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DR ABBOTT'S EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY

From *THE EAGLE* (St. John's College, Cambridge), Lent Term, 1919.

and

The *Hampstead & Highgate Express*, December 28, 1918

An Address was presented to the Rev. Edwin Abbott Abbott, M.A., D.D., F.B.A., Hon. Fellow of the College, on his eightieth birthday (December 20, 1918). Readers of the *Eagle* will be glad to see this tribute to an eminent Johnian reprinted in the College Magazine.

December 20, 1918.

Dear Dr. Abbott,

On this your eightieth birthday we, the undersigned, desire, on behalf of your old pupils, the readers of your books, and your friends generally, to take the opportunity of expressing to you our high respect and affection, and our grateful sense of the debt which we and many others owe, in some cases to your personal guidance and influence, in others to the teaching of your books, and in all to the inspiration of your example as a single-minded and disinterested seeker after truth.

You will forgive us if we endeavour on this occasion to put into words, few and inadequate as they must be, some of the many things which are included in that debt.

We call to mind that the period of your headmastership was one of signal prosperity in the history of the City of London School. It was twice found necessary to provide additional accommodation for the steadily increasing number of applicants for admission; and your unrivalled ability and energy as a teacher bore fruit in a long succession of scholarships and other distinctions at the universities, forming a notable record for a school not enabled by rich endowments to attract exceptionally gifted boys. Yourself a classical scholar of the finest Cambridge type, you maintained and enhanced the reputation which the school had won under your predecessor as a place of classical education. At the same time it was due to your enlightened zeal as an educational reformer that the City of London School led the way among the public schools of the country in treating the English language and English literature as subjects of serious study for pupils of all ages, with the result that the example thus set has established those subjects in their proper place as an integral and most important part of the school curriculum. The text-books you wrote have revolutionized the teaching of grammar and composition; the *English Lessons for English People*, written in collaboration with the late Professor Seeley, cleared the path of many, both young and old, to an intelligent appreciation of the beauties of our national literature; while the *Shakespearian Grammar* made possible, for the first time, an exact study of the language of the greatest of English poets, by bringing order into the apparent chaos of Elizabethan syntax.

Not the least part of the stimulus which your pupils owe to you was the knowledge that their teacher was also a student; and that, while you were communicating some of your own enthusiasm and admiration for great books and great subjects, you were yourself working

upon them and making important discoveries. To that stimulus was added the invaluable lesson of how to study. You brought your pupils to apply all their powers to the investigation of the problem before them, whatever it might be, and not to rest satisfied with the mere dictates of authority, or with their own first and hasty conclusions.

That lesson has been strongly reinforced by your own life-long practice. We recall how, again and again, your investigation of one problem has disclosed others, which required independent and sometimes prolonged research; and these collateral problems have always been treated with the same patient scholarship as the main issue. Thus, the annotation of Bacon's Essays raised the further question of their author's character, which was discussed in the two volumes on *Bacon and Essex* and *Francis Bacon*; the problem of miracles led to the studies of Cardinal Newman and Thomas à Becket; and the investigation of the mutual relations of the Gospels yielded not a few valuable by-products, among them the Johannine Vocabulary and Grammar. And here we may be permitted to offer our hearty congratulations upon the completion of the monumental work entitled *Diatessarica*, in which you have given to the world of Biblical scholarship the final result of your patient and unremitting labour for the last twenty years. In these volumes, learned, fair, and impartial investigation is combined with much acute and original suggestion and deep spiritual insight. They form a series of exegetical works to which our theological literature can hardly show a parallel, and which no serious student of the problem of the Gospels or the language of the Greek Testament can hereafter afford to neglect.

In passing, may we refer to your singular good-fortune in having enjoyed during the performance of this task the devoted help of a daughter who is herself an accomplished scholar?

We wish to record with special gratitude that the habit of studying for yourself frankly and fearlessly, and carrying the process of open-minded enquiry as far as it will go, has always been conspicuous in your contributions to theology. Your *Bible Lessons* and *Parables for Children* were the outcome of your desire to make the truths of the Bible more intelligible and more interesting to the young, and to quicken their sense of the reality of divine things. Your many readers have been glad to find the same characteristics in your later theological books. Whether the purpose in view was to reproduce the living image of Christ and his apostles as they walked in Galilee, or to contrast St. Paul with the Stoics, or to elucidate some abstract question as to the meaning of worship, or the relation of theology to natural science, or of form to substance in religion, your writings have always been marked by the same resolute candour and thoroughness in investigation, the same spirit of profound reverence, and the same conviction of the inestimable value of the religious fact to be investigated.

When you relinquished your headmastership, at the age of fifty-one, many of your friends would have liked to see you appointed to some high academic office at Cambridge or elsewhere. But it is now clear that, in choosing the private station of a scholar working with his pen and free to give his whole time to research and authorship, you chose the position best fitted for the achievement of the work for which your special powers and gifts have qualified

you.

In wishing you all happiness during the evening of your life, we desire to signify our hope that you may have the satisfaction of witnessing the progressive acceptance of the ideals for which you have so long and steadfastly laboured.

We are,

dear Dr. Abbott,

Very sincerely yours,

The *Hampstead & Highgate Express*, December 28, 1918, reported that among those who signed the letter to Abbott on his eightieth birthday were:—

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York; the Bishops of London, Carlisle, Chelmsford, Chester, Hereford, Kingston, St. David's, and Southwark. The Deans of Canterbury, Carlisle, Christchurch, Ely, Gloucester, Lichfield, Lincoln, Norwich, Peterborough, St. Paul's, Salisbury, Wells, Winchester and Worcester; the Sub-Dean of Westminster, Archdeacon of Ely, and the Master of the Temple; the Principals of the Universities of Aberdeen, Birmingham, and Glasgow. The Vice Chancellor of the University of Liverpool. The Principal of King's College (London), the Rector of Exeter College, the Master and President of St. John's College (Cambridge), the Master of Peterhouse, the Master of Selwyn College, the Principals of Mansfield College (Oxford), Hackney Theological College(Hampstead), New College(Hampstead). University. The Provost of Eton and Headmasters of the following schools: Birmingham, Charterhouse, Haileybury, Harrow, Manchester, Rugby, St. Olave's, Sherborne, Wellington, Westminster, and Winchester.

Herbert H. Asquith* *d*
Prof. B.W. Bacon (Yale)
Sir Clement M. Bailhache* *d*
Sir Thomas Barlow *d*
Dame Henrietta Barnett *d*
William Bateson *d*
James F. Belthune-Baker *d*
Augustine Birrel *d*
Prof. Thomas G. Bonney *d*
Prof. Box
Prof. Andrew C. Bradley *d*
Bishop George F. Browne *d*
Sophie Bryant [5]
Viscount James Bryce *d*
Prof. Francis C. Burkitt *d*
Prof. Charles E/F. Burney *w*
Mrs. Henry Montagu Butler *d*
Dr. Alexander J. Carlyle *d*
Dr. J. Estlin Carpenter *d*

Sir Robert Chalmers* *d*
Canon George B. Charles *w*
Dr. John Clifford *d*
Sir Joseph Compton-Rickett *w*
Prof. Robert S. Conway* *d*
Sir Henry Craik *d*
Louise Creighton *w*,
Earl George N. Curzon *d*
(Sarah) Emily Davies *d*
Prof. Oliver Elton *d*
Millicent Garrett Fawcett *d*
Herbert A. L. Fisher *d*
Prof. Frederick J. Foakes Jackson *d*
Sir (Thomas) Gregory Foster *d*
Sir James G. Frazer *d*
Alfred G. Gardiner *d*
Prof. Ernest A. Gardner *d*
Prof. Percy Gardner* *d*
Dr. William Garnett* *w*

Canon Michael G. Glazebrook <i>d</i>	Bishop John Percival <i>d</i>
Sir Israel Gollancz* <i>d</i>	Prof. Albert F. Pollard <i>d</i>
Sir (William) H. Hadow <i>d</i>	Sir Frederick Pollock <i>d</i>
Arthur C. Headlam <i>d</i>	Prof. John P. Postgate <i>d</i>
Canon John W. Horsley <i>d</i>	George W. Prothero <i>d</i>
Dr. Robert F. Horton <i>d</i>	Sir William M. Ramsay <i>d</i>
Sir Courtenay P. Ilbert <i>d</i>	John F. P. Rawlinson <i>w</i>
Dr. William W. Jackson <i>w</i>	Canon Hardwicke D. Rawnsley <i>w</i>
Canon Arthur W. Jephson <i>w</i>	Lord Donald J. Reay <i>d</i>
Prof. Robert H. Kennett <i>d</i>	Prof. James S. Reid <i>d</i>
Sir Frederic G. Kenyon <i>d</i>	Canon Gerald H. Rendall <i>w</i>
Kirsopp Lake <i>d</i>	Sir William Ridgeway <i>d</i>
Sir Joseph Larmor <i>d</i>	Briton Riviere <i>d</i>
Sir Sidney Lee* <i>d</i>	William Rhys Roberts* <i>w</i>
Herbert Lewis	Frank Roscoe <i>w</i>
Dr. John Scott Lidgett <i>d</i>	Sir Edward S. Russell <i>d</i>
Canon Edward Lyttelton <i>d</i>	Bishop Herbert E. Ryle <i>d</i>
John W. Mackail <i>d</i>	Prof. William Sanday <i>d</i>
George A. Macmillan <i>w</i>	Sir John E. Sandys <i>d</i>
Alfred Marshall <i>d</i>	Robert F. Scott <i>w</i>
Percy E. Matheson* <i>d</i>	Lady (Mary Agnes) Seeley
Canon Edmund McClure <i>w</i>	Prof. James Stalker <i>w</i>
Sir John D. McClure <i>d</i>	Prof. Vincent H. Stanton <i>w</i>
Prof. George Milligan <i>d</i>	Canon Vernon F. Storr <i>w</i>
Claude J. Montefiore <i>d</i>	John St Loe Strachey <i>d</i>
Lord John F. Moulton <i>d</i>	Canon Burnett H. Streeter <i>d</i>
G. Gilbert Murray <i>d</i>	Canon Richard D. Swallow <i>w</i>
Canon Alexander Nairne <i>d</i>	Prof. Alfred E. Taylor <i>d</i>
Sir Henry Newbolt <i>d</i>	Reverend William Temple <i>d</i>
Sir W. Robertson Nicoll <i>d</i>	Sir E. M. Thompson <i>d</i>
Dr. Blake Odgers <i>w</i>	Sir George Trevelyan <i>d</i>
Thomas E. Page <i>d</i>	Mary Augusta (Arnold) Ward <i>d</i>
Canon Thomas L. Papillon <i>w</i>	Sir William Watson <i>d</i>
Canon Reginald St. J. Parry <i>w</i>	Bishop James E. C. Welldon <i>d</i>
Arthur S. Peake <i>d</i>	Canon James M. Wilson <i>d</i>
Dame Emily Penrose <i>d</i>	

An asterisk (*) indicates a former student of Edwin Abbott; the names of those listed in the *Dictionary of National Biography* are followed by *d*; the names of those listed in *Who Was Who* but not the *DNB* are followed by *w*.

This remarkable list of eminent persons — virtually every name on this list is to be found in the *Dictionary of National Biography* or *Who Was Who* — includes but a few of Abbott’s personal friends and only ten of his former students. Securing the signatures must have required several weeks. One of the signers, Abbott’s friend and former Headmaster at Clifton, Bishop John Percival, died on December 3, seventeen days before the presentation.

All six of the women are prominent figures. Henrietta Barnett was the widow of Canon Samuel Barnett, the founder of Toynbee Hall. Sophie Bryant was active in the libertarian feminist movement. Louise Creighton was the wife and biographer of her famous husband, Bishop Mandell Creighton, as well as a moderate Christian feminist. Emily Davies was the sister of Abbott’s friend and mentor, John Llewelyn Davies. She was instrumental in the founding of Girton College, the first women’s college at Cambridge University. Millicent Garrett Fawcett was a leader in the movements for women’s education and suffrage. Mary Augusta Ward was a granddaughter of the famous Dr. Arnold of Rugby. Her conviction that religion ought to benefit the poor and the weak was embodied in her best-selling novel, *Robert Elsmere*. Lady Seeley was the widow of Abbott’s close friend, Sir John Seeley.

The article in the St. John’s College *Eagle* includes the names of thirty-seven signatories who were members of the college. This list, which is given below, has only eight names (Bateson, Bonney, Larmor, Marshall, Moulton, Page, Sandys, Wilson) in common with the list in the *Express*. Some of these thirty-seven ‘Johnians’ are the names corresponding to the titles at the top. (We found only four: Ede was Dean of Worcester, Liveing was President of St. John’s, MacAlister was Princiipal of Glasgow University, and Rushbrooke was Headmaster of St Olave’s.) There remain more than half of the 37 Johnians who are not mentioned in the *Express*, and so it seems that the *Express* printed only a select sample of the signers of the address.

The signatories included the following members of St. John’s College.

Henry F. Baker <i>d</i>	Charles H. Heath*	Edward J. Rapson <i>d</i>
William Bateson <i>d</i>	W. E. Heitland	W. Page Roberts <i>w</i>
William H. Bennett*	Sir Joseph Larmor <i>d</i>	W. G. Rushbrooke* <i>w</i>
Prof. T. G. Bonney <i>d</i>	J. G. Leathem	Sir John E. Sandys <i>d</i>
Alfred Caldecott <i>w</i>	George D. Liveing <i>d</i>	Lewis E. Shore <i>w</i>
R. F. Charles	Sir Donald MacAlister <i>d</i>	Edward E. Sikes <i>w</i>
W. A. Cox	Alfred Marshall <i>d</i>	Harry J. Spenser <i>w</i>
W. Moore Ede <i>w</i>	George R. S. Mead <i>w</i>	Halley F. Stewart <i>d</i>
Herbert S. Foxwell <i>d</i>	Lord John F. Moulton <i>d</i>	Joseph R. Tanner <i>d</i>
Alfred E. Garvie <i>d</i>	Thomas E. Page <i>d</i>	Telford Varley
F. G. Given-Wilson	J. Lewis Paton <i>d</i>	Canon J. M. Wilson <i>d</i>
Charles E. Graves <i>w</i>	Charles Pendlebury <i>w</i>	Arthur Wright <i>w</i>
G. E. Greene		

Wellside, Well Walk,
Hampstead, N.W. 3.
21st December 1918

My Dear.

In replying to the congratulatory address presented to me through you on the attainment of my eighty-first year, I am divided between gratitude and anxiety — gratitude for kindness, but anxiety lest by silently accepting kindness beyond my desert I may seem to claim that I deserve it.

Let me say then that in the evening of my life I recognize that I have made many mistakes of judgment and have written some things that were crude, some that were erroneous, and a few that were needlessly controversial; so that I marvel how so many eminent men (outside the circle of my personal friends and old pupils), men of various pursuits and schools of thought, should have combined to call me “a single-minded and disinterested seeker after truth.”

Yet I cling to the belief that these epithets may not be wholly undeserved. The single-mindedness of late years may have become an excessive absorption; but it was at all events absorption in worthy work. And your address of congratulation encourages me to hope that my researches on the Gospels may be of use, even to those who most differ from my conclusions, by supplying materials which other and more skilful hands may be able to turn to account.

In any case the encouragement is most welcome to me, and most kindly on the part of the encouragers, whom, including yourself, I thank with all my heart, remaining

Sincerely and gratefully yours,
Edwin A. Abbott

Note. — As Dr. Abbott’s state of health did not allow him to receive a deputation from the signatories, the address was handed to him by an old pupil who called at his house for the purpose, and to whom the above reply was on the following day sent.