AN EDITOR LOOKS BACK

By Mrs. J. Borden Harriman

WHEN, as a girl, I first read Bacon's lines

Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man

a standard was set which I hoped some day to attain. Alas, I never did. But my first impression from "Remembered Yesterdays" was that Robert Underwood Johnson has all those attributes and many more.

His life has covered the most colorful years of American history. His windows have been wide open, and little of the great pageant passing outside has escaped him. Reconstruction days in the south; Grant's administration and the Star Route scandals; the Tilden-Hayes electoral contest; the Venezuelan affair under Cleveland; the first Bryan campaign involving the gold standard; the splitting of the Democratic Party upon that issue; the Spanish-American War; the assassinations of Garfield and McKinley are all events of moment through which he leads us. From the day when the funeral train bearing the body of President Lincoln went through Cumberland, Indiana—and

> Without a companion, I followed it to Indianapolis, where at night, in the State Capitol, I viewed in tears the noble face of the beloved President, and went a second time into the silent procession, so greatly was I impressed by the beauty and dignity of death and by the half-realized historic significance of the occasion—

to his farewell to another great war president as he turned his face toward Rome as ambassador, he has been acquainted with practically all the noted figures of our times.

Mr. Johnson seems to have known Roosevelt quite well from the time prior to his defeat for mayor of New York. He remembers an interesting interview with him on the day after that election, when Roosevelt came into the office of "The Century" and despondently announced that his political career was at an end. This friendship continued during the period of the acquisition of the Philippines with the surrender thereby of the principles of the Monroe Doctrine, and the events of the Roosevelt administration, including the "trust busting", the "big stick", and the conservation of our natural resources.

Acquaintance with Woodrow Wilson dates back to the period when Wilson was a contributor to "The Century", before he became president of Princeton. Wilson's views then as to the rights of labor were considered by the editors of "The Century", including the author, as being extremely radical. An illuminating interview with Wilson is given, in which he shocked the staff of "The Century" by announcing: "I tell you, gentlemen, great changes are coming in our country, and, especially, something must be done for the working people." Mr. Wilson is again quoted as saying, in commenting on the methods of Carlyle: "But all history is not running to a fire."

Mr. Johnson led, and in a way made, the great fight for the legislation securing copyright to American authors, one of his three principal achievements. The other two are the publication of the Civil War papers,, and the fight for the conservation of forests. It was he who first made the suggestion of a national park around the Yosemite Valley, the control of which had been ceded to California. He was afterward active in the successful effort to have this valley receded by the State of California to the United States and put under control of the National Park authorities. He states that he was very materially assisted in this latter matter by E. H. Harriman, president of the Union Pacific Railroad, through his large acquaintance in the California legislature, and his deep concern in forest preservation.

As assistant editor and editor of a well known magazine, it was both natural and necessary that Mr. Johnson keep his hand on the pulse of public opinion and be constantly alert to understand the demands of his read-

ers. The publication of the "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War" was apparently not only his thought, but the success of it was largely the result of his effort; this is true also of the publication of the Century Dictionary. Interesting is Mr. Johnson's account of the suppression of the publication in "The Century Magazine" of Hale's interview with Kaiser Wilhelm.

While he seems to have had more or less to do with federal legislation and the methods of making laws at Washington, he does not appear to have been very much occupied with great public questions such as currency reform, tariff, relations of labor with capital, the prevention of monopoly, the regulation of railroads, etc. Apparently he is lacking in practical knowledge and comprehension of politics as that word is commonly used, and has taken only an amateurish sort of interest in the operations and methods of political parties and leaders.

Mr. Johnson's resentment at his treatment by a Senate Committee in connection with his testimony before the committee on the bill allowing the City of San Francisco to use the Hetch Hetchy Valley, a portion of the Yosemite, as a water supply for the city, is rather verdant. It was understood, he says, that his hearing was not to be official; moreover, the stenographic report contained glaring errors making him say diametrically the opposite of what he had said. He naïvely adds that he does not know "which of my opponents was responsible for this sharp practice".

We are given intimate, and in many instances delightful, pictures of well known literary men, including Holland, Gilder, Joel Chandler Harris (Uncle Remus), Edmund Clarence Stedman, Richard Henry Stoddard, Walt Whitman, James Russell Lowell, William Dean Howells, and Thomas Bailey Aldrich. Lowell is quoted as saying of Walt Whitman's verses: "It is not poetry at all." In reply to a suggestion that it was something between poetry and prose, he said, "There isn't anything between poetry and prose." Again Lowell, writing to Gilder and offering "The Century" some old letters for publication at fifty pounds, adds this postscript:

> If my wild demand bewilders,
> Think, 'tis only fifty pounds;
> Had I said as many Gilders,
> Where could such a sum be found?

Lowell, Mr. Johnson tells us, was sure that Browning, Tennyson, and George Eliot were Jews.

An amusing letter is mentioned from Kipling, then living in Vermont. In acknowledging a notice that he had been elected a member of The Century, Kipling remarks: "Now, as a private soldier said when they locked him up, 'Now I have a place to get drunk in.' "

To me it is remarkable that woman's suffrage is scarcely mentioned, or the great fight that was made for it and its accomplishment; nor do we find any comment upon the changed position of women with regard to social and political life. In fact the author's mind and sympathies do not seem to have turned to any extent toward humanitarian questions, and the great problem of human development and the rights of the masses and the betterment of their living conditions. He does not appear to have been interested in the realization of that concept of government which holds that "government was made for man and not man for government", and that civilization advances only as the average man gets such treatment under the laws and has such living conditions as the conscience and intelligence of the age demand.

Personally I like best the early part of the volume, its aroma of pioneer days, and wish that we might have been given more of it. But the book as a whole is undoubtedly a rich and valuable addition to the history of its author's times. I think it was some one of the ancients who said, "History is philosophy learned from examples", and any truthful presentation of the personages and manners of a period is a real contribution on this account. We are all under obligation to Mr. Johnson for having written his reminiscences.

Remembered Yesterdays. By Robert Underwood Johnson. Little, Brown and Co.