FROM THE CROWD. By George Wharton Pepper. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1915.

In 1871 the Corporation of Yale College voted to accept the offer of Mr. Henry N. Sage, of Brooklyn, of the sum of ten thousand dollars, for the foundation of a lectureship in a branch of