CHAPTER III

THE EDUCATION OF HENRY ADAMS
Nothing in education is so astonishing as the amount of ignorance it accumulates in the form of inert facts.

Henry Adams
Robert F. Sayre observes,

Within the principality of American autobiography, the two royal houses are the Adamses and the Jameses. In one kind of self-examination or another, the ascendancy of the Adamses goes back to 1776, when Henry’s great grandfather John Adams purchased a folio notebook from a Philadelphia stationer and began to keep copies of all his correspondence. John Quincy Adams faithfully did so too. The custom went on in Henry Adams until in 1888 and 1889, looking back over this burden of the past, he burned the diary he had kept since his years at Harvard. He thereby committed himself to the less arduous but more complicated medium of autobiography itself. Yet for this too there was a family tradition, going back to John Adams autobiographical sketches of 1802 and 1809. Henry’s grandmother Louisa Catherine Adams had begun autobiographies during periods of depression and gloom in 1825 and 1840, and in 1869 Henry had prepared to publish them. Finally, two years before The Education of Henry Adams was offered to the public in 1918, Brooks Adams, the youngest
brother, published the autobiography of Charles Francis Adams, Jr., the eldest brother.

A striking difference we notice between Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography and The Education of Henry Adams is that while the former is in the first person, the latter is in the third person. Critics observe that "The detachment of the third-person pronoun is not an affectation; it is an integral part of his scheme. He might have written of someone else had he known any other experience as well as his own. As the forces which he wished to examine are universal, as well as peculiar to the age, he would do as well as another for their point of impact." In addition,

In using the third person for his revelation, Adams had covered his inherent shyness but, whether deliberately or not, he had also created an impersonal voice. In the years that followed, a generation, younger but no less disillusioned than his, gradually discovered that voice to be its own. Like the age in which he lived, this man offered a new paradox at every turn. He spoke it contradictions and its dilemmas, its thoughts, and its feeling; he arranged neat and balanced equations to expound its insoluble riddles; he set
up contrary images that could not to each other across the chaos, with its companion, Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres, the Education became a testament of faith urgently needed rather than of faith achieved.

It has also been pointed out that the adoption of a third-person form in the Education thrusts "Adams" before us more decisively than the first-person form would have done. Adams, perhaps, had his own reason for using the third person, his belief that the subject matter was more important than the subject. In a letter to his eldest brother, Adams considers the two interdependent: "If I write at all in my life out of the professional line, it will probably be when I have got something to say, and when I feel that my subject has got me as well as I the subject."

The table of contents which Adams added to the 1918 edition has attracted the attention of critics. In the 1907 edition the chapters had no titles, only dates. Some consider it a reflection of the multiplicity of aspects from which Adams views his life. Five of the first six chapters are given the names of the towns or cities: I. "Quincy (1838-1848)," II. "Boston (1848-1854)," III. "Washington (1850-1854)," V. "Berlin (1858-1859)," and VI. "Rome (1859-1860)." Only one chapter thereafter is given the name of a
city: XXII. "Chicago (1893)." One chapter is named after a real human being: XVII. "President Grant (1869)," and another after a fictional character, the protagonist of Carlyle's Sartor Resartus: XXVII. "Teufelsdrockh (1901)." Several chapters are given abstract nouns as titles: VII. "Treason (1860-1861)," VIII. "Diplomacy (1861)," XII. "Eccentricity (1863)," XIX. "Chaos (1870)," XX. "Failure (1871)," XXIII. "Silence (1894-1898)," and XXVI. "Twilight (1901)." Two have abstract notions: X. "Political Morality (1862)" and XIII. "The Perfection of Human Society (1864)." Some chapters are given mirror images: XXVIII. "The Height of Knowledge (1902)," XXIX. "The Abyss of Ignorance (1902)," XXX. "Vis Inertiae (1903)," and XXXII. "Vis Nova (1903-1904)." There are some chapters, like XXI. "Twenty Years After (1892)," which fall into no particular category. Critics point out that

This considerable heterogeneity exacerbates the already heterogeneous time-scheme of the book, in which a majority of chapters purport to deal with a single year, others purport to deal with two consecutive years or a four-year period or (in the case of the first two chapters only) longer periods - and none at all confines itself to the years it is ostensibly dealing with. The eccentricity of
the book is not unfairly represented by the fact that there is a gap of twenty-one years between chapters twenty and twenty-one, as if to justify the numbering of the latter.

According to some critics the book "falls roughly into three parts: the inadequate and misleading preparation of a generation which reached maturity at the moment in history when the challenge of modern science became generally felt; the effort of one individual to adjust to this new and centrifugal world of multiplicity; and the translation of the result into a rational formula." In fact, Adams intended the full title of the book to be "The Education of Henry Adams: A Study in Twentieth-Century Multiplicity."

The "Editor's Preface," signed by Henry Cabot Lodge, was written by Adams himself, before his death, and given to Lodge to print as his own. Adams died in March 1918. The Education was published in September of that year, though it had been privately printed and circulated to friends in 1907. In the original "Preface" Adams cited Jean Jacques Rousseau's Confessions and Franklin's Autobiography as modern examples of autobiographies, but mostly he wanted to emulate St. Augustine's Confessions as a model of a man's account of his education and the role it played in his later experience of life.
We can look at Adams' life in four stages: boy, journalist and secretary, teacher of history, and twentieth-century man. In the beginning of The Education, Adams tells us that

From cradle to grave ... [the] problem of running order through chaos, direction through space, discipline through freedom, unity through multiplicity, has always been, and must always be, the task of education, as it is the moral of religion, philosophy, science, art, politics, and economy; but a boy's will is his life, and he dies when it is broken, as the colt dies in harness, taking a new nature in becoming tame. (12)

Thus The Education is "the story of the taming of his chaos and the attempt to liberate his energies."

Unlike Benjamin Franklin, who begins his Autobiography with a note on the purpose of writing one, Henry Adams straight away begins with his birth:

Under the shadow of Boston State House, turning its back on the house of John Hancock, the little passage called Hancock Avenue runs, or ran, from Beacon Street, skirting the State House grounds, to
Mount Vernon Street, on the summit of Beacon Hill; and there, in the third house below Mount Vernon Place, February 16, 1838, a child was born, and christened later by his uncle, the minister of the First Church after the tenets of Boston Unitarianism, as Henry Brooks Adams. (3)

It has been pointed out that no preceding sixty-year period in history had included as much change as the change in the United States between 1840 and 1900. That is why Adams treats his boyhood as "eighteenth-Century" (5) and according to him 1838 was "colonial" and "troglodytic" (3), and "What could become of such a child of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when he should wake up to find himself required to play the game of the twentieth?" (4). But then he realized that "To his life as a whole he was a consenting, contracting party and partner from the moment he was born to the moment he died," and "Only with that understanding - as a consciously assenting member in full partnership with the society of his age - had his education an interest to himself or to others" (4). But he never got to the point of playing the game at all as

He and his eighteenth-century, troglodytic Boston were suddenly cut apart - separated forever - in
Recollecting his childhood and the various influences on him during his childhood, Adams mentions the scarlet fever that affected him seriously. In fact, according to him the disease had a permanent influence on his personality, both physical and mental:

At first, the effect was physical. He fell behind his brothers two or three inches in height, and proportionally in bone and weight. His character and processes of mind seemed to share in this fining-down process of scale. He was not good in a fight, and his nerves were more delicate than boys' nerves ought to be. He exaggerated these weaknesses as he grew older. The habit of doubt; of distrusting his own judgment and of totally rejecting the judgment of the world; the tendency
to regard every question as open; the hesitation to
act except as a choice of evils; the shirking of
responsibility; the love of live, form, quality;
the horror of ennui; the passion for companionship
and the antipathy to society—all these are well-
known qualities of New England character in no way
peculiar to individuals but in this instance they
seemed to be stimulated by the fever, and Henry
Adams could never make up his mind whether, on the
whole, the change of character was morbid or
healthy, good or bad for his purpose. His brothers
were the type; he was the variation. (6)

It is this attitude of Adams' that has made critics consider
The Education "the story of an eighty-year search for the
meaning of life in a modern world of machines, a story which
professed to be a mere record of failure ending with a
prophecy of universal dissolution. The tone was almost
bantering, the mood dark."

In Chapter II, "Boston (1848-1854)," we find Adams
participating in the city's political and intellectual life. Adams' father and his friends, according to Adams, "were
statesmen, not politicians; they guided pubic opinion, but
were little guided by it" (32). They tried to imitate in
America England's middle class government, which they
considered "the ideal of human progress" (33). Adams accepted their beliefs: "Politics offered no difficulties, for there the moral law was a sure guide. Social perfection was also sure, because human nature worked for Good, and three instruments were all she asked - Suffrage, Common Schools, and Press" (33). The chapter ends with an idyllic image of summers back at Quincy:

Of all pleasures, winter sleighing was still the gayest and most popular. From none of these amusements could the boy learn anything likely to be of use to him in the world. Books remained as in the eighteenth century, the source of life, and as they came out - Thackeray, Dickens, Bulwer, Tennyson, Macaulay, Carlyle, and the rest - they were devoured; but as far as happiness went, the happiest hours of the boy's education were passed in summer lying on a musty heap of Congressional Documents in the old farmhouse at Quincy, reading "Quentin Durward," "Ivanhoe," and "The Talisman," and raiding the garden at intervals for peaches and pears. On the whole he learned most then. (39)

The next chapter is entitled "Washington (1850-1854)," which begins as follows:
Except for politics, Mount Vernon Street had the merit of leaving the boy-mind supple, free to turn with the world, and if one learned next to nothing, the little one did learn needed not to be unlearned. The surface was ready to take any form that education should cut into it, though Boston, with singular foresight, rejected the old designs what sort of education was stamped elsewhere, a Bostonian had no idea, but he escaped the evils of other standards by having no standard at all; and what was true of school was true of society. Boston offered none that could help outside. (40)

This chapter is mainly devoted to the author's recounting of an experience which might have overthrown the New England dogma. When his father took him to New York and then to the Capital, he was not impressed until they reached Maryland, where, for the first time in his life, he was in a slave state:

The railway, about the size and character of a modern tram, rambled through unfenced fields and woods, or through village streets, among a haphazard variety of pigs, cows, and negro babies,
who might all have used the cabins for pens and styres, had the Southern pig required styres, but who never showed a sign of care. This was the boy's impression of what slavery caused, and, for him, was all it taught ....

... Slavery struck him in the face; it was a nightmare; a horror; a crime; the sum of all wickedness! Contact made it only more repulsive. He wanted to escape, like the negroes, to free soil. Slave States were dirty, unkempt, poverty-stricken, ignorant, vicious! (44)

Yet, there was something which appealed to Adams:

He had not a thought but repulsion for it; and yet the picture had another side. The May Sunshine and shadow had something to do with it; the thickness of foliage and the heavy smells had more; the sense of atmosphere, almost new, had perhaps as much again; and the brooding indolence of a warm climate and a negro population hung in the atmosphere heavier than the catalpas. The impression was not simple, but the boy liked it: distinctly it remained on his mind as an attraction, almost obscuring Quincy itself. The want of barriers, of
pavements, of forms; the looseness, the laziness; the indolent Southern drawl; the pigs in the streets; the negro babies and their mothers with bandanas; the freedom, openness, swagger, of nature and man, soothed his Johnson blood. (44-45)

This chapter presents another contradiction. During their return journey to Mount Vernon, both father and son realized that the roads were very bad: "To the New England mind, roads, schools, clothes, and a clear face were connected as part of the law of order or divine system. Bad roads meant bad morals. The moral of this Virginia road was clear, and the boy fully learned it. Slavery was wicked, and slavery was the cause of this road's badness which amounted to social crime - and yet, at the end of the road and product of the crime stood Mount Vernon and George Washington" (47). By pondering on this dilemma, he might have reached early wisdom. But he did not; he "had only to repeat what he was told - that George Washington stood alone" (47). The chapter begins with a story of snowball fights on the Boston Common and ends with a story of Charles Summer's fight for a seat in the Senate, in which the boy readily accepted the Free Soil party's bargain with the pro-slavery Democrats. According to Adams, the sign of the practical man, is the faculty for ignoring contradictions. At the end of the chapter we find
Adams realizing that "The education he had received bore little relation to the education he needed. Speaking as an American of 1900, he had as yet no education at all. He knew not even where or how to begin" (53).

The next chapter, "Harvard College (1854-1858)," begins with a brief description of Adams' school. When he left the school in June 1854, he "felt no sensation but one of unqualified joy that this experiences were ended. Never before or afterwards in his life did he close a period so long as four years without some sensation of loss - some sentiment of habit - but school was what in after life he commonly heard his friends denounce as an intolerable bore" (54). Adams felt that New England boys were more mature than English or European boys, and schools were basically meant for boys, and not for New England boys because "Mentally they were never boys" (54).

The next stage in the education of Henry Adams was Harvard College. Adams was very glad to join in because

... generation after generation, Adamses and Brookses and Boylstons and Gorhams had gone to Harvard College, and although none of them, as far as known, had ever done any good there, or thought himself the better for it, custom, social ties,
convenience, and, above all, economy, kept each
generation in the track. Any other education would
have required a serious effort, but no one took
Harvard College seriously. All went there because
their friends went there, and the College was their
ideal of social self-respect. (54)

The above passage reflects the remarks of a man "who is
ultimately the best student, one who has gone on to learn
enough after graduation to realise how little he learned
before it." He dismisses the college's social prestige
when he says, "What he needed was a career in which social
position had value. Never in his life would he have to
explain who he was; never would he have need of acquaintance
to strengthen his social standing; but he needed greatly some
one to show him how to use the acquaintance he cared to make"
(64). He came to the conclusion that "Socially or
intellectually, the college was for him negative and in some
ways mischievous," and that "If parents went on, generation
after generation, sending their children to Harvard College
for the sake of its social advantages, they perpetuated an
inferior social type, quite as ill-fitted as the Oxford type
for success in the next generation" (65). When he was
elected Class Day Orator, Adams considered it a political
rather than a literary victory: "In politics the success of
the poorer candidate is common enough, and Henry Adams was a fairly trained politician, but he never understood how he managed to defeat not only a more capable but a more popular rival" (67). He also realized that his classmates chose him because he was "the kind of representative they wanted," and thus they were "the most formidable array of judges he could ever meet, like so many mirrors of himself, an infinite reflection of his own shortcomings" (68).

In the next chapter, "Berlin (1858-1869)," we find "Dropped into Berlin one morning without guide or direction, the young man in search of education floundered in a mere mess of misunderstandings. He could never recall what he expected to find, but whatever he expected, it had no relation with what it turned out to be" (74). Adams went to Berlin to study Civil Law, but he had no idea of what it was and did little about studying it. The most constructive move he made was in Italy -- described in Chapter VI, "Rome," -- where he began writing articles on Garibaldi for the Boston Courier. Garibaldi was about to attack near Palermo, and Adams was sent there by the American Minister in Naples. This was a sign of self-determination. In a sense, it was the end of boyhood. The last months in Europe were, however, a genial regression into tourism in Paris, and he knew that he did not learn anything new there:

85
Life was amusing. Paris rapidly became familiar. In a month or six weeks he forgot even to disapprove of it; but he studied nothing, entered no society, and made no acquaintance. Accidental education went far in Paris, and one picked up a deal of knowledge that might become useful; perhaps, after all, the three months passed there might serve better purpose than the twenty-one months passed elsewhere; but he did not intend it - did not think it - and looked at it as a momentary and frivolous vacation before going home to fit himself for life. Therewith, after staying as long as he could and spending all the money he dared, he started with mixed emotions but no education, for home. (Emphasis added) (96-97).

As Robert Sayre observes, "He might have developed coherence between his early apprenticeship and his later journalism, but this would have been a pat simplification. None of the youthful identities were complete enough. The autobiographer may establish and define the unity of civilization within the context of his life, but to presume to do so in one career only multiplies chaos."
In the next chapter, "Treason (1860-1861)," we find Adams as his father's private secretary, which position he held for the next eight years of his life. The chapter begins with Adams' disappointment with his search for knowledge: "When, forty years afterwards, Henry Adams looked back over his adventures in search of knowledge, he asked himself whether fortune or fate had ever dealt its cards quite so wildly to any of his known antecessors as when it led him to begin the study of law and to vote for Abraham Lincoln on the same day" (98). But Adams could not continue his study of law. As he was asked by his father to join him in Washington. Adams thought he could learn law under his father's guidance. But the "winter's anxieties" (106) made him neglect the pursuit of the Common Law as he had neglected the pursuit of Civil Law in Germany. He started "acting on secret as newspaper correspondent" (106). Thus, "Attention is diverted from the education of the journalist so as to concentrate on the education of the private secretary. All at once, Adams moved from being a recorder of events distant and foreign to a concerned observer and minor participant. War was about to start in the United States."

It was during this period that Adams received one of the great shocks of his life. When he was a boy he had thought that Charles Sumner and his father were very close
friends. But "He was thunderstruck to learn that Senator Sumner ... regarded Mr Adams as betraying the principles of his life, and broke off relations with his family" (107-108). In fact, Adams had to face a series of shocks: "Many a shock was Henry Adams to meet in the course of a long life passed chiefly near politics and politicians, but the profoundest lessons are not the lessons of reason; they are sudden strains that permanently warp the mind" (108). Though Adams and Sumner continued to be on speaking terms, Adams realized that "a friend in power is a friend lost" (108). Adams writes,

On his own score, he never admitted the rupture, and never exchanged a word with Mr Sumner on the subject, then or afterwards, but his education - for good or bad - made an enormous stride. One has to deal with all sorts of unexpected morals in life, and, at this moment, he was looking at hundreds of Southern gentlemen who believed themselves singularly honest, but who seemed to him engaged in the plainest breach of faith and the blackest secret conspiracy, yet they did not disturb his education. (108)

The next eight Chapters — "Diplomacy (1861)" to "Darwinism (1867-1868)" — are an account of the diplomatic
efforts of Charles Francis Adams and the social and intellectual adventures of Henry Adams. It was during this period that Adams came into contact with many well-known and influential personalities and learned a lot from them. They included Lords Palmerston and Russell, Gladstone, their steady opponent Charles Francis Adams, persuasive Members of Parliament like Roebuck and Bright, Monckton Milnes, and the salty American party organizer, Thurlow Weed. Adams developed a great admiration for Thurlow Weed, who was in charge of the Embassy's press relations. In fact, Weed illustrated the kind of broad paradoxes and contradictions in Adams' own personality:

The effect of power and publicity on all men is the aggravation of self, a sort of tumor that ends by killing the victim's sympathies; a diseased appetite, like a passion for drink or perverted tastes; one can scarcely use expressions too strong to describe the violence of egotism it stimulates; and Thurlow Weed was one of the exceptions; a rare immune. He thought apparently not of himself, but of the person he was talking with. He held himself naturally in the background. He was not jealous. He grasped power, but not office. He distributed offices by handfuls without caring to take them.
He had the instinct of empire; he gave, but he did not receive. (147)

Adams found it very difficult to understand Weed's philosophy. He asked, "'Then Mr. Weed, do you think that no politician can be trusted?' Mr. Weed hesitated for a moment; then said in his mild manner: 'I never advise a young man to begin by thinking so'” (147).

Many critics consider these chapters, except chapter XV, the least satisfactory chapters of The Education. One reason is, perhaps, that there are long stretches where Adams is not seen at all, and what we find is diplomatic history. Adams' father had fixed opinions about people. For example, he considered Prime Minister Palmerston the more difficult and dangerous and the more likely to lead the British government into open alliance with the South, and Russell, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, honest and doubtful about intervention. But it took Adams forty years to realize that the estimates were wrong:

Palmerston was simple .... He tried to check Russell .... Except Disraeli none of the English statesmen were so cautious as he in talking of America. Palmerston told no falsehoods; made no professions; concealed no opinions; was detected in no double-dealing. The most mortifying failure in
Henry Adams' long education was that, after forty years of confirmed dislike, distrust, and detraction of Lord Palmerston, he was obliged at last, to admit himself in error. (164)

As pointed out earlier, "The Education proceeds by shocks, and part of its strategy is to display Henry Adams as the man who has undergone the maximum of them. This is not the creation of confusion, as Yvor Winters had called it; it is more like a re-creation of confusion, a return to the moments of burst illusion so that out of the disorder order may be built again." English society gave an opportunity for shocks to young Adams. The pages on Monckton Milnes and the chapters "Eccentricity (1863)" and "The Perfection of Human Society (1864)" subject Adams to a succession of charged characters:

The commonest phrase overheard at an English club or dinner-table was that So-and-So "is quite mad." It was no offence to So-and-So; it hardly distinguished him from his fellows; and when applied to a public man, like Gladstone, it was qualified by epithets much more forcible. Eccentricity was so general as to become hereditary.
distinction. It made the chief charm of English society as well as it chief terror. (181)

Adams' "English education" was constantly disturbed by American realities. Adams knew that one day he had to leave England and return to America. The world of embassies

... might fit a young man in some degree for editing Shakespeare or Swift, but had little relation with the society of 1870, and none with that of 1900. Owing to other causes, young Adams never got the full training of such style as still existed. The embarrassments of his first few seasons socially ruined him .... He was not alone. Every young diplomat, and most of the old ones, felt awkward in an English house from a certainty that they were not precisely wanted there, and a possibility that they might be told so. (195-196)

Adams found Wenlock Abbey in Shropshire a symbol of the perfection of human society: "It was a new and charming existence; an experience greatly to be envied - ideal repose and rural Shakespearian peace - but a few years of it were likely to complete his education, and fit him to act a fairly useful part in life as an Englishman, an ecclesiastic, and a contemporary of Chaucer" (207).
The next chapter, "Dilettantism (1865-1866)," begins with the news of the re-election of Lincoln and the last stages of the Civil War. Adams realized that the time for going into the army had passed. If he were to be useful at all, it must be as a son, and as a son he was treated with the widest indulgence and trust. He knew that he was doing himself no good by staying in London, but thus far in life he had done himself no good anywhere, and reached his twenty-seventh birthday without having advanced a step, that he could see, beyond his twenty-first.

(208)

His friends were leaving the army and searching for new employment, and thus their position was worse than his: "The war was about to end and they were to be set adrift in a world they would find altogether strange" (208). It was around this time that news of Lincoln's assassination reached Adams, who was in Rome escorting the members of the family. Adams realized for the first time that he would have to choose a career after his term as the private secretary to his father. He had been a dilettante till then. Adams wanted to change his attitude. At the suggestion of John Gorham Palfrey, he wrote an article for The North American Review on John Smith and Pocahontas. It was published in
January 1867, and marked his beginning as a scholar. Later, in 1867, he made two more contributions to the North American on "British Finances in 1816" and "The Bank of England Restriction." The most important writing he did at this time was a fourth piece for the periodical he was eventually to edit, an extended review of Sir Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology*. Lyell was Darwin's champion in geology, and this article, which was done with Lyell's approval as a way of advertising the book in the United States, gave Adams an opportunity to inform himself about Darwinism as well as geology.

Chapter XV is entitled "Darwinism (1867-1868)." In this chapter, Adams introduces one of his most important symbols, the fish *Pteraspis*, a cousin, Adams tells us, of the Sturgeon (229). With typical irony, Adams indicates the contemporary view of evolution: "Unbroken Evolution under uniform conditions pleased everyone - except curates and bishops; it was the very best substitute for religion; a safe, conservative, practical, thoroughly Common Law deity" (225). Evolution was a pleasant doctrine but one with intellectual difficulties. Adams soon discovered forms, like *terebratula*, which had not changed throughout the whole span of geological time. *Pteraspis* was still more of a puzzle. It was the first vertebrate and before it was, in a phrase

94
that Adams surely intends to have Biblical overtones, the
"eternal void." Like the children who are told that God made
the world, and who then ask who made God, Adams, learns that
man evolved from Pteraspis. But no one can tell him where
Pteraspis came from. That twentieth-century biology can
provide answers is beside the point. Adams seized his
symbols and employed them to argue that, "Evolution ... did
not evolve; Uniformity ... was not uniform; and Selection ... did not select" (231). Pteraspis and terebratula reappear in
subsequent chapters, to haunt Adams with their presence, to
provide him with metaphors.

In February 1868, Adams visited Rome again. But
"He knew no more in 1868 than in 1858. He had learned
nothing whatever that made Rome more intelligible to him, or
made life easier to handle" (236). When he was called back
to London, the case was no better:

London had become his vice .... He loved growling
like an Englishman, and going into society where he
knew not a face, and cared not a straw. He lived
deep into the lives and loves and disappointments
of his friends. When at last he found himself back
again at Liverpool, his heart wrenches by the act
of parting, he moved mechanically, unstrung, but he
had no more acquired education than when he first
trod the steps of the Adelphi Hotel in November, 1858 .... he had become English to the point of sharing their petty social divisions, their dislikes and prejudices against each other; he took England no longer with the awe of American youth, but with the habit of an old and rather worn suit of clothes. As far as he knew, this was all that Englishmen meant by social education, but in any case it was all the education he had gained from seven years in London. (236)

The Adams family returned to the United States in 1868. The landing was a disappointing experience. There were no celebrations. The nation had changed so much and Adams was so bewildered that "Had they been Tyrian traders of the year B.C. 1000, landing from a galley fresh from Gibraltar, they could hardly have been stranger on the shore of a world, so changed from what it had been ten years before" (237). And the nation which John Adams had helped to found was now in the hands of Robber Barons, industrialists who looted a continent with barbaric enthusiasm. Critics observe that his generations of Puritan descent and his years of grooming in London actually set him back in the races of the twentieth century: "Not a Polish Jew fresh from Warsaw or Cracow - not a furtive Yacoob or Ysaac still reeking of the Ghetto, snarling a weird Yiddish to the officers of the
customs — but had a keener instinct, an intenser energy, and a freer hand than he — American of Americans, with Heaven knew how many Puritans and Patriots behind him, and an education that had cost a civil war" (238). The old education was destroyed in the rush for the new.

Adams found his symbol for the United States of his return in President Grant:

At least four-fifths of the American people — Adams among the rest — had united in the election of General Grant to the Presidency, and probably had been more or less affected in their choice by the parallel they felt between Grant and Washington. Nothing could be more obvious. Grant represented order. He was a great soldier, and the soldier always represented order. He might be as partisan as he pleased, but a general who had organized and commanded half a million or a million men in the field, must know how to administer. (260)

But Grant's poor choices of cabinet members and the scandals of his administration disappointed Adams. Adams brings up another "education," social Darwinism, to attack Grant:

"That, two thousand years after Alexander the Great and
Julius Caesar, a man like Grant should be called - and should actually and truly be - the highest product of the most advanced evolution, mad evolution ludicrous" (266). Adams, of course, did not feel Grant as a hostile force, but saw him only as an uncertain one. Grant irritated him: "He had no right to exist. He should have been extinct for ages. The idea that, as society grew older, it grew one sided, upset evolution, and made of education a fraud" (266). Adams realized that

Education became more perplexing at every phase. No theory was worth the pen that wrote it. America had no use for Adams because he was eighteenth-century, and yet it worshipped Grant because he was archaic and should have lived in a cave and worn skins. Darwinists ought to conclude that America was reverting to the stone age, but the theory of reversion was more absurd than that of evolution. (266)

He found that

... all his hopes of success in life turned on his finding an administration to support. He knew well enough the rules of self-interest. He was for sale. He wanted to be bought. His price was
excessively cheap, for he did not even ask an office, and had his eye, not on the Government, but on New York. All he wanted was something to support; something that would let itself be supported. Luck went dead against him. For once, he was fifty years in advance of his time. (267)

The next two chapters, "Free Fight (1869-1870)" and "Chaos (1870)," continue the discussion of social Darwinism, which culminates in the chapter "Failure (1871)," which describes his life at Harvard. As J.C.Levenson has observed, "Free Fight" "makes a Darwinian struggle for survival out of the political arena in which Adams and his small band of reformers were taking on the might of Gould and Fisk and their various accomplices." The struggle ended in chaos because American society did not try to put an end to the stupidity of its leaders and their collusion with business.

Grant was re-elected President in 1872, but "Grant's administration outraged every rule of ordinary decency, but scores of promising men, whom the country could not well spare, were ruined in saying so" (280).
Adams spent the summer of 1870 in Europe. When he was there, he received a telegram from his brother-in-law that his sister was dying of tetanus. His sister's death was the last lesson - the sum and term of education - began then. He had passed through thirty years of rather varied experience without having once felt the shell of custom broken. He had never seen Nature - only her surface - the sugar-coating that she shows to youth. Flung suddenly in his face with the harsh brutality of chance, the terror of the blow stayed by him henceforth for life, until repetition made it more than the will could struggle with; more than he could call on himself to bear. (287)

Adams realized that Nature generated both life and death and treated them impartially. His sister's death was a kind of forewarning to Adams of what was to strike him fifteen years later when his wife Marian committed suicide, and, as the above passage suggests, the author uses Louisa's death to stand for them both. His sister's death was a bitter lesson and resulted in chaos because there was no religious or philosophic order in which it could be understood:
The usual anodynes of social medicine became evident artifice. Stoicism was perhaps the best; religion was the most human; but the idea that any personal deity could find pleasure or profit in torturing a poor woman, by accident, with a fiendish cruelty known to man only in perverted and insane temperaments, could not be held for a moment. For pure blasphemy, it made pure atheism a comfort. God might be, as the Church said, a Substance, but He could not be a Person. (288-289)

Adams writes, "He did not yet know it, and he was twenty years in finding it out; but he had need of all the beauty of the Lake below and of the Alps above, to restore the finite to its place. For the first time in his life, Mont Blanc for a moment looked to him what it was - a chaos of anarchic and purposeless forces" (289). But, like the earlier lessons, this lesson was also forgotten: "... he needed days of repose to see it clothe itself again with the illusions of his senses, the white purity of its snows, the splendor of its light, and the infinity of its heavenly peace" (289).

On 14 July 1870, Adams' personal chaos gave way to Europe's chaos of war: "One felt helpless and ignorant, but one might have been king or kaiser without feeling stronger
to deal with the chaos" (289). As soon as he could, Adams fled to England and once more took refuge in the profound peace of Wenlock Abbey. While at Wenlock, he received a letter from Eliot, President of Harvard College, inviting him to take an Assistant Professorship of History, to be created shortly at Harvard College: "President Eliot's letter ... begins to tear Adams from his identity as journalist in the way that the brother-in-law's telegram had demolished the naive reformer who was unprepared for the fact of death."

On returning to the United States, Adams received another blow. Senator Timothy Howe, in a Republican campaign document, likened him to a begonia, a showy flower inclined to growing in public places.

The next chapter, "Failure (1871)," describes Adams' failure as a teacher at Harvard. According to Adams, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops. A teacher is expected to teach truth" (300). When Adams began his career as Assistant Professor of Medieval History, he knew hardly a thing about middle ages. But he knew that "A teacher must either treat history as a catalogue, a record, a romance, or as an evolution; and whether he affirms or denies evolution, he falls into all the burning faggots of the pit. In essence incoherent and immoral, history had either to be taught as such - or falsified" (300-301). The job of the teacher of history,
therefore, "was the job of finding the thread of order with which to bind chaos. Unless there was coherence, it could not be taught; if it was coherent, it was false. This is the dilemma with which Adams wrestled as 'Assistant Professor' and the one he bequeaths his readers when he admits he was a failure."

The next chapter is "Twenty Years After (1892)."
The omission of twenty years has perplexed the readers of The Education. Perhaps Adams wanted to avoid a discussion of his marriage and Marian's suicide. Another reason may be that Adams' feeling that the division between himself at age thirty three and at age fifty three was very great. A third reason may be that "this is a story of education, not of adventure" (314).

Adams was of the view that he was "not worth educating" (314). But,

Fit or unfit, Henry Adams stopped his own education in 1871, and began to apply it for practical uses, like his neighbors. At the end of twenty years, he found that he had finished, and could sum up the result. He had no complaint to make against man or woman. They had all treated him kindly; he had never met with ill-will, ill-temper, or even
ill-manners, or known a quarrel. He had never seen serious dishonesty or ingratitude. He had found a readiness in the young to respond to suggestion that seemed to him far beyond all he had reason to expect. Considering the stock complaints against the world, he could not understand why he had nothing to complain of. (314-315)

Adams writes, "education has ended in 1871" (316). According to Robert Sayre,

If "education" here means learning rather than teaching, the seeking after order rather than delivery of it, then the explanation is entirely justifiable. Announcements like these broadcast a fresh start, a new beginning. This is a kind of second volume, and the author is introducing a new character. The boy was born in the eighteenth century; he did his work in the nineteenth. Now the calendar alone makes him a man of the twentieth century. The protagonist has shed his old clothes and prepares to prepare again.

Adams writes, "Life had been cut in halves, and the old half has passed away, education and all, leaving no stock to graft on" (317). But by 1892 the process of the learning Adams becoming a teaching Adams had begun.
When, after a trip abroad, Adams returned to the United States, he had to face the question that he had faced in 1868, where was U.S.A. going? But his attitude had changed by 1892. While the Adams of 1868 did not try to know the answer and did not try to find one, the Adams of 1892 also did not know the answer but set himself on course to find out. The same question was repeated in 1893: "Chicago asked in 1893 for the first time whether the American people knew where they were driving. Adams answered, for one, that he did not know, but would try to find out" (343).

Adams, a retired man now, decided to study himself and his society. He used his knowledge of history, art and economics, his relationship with statesman, and his travelling experiences as sources of the study of his age. He undertook, for some time, "study of the religious press" with the hope of finding whether "growth in human nature" (352) was shown in it. He visited the rebellion in Cuba. He developed friendship with women. He visited many places between 1892 and 1901. Thus The Education develops into a "study of twentieth-century multiplicity."

The remaining part of the autobiography is "first a study of different areas of society and then an attempt to fit the studies together in a picture of its course and direction. Finally, the Education as a whole is this plus a
picture of Henry Adams as a maker of himself, and as a maker of society rather than its victim."

Chapter XXV, "The Dynamo and the Virgin (1900)," is a short essay on religion and the machine and a suggestion of the religion of the machine age. The next chapter, "Twilight (1901)," is an essay on twentieth-century politics as taught by John Hay and on geology as taught by Clarence King. Chapter XXVII, "Teufelsdrockh (1901)," describes Adams' tour of Russia, Northern Europe, and Germany. The titles of Chapter XXVIII and Chapter XXIX are ironic: "The Height of Knowledge (1902)" and "The Abyss of Ignorance (1902)." Chapter XXX, "Vis Inertiae (1903)," describes the opening up of China and the liberation of women. Chapter XXXI, "The Grammar of Science (1903)," presents the heart of the problem Adams faced. The next chapter, entitled "Vis Nova (1903-1904)," presents the view that it is the traditional power of the self-respecting man to meet the demands of his time that can save him from the negative forces. Chapter XXXIII is entitled "A Dynamic Theory of History (1904)." It anticipates the course of the world in the twentieth century. We can say that it is Adams' last and most concentrated effort at running order through chaos: "For Adams, man needed to understand history the way he needed to understand magnetism; not to know why, but how; not
to control, but to use, like the compass, in steering his way." In Chapter XXXIV, "A Law of Acceleration (1904)," Adams observes, "To educate one's self to begin with - had been the effort of one's life for sixty years .... Thus far, since five or ten thousand years, the mind had successfully reacted, and nothing yet proved that it would fail to react - but it would need to jump" (498). The last chapter, Chapter XXXV, is entitled "Nunc Age (1905)," where he realizes that his "education had ended" (505).

In conclusion, obsessed with the chaos of anarchic and purposeless forces, haunted by the death of religion and by a godless universe in which Nature was utterly indifferent to Man, and brooding over the ruins of past civilizations over whose debris jackals crept down in oppressive silence, Adams sought to shore up the fragments of history and personal experience in an attempt to make some connection between them. His education had failed, but his quest for meaning did not. In the advanced years of his life, he achieved an intellectual deliverance which was accompanied by the sad lucidity of a dark wisdom.
REFERENCES


