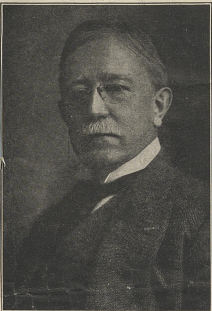




Hamilton W. Mabie's

HAMILTON WRIGHT MABIE, CRITIC AND ESSAYIST



HAMILTON WRIGHT MABIE
(Associate Editor of the Outlook)

THE death of Hamilton Wright Mabie on the last day of 1916 removed a familiar figure among the literary men of New York. Mr. Mabie had been for thirty-seven years a member of the Outlook editorial staff and for thirty-two years Associate Editor with Dr. Lyman Abbott.

After graduation from Williams College in 1867, Mr. Mabie began the practise of law in New York City, but it soon developed that his natural tastes and abilities lay rather in the direction of literature. During his connection with the Outlook he contributed hundreds of book reviews and literary articles, in addition to editorials on social topics. The more important of his essays on literary topics were from time to time collected in books that have been widely read.

In later years Mr. Mabie became known throughout the country as a lecturer, and in that field he showed special aptitude. He included in his lectures on literary topics reminiscences of famous American writers, and these were reinforced by anecdotes gleaned in the course of his extensive reading. Several years ago he went to Japan, under the auspices of the Carnegie Endowment for In-

ternational Peace, serving as an American "exchange professor" and delivering lectures in the Japanese universities and cities on the spirit and ideals of the American people.

In connection with the tributes from his editorial associates, published in the Outlook for January 10, there is printed the last contribution to the Outlook from Mr. Mabie's pen. It is entitled "Essays Old and New," and something of Mr. Mabie's own genial philosophy as an essayist stands out in the opening paragraphs, which we quote herewith:

Wisdom literature began a long time ago, but it has reversed the usual order of development; as it has grown older it has grown not only in grace but in vivacity and variety. There is essay writing of immense weight and dignity in the Old Testament, but the knowledge of life which it conveyed in the light of three thousand years of additional observation the depth and vitality of that knowledge is astounding—is invested with the solemnity which Bacon associated with affairs of state. Montaigne's epigrams, to say nothing of his devouring curiosity, put him so casier terms with his readers; he was concerned to record the fact as he saw it, but he kept well in view and told us pretty nearly all he knew about himself. Bacon's greatness will save him from the Baconians, and his grasp of the principles of conduct and the organ roll of his noble style put him safely with the masters, but one reads him in evening dress, with the feeling that he is dining with an ambassador.

Charles Lamb is as unconventional as Whitman, but far more companionable and better bred. His manner is so intimate and easy that in his hands the wisdom of life is so happily humanized that it loses its solemnity without loss of substance. He makes his readers so comfortable that they forget at the moment how much wisdom is mixed with the playfulness of his mind. He often teaches, but he never instructs. And this is characteristic of the modern essay in the hands of its masters. Matthew Arnold was a teacher by instinct and intention; he even kept a switch in his desk and used it at times with stinging effect; but it was like going to a sparkling comedy to sit in his classes. He was as far from solemnity as Bernard Shaw, but the dignity of literature was as secure in his hands as in the hands of Bacon. His essays are free from the air of the schoolroom, but the wisdom of life in conduct and art is in them.

When one recalls that happy phrase, "full weight of thought without any weight of expression," he thinks of the masters of French prose, who write as if clearness, precision, and charm of diction came by nature, like seeing and hearing, and are not matters of rigorous achievement; but American writing has survived the German influence, and, outside the field of scholarship, has quietly assumed that humor is part of the wisdom of life, and that truth is just as true as truth in heavy-handed didacticism.

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The Outlook
287 Fourth Avenue (near 23d Street)
New York

October 31, 1898.

My Dear Clifford:

I suppose you know a good hotel, so I will not attempt to advise you on that point; but if I were advising you, I would suggest that you go to the St. Denis, corner of Broadway and 11th Street, and get one of their small rooms. You can get a room there for \$1.00 per day, and then you can spend as much or as little as you please on your meals.

If you will come up here on Thursday, I will get you out to Summit promptly.

Yours in haste,

H. W. Mabie

Mr. Clifford M. Trivett.

Hamilton Wright Mackie (1846-1916)

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