

Reticence and Ambition in The Education of Henry Adams (In Honour of Professor Kenji Noguchi and Professor Osamu Osaka On the Occasion of Their Retirement)

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Reticence and Ambition in *The Education of Henry Adams*

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In a letter to Henry James dated on May 6, 1908, Adams gave the reason why he decided to write an autobiography :

This volume is a mere shield of protection in the grave. I advise you to take your own life in the same way, in order to prevent biographers from taking it in theirs.¹⁾

Adams certainly wanted to “prevent biographers from taking” his life in theirs and by so doing he wanted to find some significance in his life and justify it. Yet strangely enough, the figure Henry Adams is sometimes hidden behind the curtain as the play *The Education of Henry Adams* is performed. It is as if someone else were the hero. *The Education* can never become a strong “shield of protection” in Adams’s grave, for Adams is far from being assertive in justifying his existence.

When Henry Adams decided to write an autobiography, he probably had Benjamin Franklin in mind. In the “Preface” of *The Education*, he refers to Franklin as a model of self-teaching (p. xxix).²⁾ He mentions Franklin as “one working model for high education” (*Ibid.*) and wishes that his autobiography will be useful to the young. In a letter dated January 1, 1909, he says :

In this suggestion of a possible means of introducing order and idea

1) *Henry Adams : Selected Letters* ed. by Ernest Samuels (Cambridge : Harvard Univ. Press, 1992), p. 488.

2) *The Education of Henry Adams* ed. by Ernest Samuels (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1918). The text of *The Education of Henry Adams* is identified in parentheses immediately after the quotations.

into the chaos of University education, I am inclined to think that only the defects of my old University training prevent my success in making myself intelligible. (p. 518)³⁾

Also quoting Jean Jacques Rousseau, Adams explains the Romantic idea of the self; the self tends to be erased by societal norms as one grows up and that secular ideas are inscribed on the purely blank sheet (*tabula rasa*) of the human mind. Education is the process of this inscribing and must be useful in fitting the young to changes of society. Echoing Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, he says:

The object of study is the garment, not the figure. The tailor adapts the manikin as well as the clothes to his patrons's wants. The tailor's [Adams's] object, in this volume [*The Education*], is to fit young men ... to be men of the world, equipped for any emergency (p. xxx)

Yet his education could never become a good mannequin. For, while Franklin and Rousseau lived during a rather stable Enlightenment period when rational thinking could improve one's own life, Adams lived during the Industrial Revolution in America when the old world of wisdom and art was collapsing.

Henry Adams, who was born into a prestigious presidential family, had sufficient ambition and expectation to become another great man. Yet this ambition, exposed to the enormous transformation of American society after the Civil War, became a failed attempt. Throughout his life from 1838 to 1918, Henry Adams tried to find the significance of education, or in his words, an "order" or "formula" of his own. He tried to identify himself. But changes caused by the automobile, electricity, steam, and radium were so rapid that his attempt eluded him. Though he never uses the word "disappointment" in *The Educa-*

3) "Appendix A," in *The Education*, p. 518.

tion, his reticence is a veiled disappointment with society and himself. Adams, in "Preface," admits that "the garment offered to them [the young] is meant to show the faults of the patchwork" (p. xxx).

The narration of *The Education* is in the third person singular. Though *The Education* is classified an autobiography, the first person singular "I" of Henry Adams never appears in the text. The title of the work signals the reticence of the author: the work is not offered as "The Autobiography of Henry Adams," as in Benjamin Franklin's; the typical information of autobiography is missing. The style of the third person singular is a typical technique to show the author's detachment, but it is not typical of an autobiography. He never calls himself "I" but he addresses himself in various ways : Adams calls himself a "private secretary" or "an American" during the Civil War years; "Adams" in chapters related to science and "Darwinism"; a "newspaperman" in the chapters, "The Press" and "President Grant" during the Washington years ; and "an elderly man" in the last chapters, including "Twilight." Removing all sensitive and emotional aspects from the work, he writes as if he were a spectator looking down from above. He argues about the pursuit of the significance of education, but he writes as if it belonged to someone else. This distance between himself and the work becomes wider as he grows older. The coexistence between action (practice) and thinking (theory) was the big theme of his search for education, but in the latter part of the work it is overtaken by the predominance of thought. He does not involve himself in action. He tends to be a bystander. The editor of the text, Ernest Samuels, quoting a Kansas critic's words, says, Henry Adams was "the only man in the world who could sit on a fence and watch him go by." (p. x)

Henry Adams was as complex a figure as the 20th century he saw : his modesty as a writer was accompanied by his pride and ambition. For one thing, while he was reticent in *The Education* about the validity of his education, he was ambitious about the reputation of

the book. After completing the work, he added an "Editor's Preface" signed by Henry Cabot Lodge, Adams's close friend and U.S. Senator. But this editor in fact was not Lodge but Adams himself. He wrote the manuscript of "Editor's Preface" for Lodge to sign. This is another example of the author's reticence. In contrast with the denial of authorial ego in "Editor's Preface," Adams writes his own "Preface" and quotes Jean Jacques Rousseau, Franklin, and Carlyle, thus trying to establish his originality. Adams holds double *persona* in "Lodge" and himself in two Prefaces and maintains balance between reticence and humility on one hand and ambition and originality on the other.

For another thing, while he proposes reform and orientation in educating the young, he asks his friends not to circulate the book :

this volume is supposed to be lent out only for correction, suggestion and amendment, so that you are invited to return it, with your marginal comments whenever you have done with it.

"A letter to Henry James," dated May 6, 1908. ⁴⁾

Contrary to his expectation, none of his friends returned his book. By the time of his death the reputation of *The Education* was so high that he could anticipate that his private edition would be published in the market. If Adams had *really* desired the complete privacy of *The Education*, why did "Lodge," Adams's persona, report that "the Institute of Architects," not Adams, "published the 'Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres'" and that "Already, the 'Education' had become almost as well known as the 'Chartres'" (p. xxviii) ? The double preface ("Editor's Preface" by "Lodge" and "Preface" by Adams himself) and the "Lodge" account of the reluctant publication do suggest Adams's special concern about the text. Throughout *The Education*, this recurrence of privacy and publicity, modesty and self-

4) *Henry Adams : Selected Letters*, pp. 487-488.

assertion, commitment and detachment, and reticence and ambition can be traced. Though the shades of the combined colors change by degrees, these themes are the points at which Adams's observation always terminates. *The Education* is a monologue by Adams. Yet he splits himself into two speakers even at the beginning. The doubling *persona* is not revealed in the first half of *The Education*, but it gradually reveals itself in the second. His intellect made him realize that his 18th century education (that is, his family's old-fashioned education) did not *fit* his times, yet at the same time, he feared being misread and muffled as a forgotten man on the side track.

I. The Era of Ambition

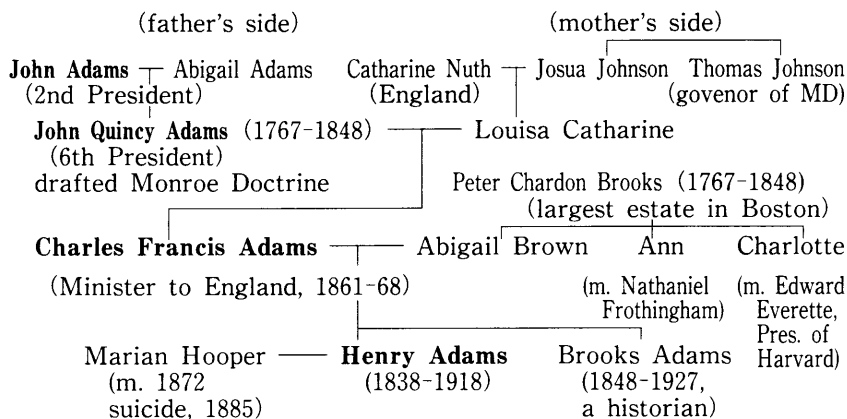
For this analysis, I divided *The Education* into two parts. The first half is about Adams's childhood and the Civil War and covers chapters 1 through 20 (pp. 1-313). The latter half is about the Chicago Exposition in 1893 and Adams's philosophical search for the law of history, covering chapters 21 to 35 (pp. 314-505). What is notable between the two parts is that there is a big gap or silence of 20 years (1871-1892). He neither mentions nor explains this silence at all in *The Education*. Leaving the chaos of the Civil War, the second half abruptly starts with the Industrial Revolution in America. It would appear that "nothing happened" in this curious gap. Yet, this demarcation also marks a shift in his narrative. While in the first half Adams maintains a concrete empirical record of historical events, the latter half becomes speculative abstract meditation. The year 1872 was when Adams married Marian Hooper, a daughter of the famous Boston oculist whose intellect Henry James had admired. During this 20 years of silence, Adams was an assistant professor of history at Harvard (1871-77) and produced numerous books, including *The History of the United States during the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison* (1889-1891) and *The Life of Albert Gallatin* and *The*

Writings of Albert Gallatin (1879). This blissful period ended with Marian Hooper's suicide on December 6, 1885. The fact that these fruitful years are *not* included in the text suggests that his reticence is far from ordinary. Adams needed more seven years to recover from the shock and resume writing. This twenty-year gap, missing in the text, further emphasizes the unfathomable emptiness of Adams's life. ⁵⁾

[Quincy years]

His great grandfather, John Adams, was the second President of the U.S. and campaigned for a second term against Thomas Jefferson. His grandfather, John Quincy Adams, also ran for a second term as the sixth President but was ousted by a common man, Andrew Jackson.

The genealogy of the Adamses⁶⁾



5) For the analysis of *form-as-message* in *The Education*, see the brilliant article by Hayden White, "Method and Ideology in Intellectual History : The Case of Henry Adams," in Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan eds., *Modern European Intellectual History : Reappraisals and New Perspectives* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 280-310, especially p. 300.

6) The genealogy is composed from information taken mainly from Chapters "Quincy" and "Boston" of *The Education*. Information about Marian Hooper, since it is not written in *The Education*, was added.

Throughout history, the Adams family was powerful in American diplomacy. John Adams signed the Declaration of Independence; John Quincy Adams, as Secretary of State under James Monroe (1817-25), drafted the Monroe Doctrine (1823); Charles Francis Adams was appointed Minister to England by President Lincoln. So it was natural that people around him said to Henry Adams, "You'll be thinkin' you'll be President too!" (p. 16).⁷⁾ Though Henry Adams did not go into diplomatic service, his interest was passed to his Harvard student and friend John Hay who advocated an "open door" policy to China.

The Adams family was mainly based in Boston. But John Quincy Adams' wife, Louisa Catharine, was from Maryland, so their child, Charles Francis Adams, was a half-Marylander who had a southern warm temperament. In *The Education*, Henry Adams describes an episode about General Robert E. Lee's son, Rooney Lee, at Harvard College. Adams says a Southerner had "no intellectual training," only temperament (pp. 57-58).⁸⁾ Yet he himself inherited southern blood from his grandmother and writes that "the freedom, openness, ... of nature and man [in the South], soothed his Johnson blood" (p. 45). Henry Adams's mind did not entirely belong to New England, either. His early years coincided with Transcendentalism and his aunt mar-

7) "The Irish gardener once said to the child: 'You'll be thinkin' you'll be President too!' The casualty of the remark made so strong an impression on his mind that he never forgot it." (p. 16) For the latest study on John Quincy Adams, see David W. McFadden, "John Quincy Adams, American Commercial Diplomacy, and Russia, 1809-1825," *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 66 (Dec., 1993), pp. 613-629. For the biography of Henry Adams in childhood, see Edward Chalfant, *Both Sides of the Ocean: A Biography of Henry Adams, His First Life 1838-1862* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Book, 1982). Chalfant plans to write a trilogy of Adams's life. The second volume was just published: *Better in Darkness: A Biography of Henry Adams, His Second Life, 1862-1891* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Book, 1994).

8) "Strictly, the Southerner had no mind; he had temperament. He was not a scholar; he had no intellectual training; he could not analyze an idea, and he could not even conceive of admitting two. . . ." (p. 58)

ried Nathaniel Frothingham, a biographer of Ralph Waldo Emerson, but he did not feel affinity with the Transcendentalists. He even called them "eccentric offshoots" (p. 27)⁹⁾ and Emerson "naïf" (p. 35).

[Civil War years]

After graduating from Harvard, Henry Adams worked as his father's private secretary and moved to England. This part of *The Education* is conventional in empirical narrative of history and is loved by diplomatic historians for its accurate record of interaction between England and the United States. Minister Adams carried the heavy burden of bargaining with the British government in order to get support for the Union cause.¹⁰⁾ Minister Adams was shown the cold shoulder by the English Establishment in 1861 because several battles, including Bull Run, were won by the South, and the war seemed to be going favorably for the South. The confederacy had also appealed for support from England, and Englishmen felt kinship with the South.

Yet American (that is, northern) policy during the war was not to seek English support but to have England remain neutral. Though Russell, Palmerston, and Gladstone wanted to intervene in the war and split the Union, Minister Adams endured the hard year of 1862 and succeeded in getting an announcement of neutrality in October. Henry Adams admired his father's composure as a diplomat: "Whatever the Minister thought, and certainly his thought was not less active than his son's, he showed no trace of excitement. His manner was the same as ever; his mind and temper were as perfectly balanced; not a word escaped, not a nerve twitched." (p. 115) Looking

9) "Dr. Channing, . . . R. E. Emerson, and other Boston ministers of the same school, would have commanded distinction in any society; but the Adamses had little or no affinity with the pulpit, and still less with its eccentric offshoots, like Theodore Parker, or Brook Farm, or the philosophy of Concord." (p. 27) In spite of his negative comments, Henry Adams was Christened by Nathaniel Frothingham, the minister of Boston's First Unitarian Church and the husband of Ann Brooks, one of Adams's mother's sisters.

back on the Civil War diplomacy in 1864, Henry Adams comments that he does not have his father's diplomatic flair by saying "the only character he never bore was that of diplomatist." (p. 194)

Adams learned of Lincoln's assassination with calmness while in Rome (Chapter 14 "Dilettantism"). He did not change his travel

10) The following is a chronology of the Civil War Years (1861-65) composed from Chapters "Diplomacy," "Foes or Friends," "Political Morality," and "The Battle of the Rams" of *The Education*.

- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1861 | 4 • 12 | Fort Sumter |
| | 5 • 1 | Minister Adams sailed for England (appointed by President Lincoln). Henry Adams accompanied him as private secretary. |
| | 5 • 13 | England recognized the belligerency of the Confederacy. Pro-Confederacy opinion in England was strong. |
| 1861 and 1862 • 4 | | Northern defeat at Bull Run |
| 1862 | | The hardest year for Minister Adams
(Power distribution in England, 1861-62) |
| | | Pro-Union (North) Pro-Confederacy (South) |
| | | 1) Monckton Milnes 1) Earl John Russell |
| | | (social power in London) (Foreign Secretary) |
| | | 2) William E. Forster 2) Lord Palmerston |
| | | 3) John Bright (Prime Minister) |
| | | 4) Richard Cobden 3) William Ewart Gladstone |
| | | 5) Lord Granville (Chancellor of the Exchequer) |
| 1862 • 9 | | Lord Granville opposed recognition of the Confederacy.
(p. 154) |
| 1862 • 9 • 22 | | The Emancipation Proclamation was announced by Lincoln to his Cabinet. |
| 1862 • 10 • 13 | | Russell's policy of intervention in the American war.
(supported by Palmerston and Gladstone)
Russell issued a call for the Cabinet to meet on October 23.
(not realized) (p. 157) |
| 1862 • 10 | | An announcement of British Cabinet: "The policy of the
[British] Government is a strict neutrality." (p. 160) |
| | • 10 | General Lee's (South) retreat into Virginia. (p. 154) |
| 1863 • 1 • 1 | | The Emancipation Proclamation took effect. |
| | • 7 • 1~3 | Battle of Gettysburg, the decisive battle for Northern victory. |

plans, and Minister Adams did not recall him to London. (p. 209) Contrary to the composure of Adams's mind, society after the Civil War was changing rapidly. Adams did not know what it would be like, but he knew that "His old education was finished" (p. 235) and that "he must set to work" to "begin a career of his own." (p. 210) The Civil War had created a new system, and the country would have to reorganize its machinery in theory and in practice. (p. 249)

Other private incidents in his post-Civil War years include the death of his eldest sister, Louisa Catherine Adams.¹¹⁾ Adams does not mention his marriage to Marian Hooper nor her suicide in *The Education* at all. Yet he spared as many as two pages for his eldest sister's tragic death (pp. 287-289), speculating about death and nature. It is intriguing to consider the contrast between Adams's silence about Marian Hooper and the detailed observations on Louisa Catherine's death. Henry Adams went to Washington D.C. after the war and enjoyed his social life with Marian Hooper. In Washington he met President Grant and associated closely with young John Hay and the people at the State Department. Though he was not employed, he collected information for articles to be published afterward, including the sensational, "The New York Gold Conspiracy," about Jay Gould's buy-out (1870). In 1871 he accepted an assistant professorship at Harvard and reluctantly left Washington.

Looking back on his Harvard years, Henry Adams enumerates the

11) The brothers and sisters of Henry Adams are as follows :

- (1) Louisa Catherine Adams(1831-1870) Died of tetanus (lockjaw). Louisa Catherine was "energetic, sympathetic and intelligent" (p. 85). Married Charles Kuhn, she influenced young Henry Adams in Europe. Her death is described in detail in *The Education*, pp. 287-289.
- (2) John Quincy Adams (1833-1894)
- (3) Charles Francis Adams (1835-1915)
- (4) **Henry Adams** (1838-1918)
- (5) Arthur Adams (1841-1846)
- (6) Mary Adams (1846-1928)
- (7) Brooks Adams (1848-1927)

negative aspects of his university education : "of all his many educations, Adams thought that of school-teacher the thinnest." (p. 307)

The lecture-room was futile enough, but the faculty-room was worse. American society feared total wreck in the maelstrom of political and corporate administration, but it could not look for help to college dons. (p. 307)

Though he says, "he was obliged to scribble a book review," and that for seven years "he wrote nothing" (p. 307), those Harvard years were the most ambitious and productive of his life. The faculty-room at Harvard greeted such professors as William James, John Fiske, and James Russell Lowell. Adams served as a Harvard professor until 1877, but the first half of *The Education* ends with the year 1871. During the absence of twenty years, Adams's role in the work shifted from an explorer of education to a mere spectator. His focus is no longer *his* education, but an observation of his mind. His viewpoint becomes introspective. Yet the world was changing drastically while Adams kept silence from 1871 to 1892.

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No president epitomizes the spectacular transformation of the country between the Civil War and 1900. Adams writes, "One might search the whole list of Congress, Judiciary, and Executive during the twenty-five years from 1870 to 1895, and find little but damaged reputation. The period is poor in purpose and barren in results." (p. 294) Instead, the popular conception of this period is formed by the image of the millionaire.¹²⁾ In 1865, America was a "society

12) For an explanation of the Gilded Age, see Richard Weiss, "Horatio Alger, Jr., and the Gilded Age," in F. C. Jaher ed., *The Age of Industrialism in*

without a core"¹³). American society lacked the political and judicial centers of authority that might have given order to change. The belief in middle class self-help and hard work remained unchanged in both city and country, but the 19th century was a period in which old village values were becoming hopelessly incompatible with the corporate state. Farm products were priced by unknown foreign forces in the world market, and the government fell disastrously behind the sweeping changes of industrial society, leaving the mass of people victims of outmoded rules.

The South became "a giant pawn shop"¹⁴) after the Civil War and had to fight with financiers. Southern and Western farmers were constantly suffering from debts incurred by investment in machinery, from the low price of products, and from world competition. They needed inflation, which would have reduced the actual amount at the time of payment. Yet the government, backed by Eastern bankers, was reluctant to exhaust the gold supply by specie resumption and opposed to free silver coinage, which would fluctuate with the market. Free silver coinage became a center of argument after 1875, and bimetallism fought in vain against the Gold Standard until 1893. Farmers had to struggle with bankers, who "*produced nothing*," "yet seemed to control everything."¹⁵) In Adams's words, "The world, after 1865, became a bankers' world" (p. 247).

The United States experienced the Industrial Revolution in only a generation, while Britain did it in a century and a half. The railway system developed nationwide after 1870. In industry, the source of

America (N.Y. : Macmillan Company, 1968). For an overview of the 19th-century U.S. millionaires, see Matthew Josephson, *The Robber Barons* (N.Y. : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1934 & 1962), especially pp. 177-289.

13) Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (N.Y. : Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 12.

14) Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment* (N.Y. : Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), p. 22.

15) Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, p. 98.

energy moved from handwork to coal, iron, and steam. Without a sense of orientation, Adams felt uneasy and worried :

the result of this revolution on a survivor from the fifties resembled the action of the earthworm ; he twisted about, in vain, to recover his starting point ; he could no longer see his own trail.... (p. 238)

Though the world around him was undergoing an enormous transformation, it no longer evoked his ambition. With the death of Marian Hooper in 1885, Adams's mind hovered over the world, never committed to it.

II. The Era of Reticence and Detachment

[Chicago World Exposition]

In the latter half of the work, Henry Adams sees America in the 1890's in terms of science and diplomacy. His vision is somewhat detached from the world in which he lives. During his twenty years of silence his father and mother died (p. 318) ; his old Europe seemed to have been stationary for 20 years (p. 318), but modern America left him far behind. The power of technology was leading American society, while in world diplomacy, Russia and Japan were trying to expand their influence over China. In the chapter, "Vis Inertiae" (force of inertia), Adams implies that the power of inertia well described the sleeping countries of Russia and China. He says, "The Atlantic [the U.S.] would have to deal with a vast continental mass of inert motion, like a glacier." (p. 440) Observing the drastic transformation of American society, Adams held no public office and saw his position ironically: "Why had no President ever cared to employ him? There never was a day when he would have refused to perform any duty that the Government imposed on him, but the American

Government never to his knowledge imposed duties." (p. 322)

When Adams went to the Chicago Exposition, he realized the gap between his outmoded education and modern science. He did not know where the American people were going. As a historian of the Middle Ages, Adams, who "had never touched an electric battery" nor had any notion of a *watt* or an *ampere*, "had no choice but to sit down on the steps," ashamed of his "childlike ignorance." (p. 342) The second half of *The Education* is characterized by metahistorical speculation and darkening pessimism.

What strikes Henry Adams's mind at the Exposition is the dynamos. The dynamo for Adams is the symbol of the scientific achievements of the Industrial Revolution. Even though the dynamo revolves at an enormous speed, it barely makes noise and can be scarcely heard. This strange combination of velocity and serenity evokes a philosophical speculation for Adams. "Before the end, one began to pray to it; inherited instinct taught the natural expression of man before silent and infinite force." (p. 380)

For Adams, a medieval historian, it is the Virgin that symbolizes infinity and force. In the chapter "The Dynamo and the Virgin," he compares the two. In history, anyone brought up among Puritans knew that sex was sin, but Adams points out that in all previous ages sex was strength (p. 384). In America, few artists insisted on the power of sex, as the classic art at Louvre and Chartres had always done. "An American Virgin would never dare command; an American Venus would never dare exist." (p. 385); Americans never thought of Venus and Virgin as forces and no American was ever truly afraid of either. The strength of a symbol is the force that a man does not realize until he has lost it. The power of the Virgin is different from the power of a railway train :

They felt a railway train as power; yet they, and all other artists, constantly complained that the power embodied in a railway train

could never be embodied in art. All the steam in the world could not, like the Virgin, build Chartres. ... The symbol was force, as a compass-needle or a triangle was force, as the mechanist might prove by losing, and nothing could be gained by ignoring their value. (p. 388)

Adams knew American society was moving toward the power of "a railway train," while he himself remained in art. He knew that his pursuit of power for forty-five years proved to be futile. A man in 1850 had the same physical force as a man in 1900, yet science and technology increased man's ability to control force. Adams was interested in the power of art that could build Chartres, and he believed in the power of symbols. Yet another power, technology, enormously controlled American society. He himself had lived faithfully as a historian, but the power of technology had pushed him to the side track. "The historical mind can think only in historical processes, and probably this was the first time since historians existed, that any of them had sat down helpless before a mechanical sequence." (p. 342) He knew only too well that he was totally out of context in the Industrial Revolution.

[The law of history]

After visiting the Chicago Exposition, Adams tries to find a law of history that will give order to a chaotic society. He tries to understand how the energy of 1838 has been transformed into the new energy of 1904. When Adams was a boy in Boston, he had not heard of dynamos nor automobiles nor radium (p. 383). Yet at Chicago, "he found himself lying in the Gallery of Machines at the Great Exposition of 1900, with his historical neck broken by the sudden irruption of forces totally new." (p. 382)

He asks, "What is the significance of education?" Education should be useful for one's life, shouldn't it? He answers, "Education should try to lessen the obstacles, diminish the friction, invigorate the energy,

and should train minds to react.” (p. 314) Nevertheless, Adams in 1900 realized that the education he had received had very little relation to the education he needed (p. 53). The year 1838, when Adams was born, was the year Ralph Waldo Emerson delivered “The Divinity School Address” and American society was still medievalistic. Yet his speculative mind in 1900 was totally incompatible with the age of steam, radium, and automobiles :

If I could live to the end of my century—1938—I am sure I should see the silly bubble explode. ... Out of a medieval, primitive, crawling infant of 1838, to find oneself a howling, steaming, ... radiumating, automobiling maniac of 1904 exceeds belief.

“A letter to Mrs. Edward Fell,” dated June 27, 1904 (p. ix)

From this transformation of society, Adams tries to learn “running order through chaos, direction through space, discipline through freedom, unity through multiplicity” (p. 12). Though he perceives “Chaos was the law of nature ; Order was the dream of man”(p. 451), he searches for “order through chaos.” He tries to identify himself and invent “a formula of his own.”¹⁶⁾ His shrewd mind knows that the old formulas have failed, and a new one has to be made.

What should be noted here is that Henry Adams never tries to discover a universal law of history, but tries to invent *his* own formula. He says there is no absolute truth. He says the historian must not try to know what is truth ; for if he cares for his truths, he is certain to falsify his facts. So, his law or order of history is a

16) “Every man with self-respect enough to become effective, . . . has had to account to himself for himself somehow, and to invent *a formula of his own* for his universe, if the standard formulas failed. . . . The old formulas had failed, and a new one had to be made. . . . One sought no absolute truth. One sought only a spool on which to wind the thread of history without breaking it. Among indefinite possible orbits, one sought the orbit which would best satisfy the observed movement” (p. 472) (emphasis added)

kind of "spool" on which to wind the thread, and even that is only one "orbit" of numerous orbits (p. 472).¹⁶ Yet whatever spool or orbit he could invent, Henry Adams knew his education was not on a safe footing of theory and practice. In the chapter, "The Height of Knowledge," he compares his education with the one of John Hay. Adams thinks Hay achieved theory and practice in diplomacy and knew both the forces and the men in it. (p. 424) In contrast with Hay, Adams saw his education as "grotesque" and his ignorance as appalling. "He seemed to know nothing—to be groping in darkness—to be falling forever in space." (p. 424) Adams knew he learned only theory and no practice.

One method Henry Adams takes to invent "a formula of his own" is to measure man "from a fixed point." (p. 434) As a historian he tries to understand the law of history from the years 1150-1250.

"Setting himself to the task, he began a volume that he mentally knew as 'Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres: a Study of Thirteenth-Century Unity.'" (p. 435) From this "fixed point" he locates himself in a new century and writes "The Education of Henry Adams: a Study of Twentieth-Century Multiplicity." Looking back on history after 1500, he says the speed of scientific progress was so rapid that it far surpassed man's gait of knowledge. (p. 484) Before Adams was 6 years old, he has seen four impossibilities made actual—the ocean-steamer, the railway, the electric telegraph, and the Daguerreotype. (p. 494) New forces in chemistry and physics were discovered, including radiation. Impossibilities no longer existed.

Henry Adams points out that, "The child born in 1900 would ... be born into a new world which would not be a unity but a multiple." (p. 457) But Adams himself feels nostalgic for the 19th century and has "a vehement wish to escape." "He greatly preferred his 18th century education when God was a father and nature a mother." (p. 458) He says his outmoded education is useless in the new century: "He had never been able to acquire knowledge, still less to impart it." (p. 496) "For this new creation, born since 1900, a historian

[Adams] asked no longer to be teacher or even friend; he asked only to be a pupil, and promised to be docile, for once, even though trodden under foot." (p. 496)

Throughout *The Education* the predominant tone is silence, detachment, and darkness. Though he sees the 20th century as promising for young people, he is excluded from the scene. He compares his life to "sunless sea"(p. 430): he dives for pearls, never to find them. In the chapter, "Twilight," Adams finds himself alone in a wilderness: "His walk soon becomes solitary, leading further and further into a wilderness where twilight is short and the shadows are dense." (p. 395) In the depth of wilderness, Adams sees that "all the roads ran about in every direction, overrunning, dividing, subdividing, stopping abruptly, vanishing slowly, with side paths that led nowhere, and sequences that could not be proved." (p. 400)

Amidst complexity incomprehensible to him, Adams regards himself as a useless dove 60 years old trying in vain to find a resting perch. (p. 357) He says "the man of sixty who wishes consideration had better hold his tongue." (p. 358) His mind has struggled like a frightened bird to escape the chaos that caged it. And, "after sixty or seventy years of growing astonishment," his mind quietly "wakes to find itself looking blankly into the void of death." (p. 460) The work ends in the darkness and serenity of Paris. Hearing of the death of John Hay, Henry Adams looks back on his life :

It was not even the suddenness of the shock, or the sense of void, that threw Adams into the depths of Hamlet's Shakespearean silence in the full flare of Paris frivolity in its favorite haunt where worldly vanity reached its most futile climax in human history; it was only the quiet summons to follow—the assent to dismissal.
(p. 505)

The Education of Henry Adams reflects not only Adams's life itself but also his vigilant observation of the social context. His education

as a member of the 19th-century elite may not have been the best education for him, but the fruit of his education was enormous: his understanding ranges from American diplomacy, history, and literature through Darwinism, physics, chemistry, and science. Just as Adams struggled with the complexity of a new century, we, the readers, have to overcome the complexity of the work. *The Education of Henry Adams* is a masterpiece of intellectual history in that it bridges a broad range of subjects in one book and shows how one intellectual identified himself in the rapid stream of history.

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