

THE EDUCATION OF HENRY ADAMS¹

IN 1771, Thomas Hutchinson wrote to one of his friends, "We have not been so quiet here these five years . . . if it were not for two or three Adamses, we should do well enough." From that day to this many people have agreed with the fastidious governor. But so far, an Adams or two we have always had with us; and on the whole, although they have sometimes been exasperating, they have always been salutary. During four generations the men of this family have loved and served America as much as they have scolded her. More cannot be said, except that they have commonly given, on both counts, more than they have received. Theirs is therefore the blessing, and ours the benefit.

Among other things, we have to thank them for some diaries and autobiographies which have been notable for frank self-revelation. Henry Adams would of course have stoutly denied that any such impertinence as self-revelation was either intended or achieved in the *Education*. There is no evidence that he ever kept a diary (all things considered, the burden of proof is not on us!); but it is not to be supposed that he would have published it in any case. A man who regarded himself as of no more significance than a chance deposit on the surface of the world might indeed write down an intimate record of his soul's doings as an exercise in cosmic irony; but the idea of publishing it could hardly have lived for a moment in the lambent flame of his own sardonic humor. He could be perverse, but perversity could not well go the length of perpetrating so pointless a joke as that would come to.

No, Henry Adams would not reveal himself to the curious inspection of an unsympathetic world; but he would write a book for the purpose of exposing a dynamic theory of history, than which nothing could well be more impersonal or unrevealing. With a philosophy of history the Puritan has always been preoccupied; and it was the major interest of Henry Adams throughout the better part of his life. He never gained more than a faint idea of any intelligible philosophy, as he would himself have readily admitted; but after a lifetime of hard study and close thinking, the matter struck him thus:

¹ *The Education of Henry Adams: an Autobiography* (Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918, pp. 519).¹

Between the dynamo in the gallery of machines and the engine-house outside, the break of continuity amounted to abysmal fracture for a historian's objects. No more relation could he discover between the steam and the electric current than between the Cross and the cathedral. The forces were interchangeable if not reversible, but he could see only an absolute *fiat* in electricity as in faith.

In these two forces the secret must lie, since for centuries faith had ruled inexorably, only to be replaced by electricity which promised to rule quite as inexorably. To find the secret was difficult enough; but

any schoolboy could see that man as a force must be measured by motion, from a fixed point. Psychology helped here by suggesting a unit—the point of history when man held the highest idea of himself as a unit in a unified universe. Eight or ten years of study had led Adams to think he might use the century 1150–1250, expressed in Amiens Cathedral and the Works of Thomas Aquinas, as the unit from which he might measure motion down to his own time, without assuming anything as true or untrue except relation. . . . Setting himself to the task, he began a volume which he mentally knew as “Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres: a Study in Thirteenth-Century Unity.” From that point he proposed to fix a position for himself, which he could label: “The Education of Henry Adams: a Study in Twentieth-Century Multiplicity.” With the help of these two points of relation, he hoped to project his lines forward and backward indefinitely, subject to correction from any one who should know better. Thereupon, he sailed for home.

You are to understand, therefore, that the *Education of Henry Adams* has nothing to do really with the person Henry Adams. Since the time of Rousseau,

the Ego has steadily tended to efface itself, and, for purposes of model, to become a manikin, on which the toilet of education is to be draped in order to show the fit or misfit of the clothes. The object of study is the garment, not the figure. . . . The manikin, therefore, has the same value as any other geometrical figure of three or four dimensions, which is used for the study of relation. For that purpose it cannot be spared; it is the only measure of motion, of proportion, of human condition; it must have the air of reality; it must be taken for real; it must be treated as though it had life. Who knows? Perhaps it had.

Whether it had life or not is, however, of no importance. The manikin is to be treated impersonally; and will be indicated throughout in the third person, not as the author's ego, but as a kind of projected and animated geometrical point upon which cosmic lines of force impinge!

It turns out that the manikin had life after all—a good deal of it; with the effect that as you go on you become more concerned with the manikin than with the clothes, and at last find yourself

wholly absorbed with an ego more subtle and complex, at times more exasperating, yet upon the whole more engaging, and above all more pervasive, than you are likely to come upon in any autobiography of modern times. It is really wonderful how the clothes fall away from the manikin, how with the best effort at draping they in fact refuse to be put on at all. The reason is simple; for the constant refrain of the study is that no clothes were ever found. The manikin is therefore always in evidence for lack of covering, and ends by having to apologize for its very existence. "To the tired student, the idea that he must give it up [the search for philosophy-clothes] seemed sheer senility. As long as he could whisper, he would go on as he had begun, bluntly refusing to meet his creator with the admission that the creation had taught him nothing except that the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle might for convenience be taken as equal to something else." On his own premises, the assumption that the manikin would ever meet his creator (if he indeed had one), or that his creator would be concerned with his opinion of the creation, is gratuitous. On his own premises, there is something too much of the ego here. The *Education of Henry Adams*, conceived as a study in the philosophy of history, turns out in fact to be an *Apologia pro vita sua*, one of the most self-centred and self-revealing books in the language.

The revelation is not indeed of the direct sort that springs from frank and insouciant spontaneity. Since the revelation was not intended, the process is tortuous in the extreme. It is a revelation that comes by the way, made manifest in the effort to conceal it, overlaid by all sorts of cryptic sentences and self-deprecatory phrases, half hidden by the protective coloring taken on by a sensitive mind commonly employing paradox and delighting in perverse and teasing mystification. One can never be sure what the book means; but taken at its face value the *Education* seems to be the story of a man who regarded life from the outside, as a spectator at the play, a play in which his own part as spectator was taken by a minor character. The play was amusing in its absurdity, but it touched not the spectator, Henry Adams, who was content to sit in his protected stall and laugh in his sleeve at the play and the players—and most of all at himself for laughing. Such is the implication; but I think it was not so. In the *Mont-Saint-Michel*² Adams speaks of those young people who rarely like the Romanesque. "They prefer the Gothic. . . . No doubt, they are right,

² *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, p. 7.

since they are young: but men and women who have lived long and are tired—who want rest—who have done with aspirations and ambitions—*whose life has been a broken arch*—feel this repose and self-restraint as they feel nothing else.” The *Education* is in fact the record, tragic and pathetic underneath its genial irony, of the defeat of fine aspirations and laudable ambitions. It is the story of a life which the man himself, in his old age, looked back upon as a broken arch.

One is not surprised that a man of Henry Adams’s antecedents should take life seriously; but no sane man, looking upon his career from the outside, would call it a failure. Born into a family whose traditions were in themselves a liberal education, Henry Adams enjoyed advantages in youth such as few boys have. It was at least an unusual experience to be able, as a lad, to sit every Sunday “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”. This to be sure might not have been an advantage if it led the lad to regard the presidency as a heritable office in the family; but it was certainly a great deal to be able to listen daily, at his father’s table, to talk as good as he was “ever likely to hear again”. This was doubtless one of the reasons why he got (or was it only that it seemed so to him in his old age?) so little from Harvard College; but at any rate he graduated with honors, and afterwards enjoyed the blessed boon of two care-free years of idling and study in Germany and Italy. For six years, as private secretary to his father on one of the most difficult and successful diplomatic missions in the history of his country, he watched history in the making, and gained an inside knowledge of English politics and society such as comes to one young man in ten thousand. Returning to America, he served for a time as editor of the *North American*, and was for seven years a professor of history in Harvard College. During the last thirty-five years of his life, he lived alternately in Washington and Paris. Relieved of official or other responsibility, he travelled all over the world, met the most interesting people of his generation, devoted himself at leisure to the study of art and literature, philosophy and science, and wrote, as an incident in a long life of serious endeavor, twelve or fifteen volumes of history which by common consent rank with the best work done in that field by American scholars.

By no common standard does such a record measure failure. Most men would have been satisfied with the life he lived apart

from the books he wrote, or with the books he wrote apart from the life he lived. Henry Adams is commonly counted with the historians; but he scarcely thought of himself as one, except in so far as he sought and failed to find a philosophy of history. It is characteristic that in the *Education* he barely mentions the *History of the United States*. The enterprise, which he undertook for lack of something better, he always regarded as negligible—an episode in his life to be chronicled like any other. But it is safe to say that most of us who call ourselves historians, with far less justification, would be well content if we could count, as the result of a lifetime of effort, such a shelf full of volumes to our credit. The average professor of history might well expect, on less showing, to be chosen president of the Historical Association; in which case the prospect of having to deliver a presidential address might lead him to speculate idly in idle moments upon the meaning of history; but the riddle of existence would not greatly trouble his sleep, nor could it be said of him, as Henry Adams said of himself, that “a historical formula that should satisfy the conditions of the stellar universe weighed heavily upon his mind”. He would live out the remnant of his days, an admired and a fêted leader in the scholar’s world, wholly unaware that his life had been a cosmic failure.

The chief question which the *Education* presents to the critic is therefore this: why did Henry Adams look back upon his life, which to other men was so enviable in itself and so notable in its achievements, as a failure? Why should he have thought of it as a broken arch? The answer may possibly be found by inquiring what he had in mind when he spoke of “education”. That he did not use the term in the narrow sense of formal education may be taken as a matter of course. He disposes of his formal education by saying that he hated it, and that it never did him any good.³ But everything, as he often says, had value for education, if one could only find out what that value was; and the reader is inclined to dismiss the question by saying that for Henry Adams education and life were identical. In a sense this is true. The careful reader will nevertheless discover that one of two rather definite, quite different, yet fundamentally related conceptions was present in Adams’s mind when he used the term education: sometimes he conceives of education as that training and knowledge which would enable a man deliberately to identify himself and his work with the

³ He says that no professor in Harvard ever mentioned Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital* in his time; which was very likely true since Adams graduated in 1858 and *Das Kapital* was not published till 1867!

main "stream of tendency" of his time; at other times he conceives of education in a wider sense, as essentially identical with a scientific explanation of the social process, so that to be educated is to possess a philosophy which will solve the mystery of life.

It is the first of these conceptions which Adams has in mind when he says,

Perhaps Henry Adams was not worth educating; most keen judges incline to think that barely one man in a hundred owns a mind capable of reacting to any purpose on the forces that surround him, and fully half of these react wrongly. The object of education for that mind should be the teaching itself how to react with vigor and economy. No doubt the world at large will always lag so far behind the active mind as to make a soft cushion of inertia to drop upon, as it did for Henry Adams; but education should try to lessen the obstacles, diminish the friction, invigorate the energy, *and should train minds to react, not at haphazard, but by choice, on the lines of force that attract their world.*

This sort of education Adams felt that he never attained. He appeared to himself to have drifted through life, to have been shunted about, by circumstances which he could neither foresee nor control, from one track to another, with the result of arriving at stations which, however attractive they may have been, it was never his intention to reach. He went to Germany to study the civil law, without any good reason for so doing; he attended one lecture (one was enough!), and idled away two years in Germany and Italy, for no reason except that he did not know what he could do if he came home. He became his father's secretary in London because his father asked him to do so and nothing better offered. He returned after six years fully determined to enter journalism as the best road to the career of a political reformer. The prospect looked good, for like every one else he had great faith in Grant; but the announcement of Grant's cabinet, "within five minutes, changed his intended future into an absurdity so laughable as to make him ashamed of it. . . . He had made another total misconception of life—another inconceivable false start." He became a professor of history, without possessing any qualifications for the position, because his family and friends urged him to accept an offer that came out of a clear sky; and afterwards wrote history because that was the thing professors of history were supposed to do. Whatever he did or accomplished in life, he did by accident and not as the result of reasoned purpose.

Not only did Adams fail of that education which would have enabled him to react "by choice, on the lines of force" that attracted his world; he was never able to determine what sort of

education would have given him this power. He observed attentively the careers of his friends and of the notable men of his generation; but the reasons for their failures or successes were not to be found; why some men, such as W. C. Whitney, should have won all the prizes the age had to offer, while others, such as his friend King, should have failed, remained a mystery to the end.

Society had failed to discover what sort of education suited it best. Wealth valued social position and classical education as highly as either of these valued wealth, and the women still tended to keep the scales even. For anything Adams could see he was himself as contented as though he had been educated; while Clarence King, whose education was exactly suited to theory, had failed; and Whitney, who was no better educated than Adams, had achieved phenomenal success.

This was one aspect of the failure, that he had never been able to do anything which he deliberately set out to do. But the chief aspect of the failure was that, having done only those things which the accident of circumstances imposed upon him, the things he had done were in no way identified with the "lines of force" that attracted his age, and were therefore of negligible importance. Henry Adams's chief reason of discontent was that he had never been able to impress himself powerfully upon his time. He knew that he had as good ability, and better ability, than most men—he was well within the "one in a hundred" who were worth educating. He knew that he had written as good history as any one was likely to write; but he was quite sincere in saying that he "worked in the dark", and that he never could see that his history was worth the doing. One reason for this was that histories as commonly written, and as he had himself written them, led nowhere and explained nothing.

Historians undertake to arrange sequences—called stories, or histories—assuming in silence a relation of cause and effect. These assumptions, hidden in the depths of dusty libraries, have been astounding, but commonly unconscious and childlike; so much so, that if the capacious critic were to drag them to light, historians would probably reply, with one voice, that they had never supposed themselves required to know what they were talking about. Adams, for one, had toiled in vain to find out what he meant. He had even published a dozen volumes of American history for no other purpose than to satisfy himself whether, by the severest process of stating, with the least possible comment, such facts as seemed sure, in such order as seemed rigorously consequent, he could fix for a familiar moment a necessary sequence of human movement. The result had satisfied him as little as at Harvard College.

Later in life, when he had turned to science for an explanation

which he could not find in history, it seemed to him that, supposing Kelvin's law to be rigorously true, the professor of American history should "begin his annual course by announcing to his class that their year's work would be devoted to showing in American history 'a universal tendency to the dissipation of energy' and degradation of thought, which would soon end in making America 'improper for the habitation of man as he is now constituted.'"⁴ It must be admitted that professors of history do not commonly begin their courses in this way; but if this is indeed the proper way, Adams was quite right in supposing that his own histories were enterprises of no great significance.

But assuming that the method was good, Adams had another reason for being indifferent to his work as historian. He says that after having given ten or twelve years of serious labor to writing his history of Jefferson and Madison, he never had, so far as he could learn, more than three serious readers. No doubt this is not mathematically true; but from Adams's point of view, considering the population of the world, and the likelihood of his books ever having a decisive influence upon the course of civilization, the statement was relatively true. The point was that, whether his histories were good or bad, the world, or even America, would have been precisely what it was if the *History of the United States* had never been written. The point was that America would have been precisely what it was if Henry Adams had never lived. And Henry Adams was not content that it should be so. Henry Adams, son and grandson and great-grandson of men who had helped to shape the destiny of their country, precisely because he had had every advantage and was possessed of mental qualities that he knew to be first-rate should have been able, in any well-ordered universe with a decent regard for its needs and for the economy of its available resources, to make an adequate contribution to the sum of human achievements. With such advantages and such abilities, he should have figured as an outstanding influence, in no matter what line of endeavor—in politics, in finance, in art, in ideas. To have been merely the writer of books that gathered dust on the shelves, of books that, even if they had run to the thousandth edition, would not have made a dent on the shell of destiny—this was to be a failure, whatever the gild of professors might say. Such a man, having "shed his life-blood for the sublime truths of Sac and Soc", might well be forgotten under the epitaph: HIC JACET HOMUNCULUS

⁴ *A Letter to American Teachers of History*, p. 85.

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SCRIPTOR DOCTOR BARBARICUS HENRICUS ADAMS ADAE FILIUS ET
EVAE PRIMO EXPLICUIT SOCNAM.

Another grandson of John Quincy Adams closed his life with much the same sense of futility; and he too was much concerned, in his *Autobiography*, with the failure to obtain the education which he needed. But while Charles Francis Adams lays this failure to his father, Henry Adams places the responsibility upon the cosmos. Charles Francis knew precisely the education he should have had; he ought to have done those things which his father did not require him to do, and he ought not to have done those things which his father required him to do; he ought to have learned to play games; he ought to have gone to the public school; he ought—but the list is long. Henry Adams blamed no one, not even himself. He did not know what education he should have had, and no one could have told him. To the last day of his life he did not know. The whole thing was a cosmic riddle. How indeed could men be trained “to react, not at haphazard, but by choice, on the lines of force that attract their world”, if no one knew what those lines of force were? But to determine the lines of force that attract the world is the problem of all history; and so the question of education, in the last analysis, was identified in Henry Adams’s mind with an intelligible philosophy of history, a scientific explanation of the universe.

With this problem he was occupied from an early date, and during the later years it absorbed all his energies. His study of science, into which he delved as deeply as his knowledge of mathematics enabled him to do, his preoccupation with the dynamo and the Virgin—all this was no mere dilettante dabbling in curious and recondite matters; nor can we suppose him, after life was fairly done, to have traversed the dreary wastes of scholastic philosophy as an idle stunt, or for the academic satisfaction of constructing a neat formula within which the vagrant facts of history might be comfortably and amicably enclosed. He is indeed whimsical enough about it, and besprinkles himself liberally with the light showers of wit and sarcasm and delicious humor that everywhere fall upon the just and the unjust. But all this is mostly protective coloring; he laughs at himself that no one may suppose his own withers wrung, and forestalls sympathy in others by having none on his own account. At bottom he is engaged in a desperate endeavor to unravel the riddle of his own failure, to search out the heart of that mysterious force that made all his reasoned purposes futile and all his achievements vain. He never succeeded; and in the end he re-

garded the *Education* itself as a fragment, unfinished, avowedly incomplete, which might well remain unpublished and so be forgotten. And this too was part of the general failure. Not only had he failed to impress himself upon the life of his time; he had not even redeemed that failure by solving the mystery of it.

If this interpretation is in any measure true (one can never be sure), there was an element of tragedy in the life of Henry Adams. But in any case it is well concealed in the *Education* as it was in life. It is not likely that many readers will see the tragedy of a failure that looks like success, or miss the philosophy-clothes that were never found. And indeed we may all be well content with the doings of this manikin that turns out to be so lively an ego. Henry Adams was worth a wilderness of philosophies. Perhaps we should have liked the book better if he could have taken himself more frankly, as a matter of course, for what he was—a man of wide experience, of altogether uncommon attainments, of extraordinarily incisive mental power; and if, resting on this assumption, he had told us more directly, as something we should like to know, what he had done, what people he had met and known, what events he had shared in or observed, and what he thought about it all. This he does do of course, in his own enigmatic way, in the process of explaining where and how he sought education and failed to find it; and fortunately, in the course of the leisurely journey, he takes us into many by-paths and shows us, by the easy play of his illuminating intelligence, much strange country, and many people whom we have never known, or have never known so intimately. When this happens, when the manikin forgets itself and its education-clothes, and merely describes people or types of mind or social customs, the result is wholly admirable. There are inimitable passages, and the number is large, which one cannot forget. One will not soon forget the young men of the Harvard class of '58, who were "*negative to a degree that in the end became positive and triumphant*"; or the exquisitely drawn portrait of "Madame President", all things considered the finest passage in the book; or the picture of old John Quincy Adams coming slowly down-stairs one hot summer morning and with massive and silent solemnity leading the rebellious little Henry to school against his will; or yet the reflections of the little Henry himself (or was it the reflection of an older Henry?), who recognized on this occasion "that the President, though a tool of tyranny, had done his disreputable work with a certain intelligence. He had shown no temper, no irritation, no personal feeling, and had made no display of force. Above all, he had held his tongue."

Those who have read the *Autobiography* of Charles Francis Adams will note with interest that Henry had a much higher opinion of his father than his elder brother had, which may have been due to the fact that he knew him much better. The elder Charles Francis, he says,

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 want of judgment. They abused Charles Francis for his judgment. . . . 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. . . . He stood alone. He had no master—hardly even his father. He had no scholars—hardly even his sons.

The estimate is just, the analysis penetrating. For analysis, Henry Adams had indeed a master's talent; and we are especially grateful for his dissection of the senatorial mind in general, and of the minds of such particular senators as Seward and Sumner and Lodge. But he was equally good at surprising the secret of the group mind, and of all groups the one that interested him most was the English. For studying the English he had ample opportunity; and although, according to custom, he professes never to have fathomed that peculiar people, his observations are always interesting and often profound. Even where his opportunity was limited he made the most of it. The picture of a whole judicial generation is made vivid in the chance statement that he "never set eyes on a judge except when his father took him to call on old Lord Lyndhurst, where they found old Lord Campbell, *both abusing old Lord Brougham*". Nothing interested him more than English "society". What it was, he never knew—"one wandered about in it like a maggot in cheese; it was not a hansom cab, to be got into, or out 'of, at dinner time." He was much perplexed by Motley's remark that the London dinner and the English country house were "the perfection of human society". But after having

studied carefully and practised painfully what seemed to be the favorite accomplishment, he came to the conclusion that

the perfection of human society required that a man should enter a drawing-room where he was a total stranger, and place himself on the hearth-rug, his back to the fire, with an air of expectant benevolence, without curiosity, much as though he had dropped in at a charity concert, kindly disposed to applaud the performers and overlook mistakes. This ideal rarely succeeded in youth, and towards thirty it took a form of modified insolence and offensive patronage; but about sixty it mellowed into courtesy, kindliness, and even deference to the young which had extraordinary charm both in women and in men.

Upon mature reflection I cannot resist the temptation to quote the passage on being called a "begonia" by a United States senator, since it reveals Adams's genial irony at its best, as well as his opinion of senators—not by any means at its worst. Returning home from England on one occasion, he found that his article in the *North American* reviewing the last session of Congress, had been widely circulated by the Democrats as a campaign document. The inevitable reply was made by Senator Timothy Howe, of Wisconsin, who, besides refuting Adams's opinions,

did him the honor—most unusual and picturesque in a Senator's rhetoric—of likening him to a begonia. The begonia is, or then was, a plant of such senatorial qualities as to make the simile, in intention, most flattering. Far from charming in its refinement, the begonia was remarkable for curious and showy foliage; it was conspicuous; it seemed to have no useful purpose; it insisted on standing always in the most prominent positions. Adams would have greatly liked to be a begonia in Washington, for this was rather his ideal of the successful statesman, and he thought about it still more when the *Westminster Review* for October brought him his article on the Gold Conspiracy, which was also instantly pirated on a great scale. Piratical he was himself henceforth driven to be, and he asked only to be pirated, for he was sure not to be paid; but the honors of piracy resemble the colors of the begonia; they are showy but not useful. Here was a *tour de force* he had never dreamed himself equal to performing: two long, dry, quarterly, thirty or forty page articles, appearing in quick succession, and pirated for audiences running well into the hundred thousands; and not one person, man or woman, offering him so much as a congratulation, except to call him a begonia.

The number of passages one would wish to quote is legion; but one must be content to say that the book is fascinating throughout—particularly perhaps in those parts which are not concerned with the education of Henry Adams. Where this recondite and cosmic problem is touched upon, there are often qualifications to be made. The perpetual profession of ignorance and incapacity seems at times a bit disingenuous; and we have to do for the most part, not with the way things struck Adams at the time, but with the way

it seemed to him, as an old man looking back upon the "broken arch", they should have struck him. Besides, in the later chapters, in which he deals with the dynamic theory of history, the problem was so vague, even to himself, that we too often do not know what he wishes to convey. Apropos of the Chicago Fair, which like everything else in his later years linked itself to the business of the dynamo and the Virgin, he says: "Did he himself quite know what he meant? Certainly not! If he had known enough to state his problem, his education would have been completed at once." Is this the statement of a fact, or only the reflection of a perversity? We do not know. Most readers, at all events, having reached page 343, will not be inclined to dispute the assertion. Yet we must after all be grateful for this meaningless philosophy of history (the more so perhaps since it is meaningless); for without it we should never have had either the *Mont-Saint-Michel* or *The Education of Henry Adams*—"books which no gentleman's library" need contain, but which will long be read by the curious inquirer into the nature of the human heart.

Henry Adams lies buried in Rock Creek Cemetery, in Washington. The casual visitor might perhaps notice, on a slight elevation, a group of shrubs and small trees making a circular enclosure. If he should step up into this concealed spot, he would see on the opposite side a polished marble seat; and placing himself there he would find himself facing a seated figure, done in bronze, loosely wrapped in a mantle which, covering the body and the head, throws into strong relief a face of singular fascination. Whether man or woman, it would puzzle the observer to say. The eyes are half closed, in reverie rather than in sleep. The figure seems not to convey the sense either of life or death, of joy or sorrow, of hope or despair. It has lived, but life is done; it has experienced all things, but is now oblivious of all; it has questioned, but questions no more. The casual visitor will perhaps approach the figure, looking for a symbol, a name, a date—some revelation. There is none. The level ground, carpeted with dead leaves, gives no indication of a grave beneath. It may be that the puzzled visitor will step outside, walk around the enclosure, examine the marble shaft against which the figure is placed; and, finding nothing there, return to the seat and look long at the strange face. What does he make of it—this level spot, these shrubs, this figure that speaks and yet is silent? Nothing—or what he will. Such was life to Henry Adams, who lived long, and questioned seriously, and would not be content with the dishonest or the facile answer.

CARL BECKER.

NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS

BACK TO PEACE IN 1865¹

ONE reason why so little public attention was given to human reconstruction and the social aspects of demobilization in 1865 was that the then dominant generation, blending the individualism of Jefferson, of Emerson, of Andrew Jackson, and of John Stuart Mill, believed that such problems were for individual solution. Doubtless shell-shock cases existed—we have most of us known veterans probably still suffering from the failure to treat it properly; undoubtedly there were economic and social hardships which might have been ameliorated—yet on the whole the individualistic method, modified by the humane neighborliness which equally characterized the Americans of the period, did result in the successful absorption of the veterans into civil life. No historian would, and no lay person should, however, deduce therefrom that such a system would work equally well to-day. No one can say whether our economic system is more or less elastic than it was, though the richness of the unexploited frontier of 1865 probably was a determining advantage; but at least the localization of the immediate effects of the war to our country rendered conditions strikingly different, and the distinctively war industries were less important.

Of course, no amount of individualism could prevent the government from having some policy and that policy from having some effect upon the situation. That policy was demobilization at the earliest possible time, by units, at the most convenient place for the unit as a whole. There was no attempt to pick out pivotal men, or to use the interval between peace and discharge for schooling.

¹ Professor Fish, now in London in charge of the interests there of the American University Union, sends this note with the following comment. [ED.]

"These notes are the result of a long-continued study of the problem of the absorption of the discharged soldiers of 1865 into the life of the community, each phase of it having been at some time a leading topic of seminar treatment for at least a year. It was my purpose to have condensed the whole into an article for the *Review*. Separated as I have been from my notes, this has been impossible, but I felt that, in view of the immediate importance of the subject, it might be worth while to present at this time some conclusions even without the evidence. It will be appreciated how much I am indebted to various members of my successive seminars, some of whom I hope will produce reasoned articles on subjects here touched upon."