

'THE EDUCATION OF HENRY ADAMS'

BY HENRY OSBORN TAYLOR

I

LITTLE will be said of Henry Adams that he would not have deprecated. It is not easy to avoid misinterpretation and perversity of speech touching one who was always puzzling over life, and presenting himself, as well as the Universe, for a puzzle to his friends. Perhaps he was less of an enigma to his nieces, by blood or adoption, upon whom in his latter years he leaned so charmingly for sympathy and care. He confided in the wisdom of women, generalizing from an elder sister's happy adjustment of a plan of travel in his youth: 'It was his first experiment in giving the reins to a woman, and he was so much pleased with the results that he never wanted to take them back. In after life he made a general law of experience — no woman had ever driven him wrong, no man had ever driven him right.'

The same whimsical admiration seems to inspire his delightful appreciation of the Virgin's rôle in mediæval culture presented in his *Mont St. Michel and Chartres*, and is returned to, *con amore*, in the volume giving the title to this article. But mere man, though he feel the affection of an old pupil, must at least be honest when writing about Mr. Adams; for no member of the Adams family could endure a dishonest word spoken of him, or even of the way in which he may have posed before himself and the world.

Perhaps no other American has left such a mass of clever writing, evolved through a life of thoughtful research and curious reflection, and has died so unrecognized by the public, educated or otherwise. It was not long after the death of his brother Charles Francis, that Henry Adams said to me at his home in Washington, 'The cab-drivers point out this house as the residence of the late Charles Francis Adams!'

Is it because the serious study of American history — other than local — has so few votaries that such a work as Henry Adams's nine-volumed *History of the United States, 1807-1817*, with its ancillary lives of *Albert Gallatin* and *John Randolph*, and publication of *Documents*, should have drawn so small attention to the writer? And to one who had written admirably in the reviews, and had edited the *North American*? At all events, with the publication of these works, he abandoned the political history of the United States for the more succulent æsthetic and human values recoverable from the European Middle Ages. But Mr. Adams no longer 'published': he merely 'printed,' in order to obtain, as he said, the criticism of his friends upon the *Mont St. Michel* and the *Education*. He made no effort to be read. Did he care? He says not, in a letter: 'I am satisfied that it is immaterial whether one man or a thousand or a hundred thousand read one's books. The author is as safe as the seventeenth-century cler-

gyman who printed his Sermon on Righteousness.'

A born 'intellectual,' Henry Adams was a virtuoso in writing, caring always for form, and possessing an in-born or sedulously acquired aptitude for the phrase and for the artistic and effective paragraph. There is little more perfect in American literature than the opening chapter of the *Education*, telling of his childhood's summers passed in Quincy at his grandfather's, who did not die till Henry was ten years old.

The house was on the hill . . . with a far view eastward over Quincy Bay, and northward over Boston. Till his twelfth year, the child passed his summers there, and his pleasures of childhood mostly centred in it. Of education he had as yet little to complain. Country schools were not very serious. Nothing stuck to the mind except home impressions, and the sharpest were those of kindred children; but as influences that warped a mind, none compared with the mere effect of the back of the President's bald head, as he sat in his pew on Sundays, in line with that of President Quincy, who, though some ten years younger, seemed to children about the same age. Before railways entered the New England town, every parish church showed half-a-dozen of these leading citizens, with gray hair, who sat on the main aisle in the best pews, and had sat there, or in some equivalent dignity, since the time of St. Augustine, if not since the glacial epoch. It was unusual for boys to sit behind a President grandfather, and to read over his head the tablet in memory of a President great-grandfather, who had 'pledged his life, his fortune, and his sacred honor' to secure the independence of his country, and so forth; but boys naturally supposed, without much reasoning, that other boys had the equivalent of President grandfathers, and that churches would always go on, with the baldheaded leading citizens on the main aisle, and Presidents or their equivalents on the walls. 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 im-

pression on his mind that he never forgot it. He could not remember ever to have thought on the subject; to him, that there should be a doubt of his being President was a new idea. What had been would continue to be. He doubted neither about Presidents nor about Churches, and no one suggested at that time a doubt whether a system of society which had lasted since Adam would outlast one Adams more.

The portrait of his grandmother is a marvel of finesse and tenderness: —

The Madam was a little more remote than the President, but more decorative. She stayed much in her own room with the Dutch tiles, looking out on her garden with the box walks, and seemed a fragile creature to a boy who sometimes brought her a note or a message, and took distinct pleasure in looking at her delicate face under what seemed to him very becoming caps. He liked her refined figure; her gentle voice and manner; her vague effect of not belonging there, but to Washington or to Europe, like her furniture, and writing-desk with little glass doors above and little eighteenth-century volumes in old binding, labelled Peregrine Pickle or Tom Jones or Hannah More.

Try as she might, the Madam could never be Bostonian, and it was her cross in life, but to the boy it was her charm. Even at that age, he felt drawn to it. The Madam's life had been in truth far from Boston. She was born in London in 1775, daughter of Joshua Johnson, an American merchant, brother of Governor Thomas Johnson of Maryland, and Catherine Nuth, of an English family in London. Driven from England by the revolutionary war, Joshua Johnson took his family to Nantes, where they remained till the peace. The girl Louisa Catherine was nearly ten years old when brought back to London, and her sense of nationality must have been confused; but the influence of the Johnsons and the services of Joshua obtained for him from President Washington the appointment of Consul in London on the organization of the government in 1790.

In 1794 President Washington appointed John Quincy Adams minister to the Hague.

He was twenty-seven years old when he returned to London, and found the Consul's house a very agreeable haunt. Louisa was then twenty.

At that time, and long afterwards, the Consul's house, far more than the Minister's, was the centre of contact for travelling Americans, either official or other. The Legation was a shifting point, between 1785 and 1815; but the Consulate, far down in the City, near the Tower, was convenient and inviting; so inviting that it proved fatal to young Adams. Louisa was charming, like a Romney portrait, but among her many charms that of being a New England woman was not one. The defect was serious. Her future mother-in-law, Abigail, a famous New England woman whose authority over her turbulent husband, the second President, was hardly so great as that which she exercised over her son, the sixth to be, was troubled by the fear that Louisa might not be made of stuff stern enough, or brought up in conditions severe enough, to suit a New England climate, or to make an efficient wife for her paragon son, and Abigail was right on that point, as on most others where sound judgment was involved; but sound judgment is sometimes a source of weakness rather than of force, and John Quincy already had reason to think that his mother held sound judgments on the subject of daughters-in-law, which human nature, since the fall of Eve, made Adams helpless to realise.

Being three thousand miles away from his mother, and equally far in love, he married Louisa in London, July 26, 1797, and took her to Berlin to be the head of the United States Legation. During three or four exciting years, the young bride lived in Berlin; whether she was happy or not, whether she was content or not, whether she was socially successful or not, her descendants did not surely know; but in any case she could by no chance have become educated there for a life in Quincy or Boston.

In 1801 the overthrow of the Federalist party drove her and her husband to America, and she became at last a member of the Quincy household; but by that time her children needed all her attention, and she remained there, with occasional winters in

Boston and Washington, till 1809. Her husband was made Senator in 1803, and in 1809 was appointed Minister to Russia. She went with him to St. Petersburg, taking her baby, Charles Francis, born in 1807; but broken-hearted at having to leave her two older boys behind. The life at St. Petersburg was hardly gay for her; they were far too poor to shine in that extravagant society; but she survived it, though her little girl baby did not, and in the winter of 1814-15, alone with the boy of seven years old, crossed Europe from St. Petersburg to Paris, in her travelling-carriage, passing through the armies, and reaching Paris in the *Cent Jours* after Napoleon's return from Elba. Her husband next went to England as Minister, and she was for two years at the Court of the Regent.

In 1817 her husband came home to be Secretary of State, and she lived for eight years in F Street, doing her work of entertainer for President Monroe's administration. Next she lived four miserable years in the White House. When that chapter was closed in 1829, she had earned the right to be tired and delicate, but she still had fifteen years to serve as wife of a Member of the House, after her husband went back to Congress in 1833. Then it was that the little Henry, her grandson, first remembered her, from 1843 to 1848, sitting in her panelled room, at breakfast, with her heavy silver tea-pot and sugar-bowl and cream-jug, which came afterwards to him and still exist somewhere as an heirloom of the modern safety-vault. By that time she was seventy years old or more, and thoroughly weary of being beaten about a stormy world. To the boy she seemed singularly peaceful, a vision of silver gray, presiding over her old President and her Queen Anne mahogany; an exotic, like her Sèvres china; an object of deference to every one, and of great affection to her son Charles; but hardly more Bostonian than she had been fifty years before, on her wedding-day, in the shadow of the Tower of London.

This portrait of an exquisite grandmother is a parallel to the writer's appreciation of the mediæval Virgin. There was never a touch of cynicism or disillusionment in anything he had to

say of symbolical or dead women, any more than in his conversation with their living daughters. Men were less convincingly admirable; yet penetrating and subtle sketches of men follow through this book, surpassing in charm and psychological quality those which make the oases in Lord Morley's recent volumes of *Reminiscences*. The elucidation of the character and mentality of his father, Charles Francis Adams, Senior, is very careful and quite different from the characterization of him in the writings of another son, Charles Francis. Henry writes: —

His father's character was therefore the larger part of his education, as far as any single person affected it, and for that reason, if for no other, the son was always a much interested critic of his father's mind and temper. Long after his death as an old man of eighty, his sons continued to discuss this subject with a good deal of difference in their points of view. To his son Henry, the quality that distinguished his father from all the other figures in the family group, was that, in his opinion, Charles Francis Adams possessed the only perfectly balanced mind that ever existed in the name. For a hundred years, every newspaper scribbler had, with more or less obvious excuse, derided or abused the older Adamses for their want of judgment. They abused Charles Francis for his judgment. Naturally they never attempted to assign values to either; that was the children's affair; but the traits were real. Charles Francis Adams was singular for mental poise, — absence of self-assertion or self-consciousness, — the faculty of standing apart without seeming aware that he was alone, — a balance of mind and temper that neither challenged nor avoided notice, nor admitted question of superiority or inferiority, of jealousy, of personal motives, from any source, even under great pressure. This unusual poise of judgment and temper, ripened by age, became the more striking to his son Henry as he learned to measure the mental faculties themselves, which were in no way exceptional either

for depth or range. Charles Francis Adams's memory was hardly above the average; his mind was not bold like his grandfather's or restless like his father's, or imaginative or oratorical — still less mathematical; but it worked with singular perfection, admirable self-restraint, and instinctive mastery of form. Within its range it was a model.

II

Evidently the foil to his father's personality in Henry Adams's mind, was the more resplendent figure of Charles Sumner, the object of the youth's loving, but passing admiration. According to the analysis in the *Education*, Sumner's friendship for the elder C. F. Adams seems to have rather worse than tottered when President Lincoln, in April, 1861, appointed Adams Minister to England. Ignoring or ignorant of Sumner's disapproval, Mr. Adams accepted the appointment, and took with him his son Henry as private secretary. Years of preëminent service were now to follow, rendered by the father to his country, while for the son of twenty-three they made the chief obvious episode of a life. His impression of their events is given in a tense and dramatic narrative, which, as he protests, 'is not a story of the diplomatic adventures of Charles Francis Adams, but of his son Henry's adventures in search of an education.' Yet the temperamental presentation does but enhance the master-interest of the diplomatic parable.

It opens with humorous pathos, the minister on his voyage recalling how his grandfather had sailed in 1778 'on a diplomacy of adventure,' taking his son John Quincy, then eleven years of age; how his father, that same John Quincy, again had sailed for Russia in 1809, with himself a baby, 'almost as much of an adventurer as John Adams before him, and almost as successful. He thought it natural that the gov-

ernment should send him out as an adventurer also, with a twenty-three-year-old son.'

This final private secretary had learned reticence, and not to grumble, by the time 'the party landed at Liverpool, May 13, 1861, and went straight up to London: a family of early Christian martyrs about to be flung into an arena of lions, under the glad eyes of Tiberius Palmerston.'

Lord Palmerston had arranged the ceremony, the immolation — consisting in the official announcement that England recognized the belligerency of the Confederacy. Whatever his father felt and concealed, the thud produced a dulness of comprehension in the son. He had all his thinking to reverse, and now must learn that nobody in England

doubted that Jefferson Davis had made or would make a nation, and nearly all were glad of it, though not often saying so. They mostly imitated Palmerston, who, according to Mr. Gladstone, 'desired the severance as a diminution of a dangerous power, but prudently held his tongue.' The sentiment of anti-slavery had disappeared. Lord John Russell, as Foreign Secretary, had received the rebel emissaries, and had decided to recognise their belligerency before the arrival of Mr. Adams, in order to fix the position of the British Government in advance. The recognition of independence would then become an understood policy; a matter of time and occasion.

It may be as well to remark here that the passage just quoted looks upon English sentiment from a London standpoint, and ignores the friendliness of other parts of England — of the Lancashire cotton-spinners for example, who, against their palpable interests and with ruin staring them in the face, upheld the Union cause. The private secretary stranded in London was not likely to learn of this. Officially obliged to go wherever his father

or mother needed escort, the young man keenly felt his social isolation, which might also be some comfort to him as, at the end of his first season, 'he hugged himself in his solitude when the story of the battle of Bull Run appeared in the *Times*.' The minister's continuance in London seemed precarious enough. 'For the next year they went on only from week to week, ready to leave England at once, and never assuming more than three months for their limit. Europe was waiting to see them go.'

This was not to be. Even the affair of Mason and Slidell was weathered. The minister was lucky in his opponents—Mr. Mason for example. His own position in London gradually improved. At least he was not open to ridicule. Society took on the habit of accepting him, of treating him cordially 'as, by birth and manners, one of themselves.' Friends, strong and useful, began to show themselves—Monckton Milnes and William E. Forster, whose portraits are duly given. 'Milnes was the good-nature of London; the Gargantuan type of its refinement and coarseness; the most universal figure of May Fair.'

And then, those pillars of defense and engines of offense as well, John Bright and Richard Cobden. These last two 'took bluntly the side of the Union against Palmerston, whom they hated. Strangers to London society, they were at home in the American Legation, delightful dinner-company, talking always with reckless freedom.' They were friendly with the young man, who also began to make friends of his own. But he longed to break away — to go home!

'Of the year 1862 Henry Adams could never think without a shudder.' There in London he did not hate the rebels: he hated the British government — its Palmerston, and its Lord

John Russell, whose 'form of defense,' for example, in the matter of the sailing of the *Alabama* from Liverpool, 'covered intent to kill.' Through a mordant analysis of facts, the book shows the persistently hostile conduct of Lord John, scarcely veiled in an obliquity of statement, which Gladstone threw to the winds in his famous, subsequently apologized for, indiscretion of October 7, 1862.

Obviously Minister Adams had need of all his friends and all his collectedness to maintain himself in the face of hostile sentiment and unfriendly action. Very tense are these pages, through which may be traced the painful amelioration of the situation. We feel the anxiousness of the Minister's contention with Lord Palmerston and Lord John Russell, the stiffening of his support from Secretary Seward; we note the sending over of efficient Americans, like Thurlow Weed, to aid his efforts, the reaction within the British Cabinet, the resounding blows of Bright, the strengthening news of Vicksburg and Gettysburg — all of which enabled Minister Adams to win 'the battle of the rams,' and prevent the sailing, from the Lairds' yards at Birkenhead, of the two armored cruisers intended to break the blockade of the Southern coast. The crisis was past, and the four-years' tension of nerve relaxed.

III

Much could be quoted from these pages giving the turns of the diplomatic drama, and the diversions of the private secretary in the company of an increasing number of attractive friends. But the story of his further intellectual fortunes draws us on, the story of an Education, which the book professes to be.

The lessons of diplomacy had inter-

jected queer disturbing elements into the vacuum of Bostonian adolescence. It was all unsatisfactory. The writer's frequent reiteration of his failure to get this education need not intrigue us; for the education which Henry Adams was to seek through experience of men and the reading of many books meant, not only personal enlightenment, but a rational explanation of the World. This becomes more evidently the theme of the latter half of the book, where nothing correspondingly concrete succeeds the exciting diplomatic narrative and the idyllic picture of a childhood. One may recall how the Voltairean wanderings of the second part of the *Roman de la Rose* follow the *precieux* but lovely idyl with which the poem opens.

Sir Charles Lyell was intimate at the Legation, and Henry, impelled by admiration for the great geologist, reviewed the new edition of Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, in an article for the *North American*. He became absorbed in Darwinism, which he professes not to have understood. Yet he drew the stimuli of its facts and inductions into his own perplexed thinking upon humanity. Perils attend the lay endeavor to read the concepts and principles of physical science into the lessons of human experience; they are bravely incurred by Mr. Adams. 'At the very outset Adams struck on Sir Charles's Glacial Theory or theories. He was ignorant enough to think that the glacial epoch looked like a chasm between him and a uniformitarian world. If the glacial period was uniformity, what was catastrophe?' In later life Henry Adams was to become the close friend of another geologist, Clarence King, whose memory and *mots* are still green. He does not give in his *Education* the frivolous explanation of the Boston climate offered by his friend: 'Boston was 1,387,453 years

under the ice; and then the Adamases came.'

It is well to remember that the mental progress or intellectual bafflings recorded here are given as they returned to the writer when he was an old man. Thus they came to him in retrospection when he was writing *The Education of Henry Adams: a Study of Twentieth Century Multiplicity*. He set them down as they appeared to him through the transforming distance, as he looked back upon his earlier self wandering through that faded labyrinth of fact and lucubration, seeking some light of universal, or at least rational, purpose. In the later time heart-breaking domestic affliction goaded him to the quest, yet held too sad a barrier to his eyes. The real refuge was to be consideration, and whatever else is shadowed in that St. Gaudens statue in the Rock Hill Cemetery in Washington — at the foot of which now Henry Adams also lies.

But more tangible labors had actually filled out his life and ministered to its content. For Adams was a man of industry, always doing more work than he confessed to. With him all facts had to be inter-related into meaning and significance. 'For facts as such I have a profound contempt,' he said one day in his classroom; just as in his *Education* he remarks that, 'nothing in education is so astonishing as the amount of ignorance it accumulates in the form of inert facts.' He taught history at Harvard from 1870 to 1877, at the latter date intimating to me, disappointed of his teaching for my coming senior year, that he had been professor as long as one ought to be. He says in his book that he left with a sense of failure; but it certainly was far from that in the convictions of his students. He was the first teacher of history at Harvard to discard the textbook, and put his students to work for themselves.

Clarence King, John La Farge, and John Hay were the chief friends and outer luminaries of Mr. Adams's later life. They made a rare quartette.

Of all the men who had deeply affected their friends since 1850 John La Farge was certainly the foremost, and for Henry Adams, who had sat at his feet since 1872, the question how much he owed La Farge could be answered only by admitting that he had no standard to measure it by. Of all his friends La Farge alone owned a mind complex enough to contrast against the commonplaces of American uniformity.

Arcades ambo! No one ever thought of plumbing John La Farge, or Henry Adams either. But the former — artist always, and wonderful discourser — 'repulsed argument.' On a trip to the South Seas taken by the two together, La Farge in the warm Tahiti nights, would tell his companion, 'Adams, you reason too much.' One night, after an argument, La Farge dreamed that he was disturbed by the *mind* of Henry Adams rattling around the room. It turned out to be a rat. Apropos of this dream and of certain chapters in our book, we may say that the Universe is so big that one's mind is sure to rattle round it, unless thought encyst itself in some strayed fragment, which it can never quite correlate with the whole. Nearer the La Fargean vein is a bit of an old man's funny letter written by Mr. Adams in April two years ago: —

DEAR INFANT . . . Yesterday I walked in the spring woods, and met a fly. To that fly I said: 'Fly! do you want me to tell you the truth about yourself?' And that fly winked at me — carefully — and said: 'You be damned.' — They have told me that just seventy-eight times. They are not tired, but I am.

But the latter part of the book does not lack a potent coherency, given it by the deft union of two connected themes, both of them prophetic of the

present position and function of the United States. In 1884 Adams and his friend Hay built themselves adjoining houses on Lafayette Square in Washington, and spent there the greater part of the years still falling to them. Mr. Adams was always intimate with men who guided events in Washington, if not with the 'best-sellers' there. From these surroundings, but more distinctly from the vantage-ground of his own study and reflection, he lays before us the progressing grades of self-consciousness through which the United States came to recognize itself as a world-power and undertook to act accordingly. This theme weaves itself around an affectionate exposition — glorification, indeed — of the career of John Hay as Ambassador to England and afterwards as Secretary of State.

Even then, twenty years ago, it was the 'sudden appearance of Germany as the grizzly terror' which 'frightened England into America's arms.' 'For the first time in his life,' says Mr. Adams, 'he felt a sense of possible purpose working itself out in history.' This was also the time of the Spanish War.

Next came the summer of 1900, with its fantastic doings at Peking, followed by the astoundingly successful moves of Hay — and purpose continued to shine through history. Incidentally the work was killing Hay; but was worth it.

So the diplomatic tale progresses. America learns, and so does Henry Adams, although geology and evolution still fail to solve the riddle of the World. Indeed, the Virgin, with St. Thomas Aquinas, offers more genial comfort. Adams in two of his last

chapters reaches some solution in 'a dynamic theory of history,' with 'a law of acceleration' as its pivot. 'To evolutionists may be left the processes of evolution; to historians the single interest is the law of reaction between force and force, — between mind and nature, — the law of progress.' The United States offers, to-day, a portentous example of this acceleration of the self-consciousness of national power and world-function.

Henry Adams lived to see this, but made no attempt to include it in his *Education*. That ends with the death of Hay. Life, in thought, had never been easy to him. He enjoyed taking it very hard and then lapsing into an intellectual *laissez-faire*. The latter became usual with him in the closing years. He died in his sleep. The time was that of the shattering opening of the German offensive at the end of March last. There was then warrant for what he said to his companion the day before his death: 'Life has become almost intolerable.'

Henry Adams is an example, so extraordinary as to be almost unique, of a New Englander who had perhaps over-considered the matter of his thought; a sophisticated mind, yet scarcely as disillusioned as it sought to think itself; nevertheless, a mind conscientiously posing as the spirit of a New England Montaigne. He avoided recognition willfully, not merely from the thoughtless, but from the sincerely thoughtful; and purposely he carried obliteration to a grave which has no stone to mark his name. None the less, the lack of recognition of Henry Adams throws a sort of faint sidelight on the culture of his country.

HALLOWE'EN BIRTH

BY KATHARINE BUTLER

ALL night against the window
Ran sweet, impetuous rain;
And with the dark morning
Still streams the pane.

The thin gold grape-leaves
And black grapes cling,
While, soaring and descending,
The strong winds sing.

Will souls walk to-night
Over watery, strewn leaves?
Shall we hear them sighing
Amid the pale corn-sheaves?

O Wanderer, will you come,
Who are younger than they,
Chosen and desired? —
For this is your day.

All souls will moan outside,
Fulfilling their long doom,
While you shall break importunate
Into our room.

Comes the early evening,
For you the fire is warm
On the four close walls
Against the threshing storm.