

Of all his students, Abbott was said to be proudest of Herbert Henry Asquith, who attended the City of London School, 1864–1870. Asquith was further educated at Balliol College, Oxford, where he was elected a fellow in 1874. He served as Prime Minister of England 1909–1916. The following recollection is taken from Asquith’s autobiography, *Memories and Reflections*, pp. 11–12.

“But the driving power of the whole machine, no less than the special quality of the teaching in the highest forms, was provided by the new Headmaster, Dr. Edwin Abbott, who succeeded Dr. Mortimer in 1865. He had been a pupil of the School, and passed out thence to St. John’s at Cambridge, where as I have just said, he came out as Senior in the Classical Tripos of 1861. He was a Cambridge scholar of the most finished type in days when that type produced some of its most brilliant specimens. Next to Abbott’s name in the Tripos of 1861 comes that of G. O. Trevelyan of Trinity, and in the following year the Senior Classic was Jebb, the runners-up being Graves and Henry Jackson, either of whom (it used to be said) might have been Senior in an ordinary year. Abbott had a natural gift for teaching, and in the everyday tasks of translation and composition it would be difficult to imagine a better equipped or a more stimulating master. He diversified and enlarged the regular curriculum of a Sixth Form by going outside the Greek and Latin Classics, and applying the methods of exact scholarship to such authors as Spenser, Dante, and above all Shakespeare. His *Shakespearian Grammar* is still, I believe, a standard authority. His lessons on the Greek Testament were the vestibule to the great edifice of research to which he afterwards devoted the years of his retirement. He was a clergyman of the Church of England, and well known outside as a powerful and suggestive preacher, but there was nothing sectarian or denominational in his presentation of religion to his pupils. Above all, he had the sovereign gift of a great personality, at once austere and sympathetic, impressive and inspiring, without which the most accomplished teacher cannot succeed in moulding and fortifying the character of the young.”

Below is an excerpt from Asquith’s talk to the John Carpenter Club dinner in 1892, as recounted in *The City of London School*

“And then, last of all I came to Dr. Abbott (cheers), who, to me and I am certain to many of those whom I address to-night, meant and will always mean the City School. (Cheers.) I will not trust myself to say, for I could not easily find words which would do justice to what I intend and feel, all that I owe to him. I am certain — and I say it deliberately and with full conviction — that there is no man living to whom I lie under the same debt of obligation.”