

**THE SPIRIT
OF DEMOCRACY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649214167

The spirit of democracy by Lyman Abbott

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LYMAN ABBOTT

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OF DEMOCRACY**

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BY
LYMAN ABBOTT



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

The Riverside Press Cambridge

1910

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Published November 1910

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THE SPIRIT OF DEMOCRACY

CHAPTER I

THE BIRTH OF DEMOCRACY

EVERY age is a transition age. But in some eras the transition is more rapid and more noticeable than in others. As sometimes in a year the girl develops into womanhood, as sometimes in a week the skeleton plant bursts into leafage and perhaps into bloom, so a nation, which has been growing silently, suddenly puts forth the evidence of its growth, and both surprises and perplexes itself by the transformation. Such is the phenomenon now taking place in America. It is as though a new-created world were springing up, and we were taking part in the process of creation. Nothing is as it has been. Science, literature, education, art, politics, religion, all are being new-born. There is a new astronomy, a new biology, a new chemistry; there are new methods of architecture, lighting, locomotion, manufacturing; new types of fiction, drama, poetry, philosophy; new methods of teaching and an immense increase in the number of sub-

jects taught ; a new alignment of political parties and new policies as yet not even named save as they bear the names of some representative expounder, as Cleveland or Bryan Democracy, or Roosevelt or Taft Republicanism ; and a new theology which has not only shortened and simplified all creeds but has sometimes threatened to destroy them altogether.

These changes are not incidental ; they are radical. Schumann, in "Warum ?" musically interprets the questioning spirit of the age which puts an interrogation point after every affirmation of the past, however long it may have been accepted. In industry the right of laborers to organize is denied by capitalists, and the right of capitalists to organize is denied by laborers. On the one hand property is so concentrated in a few hands for administration purposes as to fill thoughtful men with a not wholly unreasonable dread of what plutocracy may grow to, and on the other hand a class of Socialists appear to deny all right, if not of private property, at least of private property industrially employed. In politics there are both a New Jeffersonianism and a New Federalism. Neither the Democracy of Cleveland nor that of Bryan is a copy of Thomas Jefferson's Democracy ; neither the Federalism of Roosevelt nor that of Cannon and Al-

drich is a copy of the Federalism of Alexander Hamilton. No Church is immune from the New Theology, not even the Roman Catholic Church, as the Pope himself by his syllabus on Modernism has attested. And the New Theology questions the basis of authority, and questions it so effectually that neither the Bible nor the Church speaks to even the churchman with the authority with which they spoke to the churchmen of a century ago. What does all this mean? To what does it all tend? What will it do with us? Perhaps more important is the question, What can we do with it?

Two democracies were born in America about a century and a half apart: one in the early half of the seventeenth century, and the other in the latter half of the eighteenth century; one of Hebrew, the other of Latin, ancestry. They married. The democracy of this twentieth century is their child. It inherits characteristics from both its parents. They are not only diverse; they are inconsistent. The child is perplexed by its contradictory inheritance. He does not understand himself. If we are to understand him, we must understand his ancestors.

Ten or twelve centuries before Christ there grew up in the Near East a new form of social organization which we may call the Hebrew Com-

monwealth. All the neighboring governments were absolute despotisms — all power being concentrated in the hands of a single autocrat. In the Hebrew Commonwealth government was for the first time organized in three departments — a legislative, an executive, and a judicial. In all the neighboring governments the power of the autocrat was unlimited. In the Hebrew Commonwealth the king was a constitutional monarch whose powers were somewhat carefully limited. In the Hebrew Commonwealth no hereditary caste or class was permitted; there was the State Church, but the priesthood were forbidden to become land-owners, and were made dependent for their support on the voluntary offerings of the people; methods of worship were carefully defined, but attendance on worship was not compulsory; private ownership in land was allowed, but only for a limited tenure; labor was honorable and idleness a disgrace; slavery, though not prohibited, was hedged about with such conditions that in the course of a few centuries it disappeared; woman's position, if not absolutely equal to that of man, was one of unexampled honor in that age; provision was made for the education of all the children by home instruction, aided by itinerant school-teachers, out of which later grew the first popular school system in the then known world.