Henry Adams | What he wanted, why he "failed", what he meant by "education"

James Emet Gardner
The University of Montana

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.
Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd
HENRY ADAMS

What he wanted. Why he "failed." What he meant by "education."

by

James E. Gardner Ph.B., Carroll College, Helena, Montana 1927; B. A. Montana State University, 1929.

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Montana State University
1946

Approved:

[Signatures]

Chairman of Board of Examiners

Chairman of Committee on Graduate Study
HENRY ADAMS

Index

1. What Did He Want?
2. Why Did He "Fail"?
3. What Did He Mean By "Education"?
4. Bibliography
After reading The Education of Henry Adams, wherein Henry Adams referred to himself as a failure, one wonders why he so considered himself. He also declared himself uneducated. What then did he mean by "education"?

The questions are especially vexing when one knew the following facts about his life:

Henry Brooks Adams was born February 17, 1838, in Boston, Mass., the third son of Charles F. Adams and Abigail Brown Brooks Adams. His grandfather was John Q. Adams, sixth president of the United States; his great grandfather was John Adams, second president.

Graduated from Harvard in 1858, he was, in turn, a student at the University of Berlin for a year, and then enjoyed a year of travel in Germany and Italy. From 1860 to 1868, he acted as secretary to his father who was American Ambassador to England. In 1870 until 1877 Adams was assistant professor of history at Harvard. He edited the North American Review during his stay at Harvard. On June 27, 1872, he married Marian Hooper. Mrs. Adams died by her own hand on December 6, 1885. Until his death, while sleeping, on March 27, 1918, Adams alternated in his travels between Washington and the world at large.

He wrote, among others, the following books:

Democracy—an American novel, 1880

Ester—a novel, 1884

History of U.S.—during administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison (nine volumes) 1889-91

Mont Saint Michel And Chartres—1904
This seemed to constitute a life and volume of respectable work that few men would consider as amounting to failure or the work of an uneducated person.

Few readers of Henry Adams' works would know what he wanted, why he "failed" and what he meant by "education." Even after having found considerable available evidence on those questions one cannot be certain that he is right, or that the matter is settled. We say this because Henry Adams is one of the most puzzling figures in American literature. He delights in concealing his intentions in much of what he says. For example, throughout the whole of The Education of Henry Adams, he repeatedly states that he found no education. This is ridiculous because in the very lines one is reading when Adams makes the statement he reveals a rare state of learning. What he must mean by education is something out of the ordinary—something personal and special.

Furthermore, the critics cannot agree about his "failure."

Max, Baye, in a recent study of Adams, lists Amy Lowell, Professor Parrington, Carl Becker, Paul Elmer More, Fernand
Baldensperger, Granville Hicks, Edgar Johnson and Fernal Nuhn as all agreeing with Adams' own estimate of himself as a "failure."

They all took Adams seriously when he said he "failed."

Van Wyck Brooks and Gamaliel Bradford thought Adams a snob and a poseur. They did not take his failure seriously and hence had little sympathy for him.

Allen Tate, Huntington Cairns, Professor Blackmur and Mark Van Doren in their book *Invitation to Learning* thought of Adams as being a distinguished success and "failed" only in the sense that we all fail in our search for the ultimate truth.

Mr. Baym says:

"Adams' failure was only a pen and paper failure. He wrote a terribly ironic estimate of himself because it pleased his artistic fancy to do so....Henry Adams himself started the legend of his failure. On close inspection the actual references to it in his autobiography are not so many as they first appear to be.

The reason for this is that these few allusions to his failure are frequently expressed in a context of Pascalian fatality, touched with lyricism. In the sombreness of his thought even his successes look like failures. Let us open the *Education* and read - not forgetting that throughout Adams is a prose master consciously elaborating a stylistic pattern...Indeed, very often the contradiction of failure will be found in the same passage, side by side with the affirmation of it.

Working through these difficulties of Adams' style, and disagreement among his critics, however, we can give fair answers to the three questions that puzzled us about Henry Adams.

The purpose of this paper, then, will be to attempt an answer to these questions about Henry Adams:

3. Allen Tate, ed. *Invitation to Learning* 1941, pp. 422
What did he want?

Why did he consider himself a "failure"?

What did he mean by "education"?

The method to be used will be as follows: First, ask the question; second, give the answer; third, submit evidence from Adams' own works to support the conclusion; fourth, where it is possible and desirable, quote critical evidence; fifth, and last, sum up our conclusions.

The books of Henry Adams to be used in finding these answers are those listed on pages one and two. Special attention should be called to Adams' Education. It is his most mature work and, if read carefully, gives the answer to much that is puzzling in Henry Adams. It is the story of seventy years of education. We are concerned with his views on education, especially as they are related to his self-styled "failure."
Henry Adams, like his great grandfather, John, his grandfather, John Quincy, his father, Charles Francis Adams, wanted power in the government of the United States. Anything less than the presidency, or an ambassadorship to England, would, by family example, have been considered failure.

Adams was undoubtedly right when he thought that this weight of the past constituted a most discouraging prospect for the fourth generation. The four boys, John, Charles Francis Jr., Henry and Brooks, were keenly aware of what was expected of them. Each did his best to succeed in the family tradition. However, only John held public office of any consequence. The others, early in young manhood, realised that times had changed. To succeed in politics in 1864, one needed to have no unshakable convictions of one's own; needed to find out what the electorate wanted, and then proceed by every known trick to get elected. This was contrary to the Adams tradition of being a no-party man, and standing always for one's own deepest convictions of what was right, regardless of what any man or any party thought.

Henry Adams saw that what an Adams of the fourth generation had to give to the political life of his day was not at all what nineteenth century politics wanted. He stood for what was right; his age stood for what was expedient. He stood for principle; his age stood for gaining wealth or power, and with total disregard of how ends were to be attained. A true Adams could never be anything but an Adams (and Henry was one of the truest and most sensitive
of the clan). His age demanded of those that succeeded that, in politics at least, they be everything to everyone. This no Adams could ever do, and Henry least of all.

Henry Adams, then as a child, might have had no doubt about one day being president; but at the age of thirty upon returning from Europe where he had been his father's unofficial private secretary, while the latter had been American Ambassador to the court of Saint James, as we shall soon see, he knew he could never succeed in politics. He could never openly seek office, please the mob, cheat his friends, kiss babies and offer postmasterships for votes. Soon after his return C.F. Adams Sr. was nominated for vice president. The party was defeated, and Henry Adams who had actively campaigned for his father, recoiled from seeking political office forever after.

What, then, did he say in his writings about what he wanted?

As a child, the very idea that he wouldn't be President some day never even came to his mind. His right of succession to the Presidency, in his childish mind, was as unquestioned as the principles of the church he attended. We find this statement in The Education:

The Irish gardener once said to the child: 'You'll be thinkin' you'll be President too!' The casualness of the remark made so strong an impression 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. 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.

Later when he found that this system (based on moral principles...
and superior devotion to duty) which had lasted since Adam did not
outlast one Adams more, and found himself out of power, he says:

He should have been, like his grandfather, a protege
of George Washington, a statesman designated by destiny,
with nothing to do but look directly ahead, follow orders
and march.

He needed someone like George Washington to guide him and offer
him public office and, in view of life long devotion to high prin-
ciples, he would have rendered distinguished service to his country.

He admits he wanted power, as did his brothers, when he says:

"All were conscious that they would like to control power in some
form...Their form was tied to politics or literature."6

Speaking of President Taylor, Adams observes:

To him, the Adamses might still be of use. As for
the White House, all the boy’s family had lived there,
and barring the eight years of Andrew Jackson’s reign,
had been more or less at home there ever since it was
built. The boy half thought he owned it, and took for
granted, that he should some day live in it. He felt no
sensation whatever before Presidetns. A President was a
matter of course in every respectable family; he had two
in his own; three, if he counted old Nathaniel Gorham,
who was the oldest and first in distinction.

We note that he took for granted that he should some day live
in the White House. Though such an unquestioning attitude was merely
a boy’s idea, it might easily condition a boy’s life, making anything
less than high position not worth considering.

In his novel Democracy, Adams describes his heroine, Mrs. Light-
foot Lee, as follows: "What she wanted was Power."8 And again:

"What really attracted her, and however strongly she might deny it,
the passion for exercising power, for its own sake, might dazzle and

5. Ibid., p. 51
6. Ibid., p. 36
7. Ibid., p. 45
8. Democracy, p. 12
mislead a woman who had exhausted all the ordinary feminine re-
sources." And also, "She was bent upon getting to the heart of the
great American mystery of democracy and government."

Now this was written about a fictional character, but it seems
to fit his own picture. Henry Adams longed for power when he was
young, before his hopes were blasted by the demands of a new age.

Van Wyck Brooks quotes Adams as saying in 1864: "I look for­
ward to the day when we shall be in power again as not far distant...
We shall play for high stakes."

Again Mr. Brooks quotes Henry Adams as follows: "They (Hay's
letters) are interesting to me—more so than my own Education; for he
did what I set out to do, only I could never have done it."

John Hay had been an ambassador and Secretary of State and was
one of Adams' dearest friends. Adams set out to accomplish all that
Hay had done; but although great friends, they were different types.
Hay was able to fight in the arena of public life in an effective
manner. Adams could not do this.

As late as 1905 when he was 67 years old, Adams is still in­
terested in politics and politicians. In a letter to Anna Cabot Lodge
he says: "Yes, I suppose I shall open Congress as usual. Why not?
If anyone were to come and take me by the ear and lead me off to
statesmen in the moon, I should go readily."

Conclusions:

Henry Adams wanted power in the government of the

10. Ibid, p. 11
12. Ibid, p. 272
United States.

He did little or nothing, to get this power, except through writing, with which we shall deal next. His only hope now, about 1868, was to achieve power through the press (he realized he could never succeed in politics as we shall see in Part III). This he thought he could do by making himself a political and economic authority and so rule the country through the press. If not actually in power one could control the thinking of those in power, and thereby, by remote control, have the equivalent of great power. He abandoned this idea soon after Grant appointed his cabinet, and thereafter, while still comparatively young, devoted the rest of his life to observing men and forces, chiefly political, till the end of his days. It is true he continued to write, but for his own satisfaction, and not for power.  

He chose writing to get him power, but saw that that way was as futile as the political way. However, just as he was fascinated by politicians and politics all his days, so also did he continue to write all of his days, and in season and out of season, he was forever intrigued by the strange phenomenon of an Adams who had wanted power, and was powerless to get it. He had much to say about the role played by the schools in accounting for his failure, a point that will be dealt with in explaining what he meant by “education”.

Let us see what he has to say about getting power through the press. In the Education we find this:

So Henry Adams, well aware that he could not succeed as a scholar, and finding his social position beyond improvement or need of effort...took to the pen. He wrote.?
Again he says:

The press was an inferior pulpit; an anonymous schoolmaster; a cheap boarding-school; but it was still the nearest approach to a career for the literary survivor of a wrecked education. For the press, then, Henry Adams decided to fit himself.  

So the press it was to be:

His brother, Charles, had determined to strike for the railroads; Henry was to strike for the press, and they hoped to play into each other's hands.  

He tells us that he passed three or four months visiting relations, renewing friendships, and studying the situation. He then observes that at thirty years old the man who has not yet got further than to study the situation is lost, or near it.  

He relates that he hadn't the courage or self-confidence to hire an office in State Street, so he wrote letters to the Nation and articles for the North American Review and the Edinburgh Review. He felt that with his sources of information and his social intimacies at Washington, he couldn't help saying something that would command attention. He says:

[He] began what he meant for a permanent series of annual political reviews which he hoped to make, in time, a political authority. He had the field to himself, and he meant to give himself a free hand as he went on. Whether the newspapers liked it or not, they would have to reckon with him; for such power, once established, was more effective than all the speeches in Congress or reports to the President that could be crammed into the government presses.  

He had a wide audience and would have succeeded in all his calculations if this ambition had been his only hazard. He failed where he always failed—he could not be certain of men. He tells us:

16. Ibid. p. 211  
17. Ibid. p. 240  
18. Ibid. p. 241  
19. Ibid. pp. 242, 250, 258
He meant to support the Executive (President Grant) in attacking the Senate and taking away its two-thirds vote and power of confirmation.

When Grant announced his Cabinet Adams realized he was through. He was ashamed of himself for being so trusting. He had "made another total misconception of life--another inconceivable false start." 21

However, his intention was more than sound. Even senators told Adams that Grant's Cabinet betrayed his incompetence. This was almost the end. He says:

To the end of his life, he wondered at the suddenness of the revolution which actually, within five minutes, changed his intended future into an absurdity so laughable as to make him ashamed of it. 22

He continues:

He knew, without absolutely saying it, that Grant had cut short the life which Adams had laid out for himself in the future. After such a miscarriage, no thought of effectual reform could revive for at least one generation, and he had no face for ineffectual politics. What course could he say next? He had tried so many, and society had barred them all. 23

Grant's actions were fatal to Adams because no one had doubted that he intended reform, and that his aim had been to place his administration above politics. However, when Grant avowed, from the start, a policy of drift there was obviously no place for Adams as a reformer. He was a reformer and his friends were reformers. They were critics and objects of doubt in party allegiance. 24

He tells us:

As for Adams, all his hopes of success in life turned on his finding an administration to support. He was for sale. He wanted to be bought. His price was excessively cheap. 25

20. Ibid. p. 262
22. Ibid
23. Ibid
24. Ibid. p. 267
25. Ibid
Grant's administration was a travesty on decency. Adams concludes:

The world cared little for decency. What it wanted, it did not know; probably a system that would work, and men who could work it, and had failed. His friends had been driven out of Washington or had taken to fistcuffs. He himself sat down and stared helplessly into the future. 26

He wrote a review of the Session of 1869-70 for the July North American. He wrote all sorts of attacks and defences. He enjoyed the life enormously. 27 He wrote his "Gold Conspiracy" and the "Erie Scandal" for the Westminster Review, the piracy of which on a great scale pleased him. Two of his articles appearing in quick succession were pirated for audiences running well into the hundred thousands. 28

Though this was all very well, he was making no money and had no permanent position. Finally his family and friends persuaded him to accept a position at Harvard, teaching history and editing the North American Review. Harvard, they thought, would give him solidity and would lead naturally to the daily press. 29 It never did lead to the press but Adams continued to write history and novels.

Adams, in reviewing his life, concluded that he was just as happy and as useful doing what he did. Abram Hewitt, his good friend, who had been in Congress from 1874 to 1886 and had influence second to none, said that after a dozen years he left behind him no permanent result except the act consolidating the Surveys. The same could be said of Senators Sherman and Pendleton. These were the men who had succeeded. 30 He says:

26. Ibid. p. 280
27. Ibid
28. Ibid. p. 291
29. Ibid. p. 293
30. Ibid. p. 296
None of Adams' generation profited by public activity unless it were W. C. Whitney, and even he could not be induced to return to it.

He continues:

Supposing one asked for the mission to Belgium or Portugal and obtained it; supposing one served a term as Assistant Secretary or Chief of Bureau; or finally, supposing one had gone as sub-editor of the New York Tribune or Times—how much more education would one have gained than by going to Harvard College... One never found an answer then or afterwards, and because, to his mind, the values of American society altogether was mixed up with the value of Washington.

He later concludes that "Power is Poison." A friend in power is a friend lost.

Despite his mention of failure one senses that Henry Adams enjoyed his life immensely as we shall see later.

Conclusions:

Henry Adams wanted power in the government of the United States to be achieved through the press. His aim was to establish himself as a political and economic authority so that those in authority would have to reckon with him whether they liked it or not.

He wanted power by appointment, especially when he was a young man. He didn't win these privileges in exactly the way he wanted them, although he was one of the most distinguished and influential men of his time.

Why did he fail? The next part will be devoted to that problem.

31. Ibid.
32. Ibid
33. Ibid, p. 418
WHY DID HE CONSIDER HIMSELF A FAILURE?

Henry Adams did not succeed in the family pattern—politics. He did not succeed in establishing himself as a political and economic authority. In that sense he failed. In many other respects he was a distinguished success.

He failed in politics and the press for the following reasons:

All nature seemed part of a plot to defeat him.

He believed in sixteenth-century principles, eighteenth century statesmanship and was opposed to late nineteenth-century party organization.

His taste was fastidious. He would not go down into the rough and tumble and fight. He was finicky—choosy. If things didn't please him, he said so.

His wife's death by her own hand was a blow from which he never fully recovered. He didn't have the heart to fight for success after that. What he would have gained wasn't worth the sacrifice it would cost him in effort, compromise of his principles and freedom to do as he pleased.

Scarlet fever, when he was three, super-refined his already delicate nervous system.

John Quincy Adams' wife, Louisa, gave to Henry Adams his rebellious nature which would not permit him to march to the tune his day demanded.

Family pride in past achievement set a pattern that was discouraging to maintain.

State Street or Big Business could not control him.
He thought his principles were superior to those of his day and, therefore, would not change and give his day what it wanted.

He thought his education was ideal to bring him success. When he found, as he thought, that his training completely unfitted him to succeed in his time, he blamed the school. We shall devote the last part of this paper to his criticism of education.

To corroborate the foregoing contentions, let us turn to Adams’ autobiography and deal with these reasons for his “failure” in the order just listed.

He pondered over the question of his self-styled failure most of his life. “At the end he concluded that: “He could have done no better had he foreseen every stage of his coming life, and he would probably have done worse.”

When he was writing his Education, looking back over his whole life, he felt that even in the beginning he was doomed: “At the outset he was condemned to failure more or less complete in the life awaiting him.”

All nature seemed part of a plot to defeat him:

Even the violent reaction after 1846, and the return of all Europe to military practices, never for a moment shook the true faith. No one, except Karl Marx, foresaw radical change. What announced it? The world was producing sixty or seventy million tons of coal, and might be using nearly a million steam horse-power, just beginning to make itself felt. All experience since the creation of man, all divine revelation or human science, conspired to deceive and betray a twelve-year old boy who took for granted that his ideas, which were alone respectable, would be alone respected.

He should have lived in the time of his great-grandfather, John

1. Ibid., p. 63
2. Ibid., p. 59
3. Ibid., p. 32
Adams, or earlier:

Thus far he had seen nothing but eighteenth-century statesmanship. America and he began, at the same time, to become aware of a new force under the innocent surface of party machinery. Even at that early moment, a rather blow boy felt dimly conscious that he might meet some personal difficulties in trying to reconcile sixteenth-century principles and eighteenth-century statesmanship with late nineteenth-century party organisation. Satir.

What were these three things? We will, more or less, let him define them himself. First, sixteenth century principles, what were they?

He tells us that resistance to something was the law of New England nature and that for numberless generations his predecessors had viewed the world chiefly as a thing to be reformed, filled with evil forces to be abolished. One's duty implied not only resistance to evil but hatred of it. 5

But his puritan nature rebelled against change, largely because he considered his thought higher and his moral standards better than those of his successors. Henry Adams could not be convinced that moral standards had nothing to do with success and that utilitarian morality was good enough for him, as it was for the graceless. He tells us that nature had given him a character that in any previous century would have led him to the church. He says that he had inherited dogma and a-priori thought from the beginning of time. 6 Hence, politics offered no difficulties. All one needed was the moral law for a sure guide. 7

Second, what was eighteenth-century statesmanship?

It was, he tells us again, "The law of Resistance, of Truth,
of Duty and of Freedom." His family had deep prejudices concerning these things, and their actions could be predicted according to these abstract ideals. Eighteenth-century statesmanship acted on the principle that all the country needed to reach perfection was three things:

Suffrage, Common Schools and a free Press. Education was divine and man needed only a correct knowledge of facts to reach perfection.

Eighteenth-century statesmanship also was opposed to State Street and Big Business, trusts and monopolies. The eighteenth century statesman favored "a paradise of small farms, each man secure on his own freehold, resting under his own vine and fig trees...The American dream required that the land be kept free from the corruptions of industrialism." The control of government by anyone but statesmen who devoted their lives to good government was unthinkable. Henry Adams, like all his forebears, hated Capitalism. Hatred of Capitalism and the protection of the constitution and personal liberties against incroachment by Big Business, or corrupt politicians, was the hallmark of the eighteenth century statesman.

Henry Adams said that he stood up for his eighteenth century, his Constitution, his Harvard College, his Quincy and his Plymouth Pilgrims as long as anyone would stand up with him. He held on till he became little better than a crank. His world, the one he loved, was simply industrial; the other was capitalistic, centralizing and mechanical. Of all forms of society and government this was the one he liked least. Capitalism brought in the protective tariff, the corporations and trusts, the trades unions and socialistic paternalism which necessarily made their complement. This whole-mechanical consolidation of force ruthlessly stamped out the life of the class into

---

9. Ibid., p. 33
10. Ibid., p. 8
11. Ibid., p. 8
Third, what was late nineteenth century party organization? It was, in a word, the spoils system. Expediency was the rule in government. It was the system we have today. Everything for the party. Everyone, from the President to a local ward helper, is organized to elect a party. Get Votes! 16

Of course this system sounded the death knell for Henry Adams in politics. One couldn't adhere strictly to high moral principles, and work for what was right regardless of party, unless one first got elected. To get elected one must compromise and be everything to every man. After one got elected he might then choose to lead his party and his party might, or might not, follow.

Adams was a reformer in politics. He opposed the Senate's two thirds vote and power of confirmation; he opposed the caucus system and machine politics in general. His age had little time for reform. The nation was expanding. The wave of the future was at the crest. Reform came later.

Adams type was through in politics. As he says, his age didn't know exactly what it wanted, but it did want a system that would work.

This doesn't mean that the highest type cannot succeed in politics either in Adams' day or now. It has succeeded, but with difficulty. Adams was a philosopher. Men of thought and high principle cannot succeed without lots of action. Things must be done. One cannot please himself; he must please the electorate. 17

This confusion of time and principles unfitted him for competition in his battle for success. In a letter to his brother, C. F. Adams, Jr. he said:

12. Ibid, p. 344
This is solemn, but I have enough self-respect to keep me from joining with any body of men who act from mere passion and the sense of wrong. Don't trust yourself to that set, for they will desert you when you need their support. They don't know what they're after.  

Van Wyck Brooks quotes Adams as follows:

I will not go down into the rough-and-tumble, nor mix with the crowd, nor write anonymously, except for more literary practice.—Letter of 1869

For I am, as you have often truly said, a mass of affectation and vanity.—Letter to his brother Charles.

Brooks also quotes Theodore Roosevelt as saying:

I think of (Justice) Holmes as mostly keeping the doors of his sympathy open, and of Adams as mostly keeping them shut.

"If the country had put him on a pedestal," said Holmes to me once, "I think that Henry Adams with his gifts could have rendered distinguished public service."

"What was the matter with Henry Adams?" I asked.

"He wanted it handed to him on a silver plate," said Holmes.

But how Holmes had gone after "it" tooth and nail.

His taste was fastidious. Writing to O. M. Gaskell he senses that his taste will more than likely lead him to no public success:

As for me, I glide along quietly through life, and enjoy it at times a good deal. But my opinions and dislike for things in general will probably make my career a failure; so far as any public distinction goes, and I am contented to have it so.

In accounting for Henry Adams' failure his wife's death must not be forgotten. Mr. Brooks has this to say:

15. Ford, Letters of Henry Adams, p. 161
Suddenly, a blow fell from which Henry Adams never recovered. His wife committed suicide one Sunday morning, while he was out for a walk. The mainspring of his life, he felt, was broken; and, moving into the new house on Lafayette Square he could not bear to live in it alone. He burned his diaries, and his notes and correspondence, and he commissioned St. Gaudens to design the Rock Creek monument that was to stand henceforth on the unmarked grave. He seemed to himself as dead as a ghost or a mummy. Meanwhile, like Mrs. Lightfoot Lee, he longed for the oblivion of Egypt. Mrs. Lee's nerves had also been shaken by Washington politics. She also felt her life had gone awry, and her final word expressed Adams' thought: 'Oh, what a rest it would be to live in the Great Pyramid and look out forever at the polar star!'

Scarlet fever helped to cause his failure. He decided later that the fever, along with his physical inheritance from his grandmother, gave him a certain fineness, exposed his already superfine nerves to the point that it unfitted him for the rough and tumble, cheap back slapping and submersion of any sense of principle except opportunism, demanded of anyone who would succeed in twentieth century politics. He says:

As a means of variation from a normal type, sickness in childhood ought to have a certain value not to be classed under any fitness or unfitness of natural selection; and especially scarlet fever affected boys seriously, both physically and in character, though they might through life puzzle themselves to decide whether it had fitted or unfitted them for success; but this fever of Henry Adams took greater and greater importance in his eyes, from the point of view of education, the longer he lived. At first, the effect was physical. He fell behind his brothers two or three inches in height, and proportionally in bone and weight.

He goes on:

16. Education, p. 6
17. Ibid
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 line, 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.18

From his grandmother came many qualities that did not help him succeed. So, in addition to the fever there was Louisa, his grandmother, about whom Abigail, his great grandmother, worried:

Abigail 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.19

He is quite specific about Louisa's effect on the family:

Such a figure was even less fitted than that of her old husband, the President, to impress on a boy's mind, the standards of the coming century. He never dreamed that from her might come some of those doubts and self-questionings, those hesitations, those rebellions against law and discipline, which marked more than one of her descendants; but he might even then have felt some vague instinctive suspicion that he was to inherit from her the seeds of the primal sin, the fall from grace, the curse of Abel, that he was not of pure New England stock, but half exotic. He was to be nearly as old as his mother had been in 1845, before he quite accepted Boston, or Boston accepted him.20

18. Ibid
19. Ibid, p. 17
20. Ibid, p. 19
Family pride in past achievements discouraged him. He continues to list his handicaps:

A boy who began his education in these surroundings, with physical strength inferior to that of his brothers, and with a certain delicacy of mind and bone, ought rightly to have felt at home in the eighteenth century and should, in proper self-respect, have rebelled against the standards of the nineteenth. One had to pay for Revolutionary patriots; grandfathers and grandmothers; Presidents, diplomats; Queen Anne mahogany and Louis Seize chairs, as well as for Stuart portraits. Such things warped young life. Americans commonly believed that they ruined it, and perhaps the practical common-sense of the American mind judged right. Many a boy might be ruined by much less than the emotions of the funeral service in the Quincy church, with its surroundings of national respect and family pride.

Adams and his forebears hated capitalism. He calls industrial capitalism State Street, and Boston were the same in his mind. He made his choice and did abide by it, but he saw that all the advantages for success were in State Street. He states: "Boston had been their quarrel with State Street." Which brought him at an early age to this:

Thus already, at ten years old, the boy found himself standing face to face with a dilemma that might have puzzled an early Christian. What was he—where was he going? Even then he felt that something was wrong, but he concluded that it must be Boston.

However, he never could decide about State Street:

If State Street was wrong, Quincy must be right.

Turn the dilemmas as he pleased, he still came back on the eighteenth century and the law of Resistance; of Truth; of Duty, and of Freedom. Sometimes, in his old age, he wondered—and could never decide—whether the most clear and certain knowledge would have helped him.

21. Ibid, p. 21
22. Ibid
23. Ibid
24. Ibid
He continues pondering the question:

Supposing he had seen a New York stock-list of 1900, and had studied the statistics of railways, telegraphs, coal, and steel—would he have quitted his eighteenth-century, his ancestral prejudices, his abstract ideals, his semi-clerical training, and the rest, in order to perform an expiatory pilgrimage to State Street and ask for the fatted calf of his grandfather Brooks and a clerkship in the Suffolk Bank?

Sixty years afterwards he was still unable to make up his mind. The cause had its advantages, but the material advantages, looking back, seemed to lie wholly in State Street.

He does conclude, though, that:

They would have lost in consideration more than they would have gained in patronage. No matter how much they had wished to enter State Street, they felt that State Street would never trust them, or they it. Had State Street been Paradise, they must hunger for it in vain, and it hardly needed Daniel Webster to act as archangel with the flaming sword, to order them away from the door.

In the following quotation we see that time has somewhat mollified his judgments:

Time and experience, which alter all perspectives, altered this among the rest, and taught the boy gentler judgment, but even when only ten years old, his face was already fixed, and his heart was stone, against State Street; his education was warped beyond recovery in the direction of the Puritan Politics. Between him and his patriot grandfather at the same age, the conditions had changed little. The year 1848 was like enough to the year 1776 to make a fair parallel. The parallel, as concerned bias of education, was complete when, a few months after the death of John Quincy Adams, a convention of anti-slavery delegates met at Buffalo to organize a new party and named candidates for the general election in November: for President, Martin Van Buren; for Vice President, Charles Francis Adams.

25. Ibid, p. 21
27. Ibid
He would not change because he thought that his standards were higher. Of course this led to friction and helped decide his failure to get what he wanted. He tells us:

The stamp of 1846 was almost as indelible as the stamp of 1776 but in the eighteenth or any earlier century, the stamp mattered less because it was a standard, and every one bore it; while men whose lives were to fall in the generation between 1865 and 1900 had, first of all, to get rid of it, and take the stamp that belonged to their time. This was their education. To outsiders, immigrants, adventurers, it was easy, but the old Puritan nature rebelled against change. The reason it gave was forcible. The Puritan thought his thought higher and his moral standards better than those of his successors. So they were. He could not be convinced that moral standards had nothing to do with it, and the utilitarian morality was good enough for him, as it was for the graceless. Nature had given to the boy Henry a character that, in any previous century, would have led him into the Church; he inherited dogma and a priori thought from the beginning of time; and he scarcely needed a violent reaction like anti-slavery politics to sweep him back into Puritanism with a violence as great as that of religious war.28

He thought his education ideal to bring him success. He is most pointed in his assertions:

Had he been born in Jerusalem under the shadow of the Temple and circumcised in the Synagogue by his uncle the high priest, under the name of Israel Cohen, he would scarcely have been more distinctly branded, and not much more heavily handicapped in the races of the coming century, in running for such stakes as the century was to offer.

Further on he says:

A hundred years earlier, such safeguards as his would have secured any young man's success; and although in 1838 their value was not very great compared with what they would have had in 1738, yet the mere accident of starting a twentieth-century career from a nest of associations so colonial—so troglodytic—as the First Church, the Boston State House, Beacon Hill, John Hancock and John Adams, Mount Vernon Street and Quincy, all crowding on ten pounds

28. Ibid. p. 25
29. Ibid. p. 3
of unconscious babyhood, was so queer as to offer a subject of curious speculation to the baby long after he had witnessed the solution. 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?

He thought for awhile he had a good chance to succeed:

"Probably no child, born in the year, held better cards than he and he could not refuse to play his excellent hand.

However, he soon found he was wrong:

"As it happened, he never got to the point of playing the game at all; he lost himself in the study of it, watching the errors of the players.

Henry Adams at an early age learned that his function would be that of an observer—not an actor in life's drama. His Education goes on:

"But this is the only interest in the story, which otherwise has no moral and little incident. A story of education—seventy years of it—the practical value remains to the end in doubt, like other values about which men have disputed since the birth of Cain and Abel; but the practical value of the universe has never been stated in dollars. Although everyone cannot be a Gargantua-Napoleon-Bismarck and walk off with the great bells of Notre Dame, everyone must bear his own universe, and most persons are moderately interested in learning how their neighbors have managed to carry theirs.

He said he would live his life again, if only for the light it threw on his education, for himself and others. Possibly he hoped that schools would learn from his "failure", his maladjustment, to study pupils and train them to succeed in their world, however it differed from the world of their fathers:

To this life as a whole he was a consenting, contracting party and partner from the moment he was born to the moment he died. Only with that understanding—as a consciously consenting member in full partnership with the society of his age—had his education an interest to himself or to others.

30. Ibid., p. 4
31. Ibid
32. Ibid
33. Ibid
34. Ibid, p. 5
When Adams was sixteen years old, he knew more than his great forebears had known at that age. Lack of knowledge didn't cause his failure. He couldn't give his age what it wanted. Of course, he tells us that his age didn't know what it wanted. Its values were undetermined. However, he did need many things that would have helped him meet the needs of his day. He tells us:

At any other point in human history, this education, including its political and literary bias, would have been not only good, but quite the best. Society had always welcomed and flattered men so endowed. Henry Adams had every reason to be well pleased with it, and not ill-pleased with himself. He had all he wanted. He saw no reason for thinking that anyone else had more. He finished with school, not very brilliantly, but without finding fault with the sum of his knowledge. Probably he knew more than his father, or his grandfather, or his great-grandfather had known at sixteen years old. Only on looking back, fifty years later, at his own figure in 1854, and pondering on the needs of the twentieth century, did he wonder whether, on the whole, the boy of 1854 stood nearer to the thought of 1904, or to that of the year 1. He found himself unable to give a sure answer. The calculation was clouded by the undetermined values of twentieth-century thought, but the story will show his reason for thinking that, in essentials, like religion, ethics, philosophy; in history, literature, art; in the concepts of all science, except perhaps mathematics, the American boy of 1854 stood nearer the year 1 than the year 1900. 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.

Conclusions:

Henry Adams considered himself a failure because he did not succeed in politics; he did not succeed in establishing himself as a political and economic authority which would give him political power.

He failed to get these because all nature seemed part of a plot to defeat him. He believed in sixteenth-century principles, eighteenth

35. Ibid., pp. 52-53
century statesmanship and was opposed to late nineteenth century party organization. His taste was too fastidious for the rough and tumble of political life.

His wife's death depressed him so much that after that he didn't try to succeed in what he had set out to do. Scarlet fever probably helped change him from a man of action to a philosopher, for which the nineteenth century had little use in politics.

His grandmother, Louisa, gave him a rebellious nature which prevented success in politics during his day because his time demanded "yes" men. Family pride set a pattern of achievement that was almost impossible to get during his time.

Big Business, or State Street, was opposed to the Adams family. They distrusted each other. He wouldn't change. His principles were superior to those who got power. His education had not fitted him to give his day what it wanted.

The next part will be devoted to what he meant by "education."
What Henry Adams says in effect throughout his *Education*, and says on other occasions, is that his education wasn't vital. His quarrel with schools was that they failed to educate. By that he meant that knowledge didn't function actively in his life. He wasn't given the information, or taught how to use it, that would have solved the problems of life he met later, that had to be met and solved on the spot, without much time to think or meditate upon.

The schools, he thought were pleasant enough, but relatively useless in preparing him for the life he had to live. If they had any useful information they failed to give it to him. He said the function of teachers was to teach lies to little boys.

His idea of a school was a very serious one. Schools, he thought, should be reservoirs of truth and guidance. He expected them to tell him what he could do best and what his day would demand of him. He thought the schools should know what was going on in the world, what forces would be in power, what adjustments he would have to make, what type of person he would have to be to satisfy himself, and his age.

The schools didn't do this for Henry Adams. Toward the end of his life he figures out what the schools should have done for him.

If the schools wished to educate they should give one the tools of learning that would serve to pry open the oyster of success in one's day. To Adams this meant, mostly, power in politics.

It also meant ability to meet all emergencies, to think quickly and correctly on all problems. A person should have no lost motion, or paralyzing self-consciousness, or feeling of fear and trembling that he was right or wrong, or false pride, or reserve, or taste, or
family history to cloud his decisions.

How any education could have overcome these obstacles for Henry Adams is still a mystery. But the challenge to the school is still valid. Schools seldom, if ever, will meet another. Henry Adams carrying all that weight of the past with him.

Let us interrupt ourselves here and say a few things about Adams' desire for power and his idea of what a school should be. He could have had success and power if he had used the methods used by those who got power. His reserve, pride, and uncompromising principles forbade this. There was no other way to power. He could take no other way than the way he took. He gave up trying very early and enjoyed his life immensely, as an observer, the rest of his life.

This is true despite the sense of despair, pessimism and failure one senses in his writings. Friends who knew him said he was essentially a gay hearted soul, with a protective outer covering of brusqueness. He got huge enjoyment out of life, and was quite contented with things exactly as they were. His freedom to do exactly as he pleased pleased him no end.

His disillusioned temper in writing was just his style of summarising things. His delicious sense of exaggerated irony amused him, and fitted him and his observations perfectly.

However, even though no miracle of education could have forced Henry Adams into power, except by thrusting it upon him, or begging him, in the name of Adams, to accept, the fact remains that he placed a just and needed responsibility upon the schools.

He advocates the following as the chief function of the school: The primary purpose of education is to train students to succeed. This could be done not only by telling each student what his talents are, but advising him to cultivate these talents carefully and wisely to their full fruition. Then, having carefully determined what forces will be in power in the student's world, the student could be trained to meet every emergency with vigor of force and economy of effort and time.

The student should be told what his abilities are. These talents could then be trained in such a way as to solve the problems of a world that had been foreseen.

Adams never explained how the schools could do all he expected them to do. However, he might agree to the following:

1. The office in every school should keep a cumulative record of every student, from kindergarten through the highest school. Each student's abilities and inabilitys, his strength and weakness, in class and out of class—his curricular and extra-curricular activities—all should be recorded to give a complete picture of the student.

2. At determined intervals each student should be given intelligence tests, achievement tests, aptitude tests, etc. This information should be recorded in the cumulative record, and also should be given to the student, so that he would know what the school knows about him.

3. An advisor should interpret this cumulative record; tell each student where his talents lie, and advise him how to
make the best use of them, according to some satis-
factory compromise between his desires and needs.
and the world's desires and needs (that is, the world
in which he plans on living.)

4. To determine what the world will demand of anyone
who desires success, each school should have an expert
who studies trends, drifts, and directions of political,
economic, philosophical and sociological forces. Either
be have an expert statistician, or have access to one's
figures and use them to tell each student what kind of
an education will lead to success. Somehow the child's
needs and his time's needs should meet satisfactorily.

The foregoing gives our statement of what Henry Adams could have
meant by education, and of what he expected from schools. Let us
now go to the Education and get his exact definitions of education,
his statement of what he found useless, what he found useful, and
the particular qualities his models possessed.

Henry Adams' definitions of Education.

In the preface to the Education Adams tells us that the purpose
of the book would be to discuss what part of his education turned
out to be useful and what was not useful. The word useful should be
kept in mind throughout the book because he makes so many remarks
about finding no education here, and no education there. Mostly,
education means useful training or experience. If it helped him
solve his problems it was education. If it was useless it was not
His object in writing the book was to "fit young men, in
universities or elsewhere, to be men of the world, equipped for
any emergency." Furthermore, the book is meant to show the faults
of the patchword fitted on their fathers. He goes on:

From the cradle to grave, this 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. Adams taught his students at Harvard, where he established the
first seminar for research in an American school, to think, to
reflect, to relate, to weigh evidence, see movements of forces in
history—not mere facts. He taught them to work in and about and
through a subject and not just memorize certain data.

Again he tells us:

At the utmost, the active-minded young man should ask
of his teacher only mastery of his tools. The young man
himself, the subject of education, is a certain form of
energy, the object to be gained is economy of his force;
the training is partly the clearing away of obstacles,
partly the direct application of effort.

The function of the school, he thought, was to teach one to react
quickly and correctly to any stimulus; to react with force and with
no waste motion. He always felt that his reactions were timid and
that he made too many false starts. If the school had studied him,
found what he needed to succeed, and then had trained him for it,
there would have been no lost motion.

Of course, in a larger sense, Adams expected more from education
than mere success. He was searching for a faith, a unifying force

2. Ibid, p. 12
3. Ibid, preface, p. IX
4. Ibid, p. 12
Schlesinger, Arthur M. Jr.  "The Age of Jackson" p. 8
Boston, Little, Brown & Co.

Tate, Allen, ed.  "Invitation To Learning" 1941
422 p. Random House, N.Y.

Thoron, Ward, ed.  "Letters of Mrs. Henry Adams"
1956
in history. Max Baym quotes Adams as follows:

“...To be educated is to be able to identify oneself and one’s work with the main stream or tendency of one’s time...is to possess a philosophy which will solve the mystery of life.”

However, we won’t deal with these philosophic imponderables, and shall try to keep the inquiry on as practical a plane as possible, not forgetting the more embracing aim of Adams’ search for education.

He relates that probably no child born in the year 1838, held better cards than he. He could not refuse to play his excellent hand. He was not irresponsible, and he was a consenting and contracting party and partner from the moment he was born to the moment he died with the society of his age. He wanted an education badly, one that would give him the power to do what he wanted to do. We have seen that he wanted political or press power. So this story of his education, seventy years of it, had great interest to himself and has great interest to us, if we can learn from his errors.

He tells us in another place that the education was:

Meant to help young men...or such as have intelligence enough to seek help...but it is not meant to amuse them...
Perhaps Henry Adams was not worth educating...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...He 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. What one knows is, in youth, of little moment; they know enough who know how to learn. Throughout human history the waste of mind has been appalling, and, as this story is meant to show, society has conspired to promote it. No doubt the teacher is the worst criminal, but the world stands behind him and drags the

5. Max I. Baym, "Henry Adams and the Critics" The American Scholar, Winter 1945-6, p. 82, V. 10, No.1
student from his course. The moral is stentorian.
Only the most energetic, the most highly fitted, and
the most favored have overcome the friction or the
viscosity of inertia, and these were compelled to waste
three fourths of their energy in doing it. 6

If we only knew how to learn, how to react to any purpose on the
forces that surround us. Indeed, when one thinks of it, the waste
of mind, throughout history, has been appalling.
Again he says: 

Education must fit the complex conditions of a new
society, always accelerating its movement, and its fit-
ness could be known only from success among the educated
of one's time. 7

He mentioned John Hay, Whitlaw Reid and Wm. O. Whitney as typical
and Whitney was the most popular type—he had money and handled it
well. Whitney succeeded precisely where Clarence King, Adams' model
of success, had failed. He says:

One knew no better in 1894 than in 1854 what an
American education ought to be to count as success.
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.

Had Adams in 1894 been starting in life as he did
in 1854, he must have repeated that all he asked of
education was the facile use of the four old tools:
Mathematics, French, German and Spanish. With these he
could still make his way to any object which was within
his vision and would have a decisive advantage over nine
rivals in ten. Statesman or lawyer, chemist or electrician,
priest or professor, native or foreign, he would fear none. 8

6. Education, p. 314
7. Ibid., p. 347
8. Ibid., p. 348
He intimates that money without the knowledge to live a fully rounded life is futile when he tells us that America contained scores of millionaires whose lives were no more worth living than those of their seekers and to whom the task of making money equivalent to education offered more difficulties than to Adams the task of making education equivalent to money. Social position seemed to have value still, while education counted for nothing. A mathematician, linguist, chemist, electrician, engineer, if fortunate, might average a value of ten dollars a day in the open market. An administrator, organizer, manager, with medieval qualities of energy and will, but no education beyond his special branch, would probably be worth at least ten times as much.

Adams thought that he could succeed with only four tools: mathematics, French, German and Spanish. This is doubtful. He would also have had to be an administrator, organizer, manager, with medieval qualities of energy. In addition he would have to accept his age and follow his own admonition to be ready for any emergency.

He tells us that any man with self-respect enough to become effective must account to himself for himself somehow, and that if the standard formulas failed he must invent a formula of his own for himself and his universe. His idea was not too extravagant or eccentric.

He sought no absolute truth; sought only a spool on which to wind the thread of history without breaking it. One sought the orbit which would best satisfy the observed movement of the runaway star Groenbridge, 1838, commonly called Henry Adams. As a term of nineteenth-century education, one sought a common factor for certain definite historical fractions. He sat down as though he were at school to shape, after his own needs, the values of a Dynamic Theory of History.

We need not concern ourselves with the accuracy of this theory, only with its application to education. He was concerned with forces and how they affected man. Let us see how force enters into education. He states:

9. Ibid.
10. Ibid. p. 472
A dynamic theory, like most theories, begins by begging the question; it defines Progress as the development and economy of Forces. Further, it defines force as anything that does, or helps to do work. Man is a force; so is the sun; so is a mathematical point, though without dimensions or known existence.

Man commonly begs the question again by taking for granted that he captures the forces. A dynamic theory, assigning attractive force to opposing bodies in proportion to the law of mass, takes for granted that the forces of nature capture man. The sum of force attracts; the feeble atom or molecule called man is attracted; he suffers education or growth; he is the sum of the forces that attract him; his body and his thought are alike their product; the movement of the forces controls the progress of his mind, since he can know nothing but the motions which impinge on his senses, whose sum makes education.

Progress, we see, is the development and economy of force. Force is anything that does work. Man is a force. Forces are attracted to the largest mass. Man, then, must suffer education or growth. He is the sum of the forces that attract him—in mind and body. As these forces move, his mind moves. The total movement of his brain makes up his education.

Adams became intensely conscious of forces, and their effect on man. He saw lines of force in everything. He kept magnets on his desk with steel filings to remind him of attractive forces. When we realize that each one is a product of all the forces that attract him, the function of education becomes immediately apparent. We now can see how forces, without worrying too much about the Dynamo and the Virgin, as such, and the validity of his whole Dynamic Theory of History, apply to education. If we can even partly control these forces in education, and direct them toward our specific needs, and predict and prepare for coming trends and needs of our day, our education should be more useful to ourselves and society.

11. Ibid., p. 474
He describes the possibilities of our age as follows:

Fortunately, a student of history had no responsibility for the problem; he took it as science gave it, and waited only to be taught. With science or with society, he had no quarrel and claimed no share of authority. He had never been able to acquire knowledge, still less to impart it; and if he had, at times, felt serious differences with the American of the nineteenth century, he felt none with the American of the twentieth. For this new creation, born since 1900, a historian asked no longer to be teacher or even friend; he asked only to be a pupil, and promised to be docile, even though tredded under foot; for he could see that the new American—the child of incalculable coal-power, chemical power, electric power and radiation energy, as well as of the new forces yet undetermined—must be a sort of God compared with any former creation of nature. At the rate of progress since 1800, every American who lived into the year 2000 would know how to control unlimited power. He would think in complexities unimaginable to an earlier mind. He would deal with problems altogether beyond the range of earlier society. To him the nineteenth century would stand on the same plane with the fourth—equally childlike—and he would only wonder how both of them, knowing so little, and so weak in force, should have done so much. Perhaps even he might go back, in 1964, to sit with Gibbon on the steps of Aen Cælestis.

He tells us that these new forces would educate and that:

The teacher... if foolhardy, might stimulate; if foolish might resist; if intelligent, might balance... but the forces would continue to educate, and the mind would continue to react. All the teacher could hope was to teach it reaction.

He tells us that this new American

...would need to think in contradictions... every law could be proved by its anti-law. He will require a new social mind... He would enter a new phase subject to new laws. 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.

This is certainly true today with our atomic energy. The mind must jump into a new phase to even dream of understanding it. Adams goes on describing these new forces:

12. Ibid., p. 496
13. Ibid., p. 501
14. Ibid., p. 497
If the acceleration, measured by the development of forces, were to continue at its rate since 1800, the mathematician of 1950 should be able to plot the past and future orbit of the human race as accurately as that of the November meteoroids.

Naturally such an attitude annoyed the players in the game, as the attitude of the umpire is apt to infuriate the spectators. Above all, it was profoundly un-moral, and tended to discourage effort. On the other hand, if it tended to encourage foresight and to economise waste of mind. If it was not itself education, it pointed out the economies necessary for the education of the new American.

Whether we may predict the future accurately doesn't concern us seriously, but we can see what is coming far enough ahead to be prepared for a new world. As he stated knowing what is to come prevents waste of mind and indicates the economies necessary for the education of the new American.

He says he would like to come back and visit this world, say in 1938, and perhaps then, for the first time since man began his education among the carnivores, he would find a world that sensitive and timid natures could regard without a shudder.

This world hasn't arrived yet. Perhaps if we could apply Henry Adams' ideas successfully on a wide scale, especially his idea about finding one's talents, cultivating them, and how to best use them in a world whose needs had, at least in part, been foreseen, it would be a step in that direction and might even be accomplished at some not too distant date.

Conclusions:

Education should fit young men to be men of the world, equipped for any emergency; it should give one mastery of the tools needed to

15. Ibid. p. 501
16. Ibid. p. 505
succeed; it should remove obstacles that stand in the way of one's success; it should stimulate effort to succeed; it should teach one to react with vigor of effort and economy of force; it should get order out of chaos, direction through space, discipline through freedom, and unity through multiplicity; it should give us the power to react to some purpose on the forces that surround us, and give us the power to become effective individuals; education in a word, then, should reveal our talents and show us how to make the best of them according to the demands of our day.
Education that Henry Adams found useless or full of fault.

He got little education, fitting him for his own time, from his schools:

He took for granted that this sort of world, more or less the same that had always existed in Boston and Massachusetts Bay, was the world which he was to fit. The world changed and the kind of man it needed changed. When Adams found this out it was too late to change his nature and his education.

He continues:

In any and all its forms, the boy detested school, and the prejudice became deeper with the years. He always reckoned his school days, from ten to sixteen years old, as time thrown away. Perhaps his needs turned out to be exceptional, but his existence was exceptional. For success in the life imposed on him he needed, as afterwards appeared, the facile use of only four tools: Mathematics, French, German and Spanish. With these, he could master in very short time any special branch of inquiry, and feel at home in any society. Latin and Greek he could, with the help of the modern languages, learn more completely by the intelligent work of six weeks than in the six years he spent on them at school. These four tools were necessary to his success in life, but he never controlled any one of them.

He needed more than these four tools, but they would have helped. He says: "The boy was thirty years old before his education reached Wordsworth." By "Wordsworth" he probably meant genuine poetry that helped him toward a correct evaluation of life. It seems that the schools could have remedied this lapse.

He continues:

The passionate hatred of school methods was almost a method in itself...he was compelled to learn by memory a quantity of things...School masters never gave time.

1. Education, p. 32
2. Ibid, p. 38
3. Ibid, p. 36
4. Ibid, p. 37
These are valid criticisms. The older schools left most things to memory work. That is the reason he said that the more he was educated the less he understood. It takes time to think. Most persons, including Henry Adams, need more time. Schools are in too much of a hurry. They should take time and see where they are going.

His education was good, as far as it went, but he couldn't use it to any purpose.

He had all he wanted. He saw no reason for thinking that anyone else had more. He finished with school, not very brilliantly, but without finding fault with the sum of his knowledge. Probably he knew more than his father, or his grandfather, or his great-grandfather had known at sixteen years old. Only on looking back, fifty years later, at his own figure in 1854, and pondering on the needs of the twentieth century, he wondered whether, on the whole, the boy of 1854, stood nearer to the thought of 1904, or that of the year 1. He found himself unable to give a sure answer. The calculation was clouded by the undetermined values of twentieth-century thought, but the story will show his reasons for thinking that, in essentials like religion, ethics, philosophy, in history, literature, art; in the concepts of all science, except perhaps mathematics, the American boy of 1854 stood nearer the year 1 than to the year 1900. 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.

He tells us his path to learning was "singularly circuitous and excessively wasteful of energy" and that

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.

The fault in the school here, for Adams at least, is that it didn't see his weakness and advise him. He didn't need friends but he needed to know how to use his friends. Of course, he might not have

5. Ibid., p. 44
6. Ibid., p. 52
7. Ibid., p. 52
8. Ibid
He hated large classes.

Any large body of students stifles the student. No man can instruct more than half a dozen students at once. The whole problem of education is one of its cost in money. It is true the schools would be more effective if they had more money for each child. Schools should become more and more expensive and more and more effective in teaching. Where better place can we spend our money? We spend billions for cheap entertainment, cosmetics, tobacco, and liquor. The cost is many billions more than the cost of education, and what have we to show for it except bad complexions and headaches.

He disliked the lecture system. He says that

He was bored by facts and wanted to teach his students something not wholly useless. The number of students whose minds were of an order above the average was, in his experience, barely one of ten; the rest could not be much stimulated by any inducements a teacher could suggest.

He quickly had his best students meet with him in his study. They investigated, talked and wrote. He felt that he had helped them, and the rest couldn't be reached so easily. It would take a better method than he had the time or the patience to find to reach the other nine.

The lecture system at best is not too effective. Some minds are receptive enough to grasp things from hearing them once, but most

9. Ibid. p. 300
10. Ibid. p. 302
11. Ibid.
minds must learn by doing. Henry Adams turned his students loose and they met periodically and compared results. He remarks: "As pedagogy, nothing could be more triumphant--The boys worked like rabbits." 12

However, he says:

What was the use of training an active mind to waste its energy? He wanted to help the boys to a career...His mind required conflict, competition, contradiction, even more than that of the student. 13

He couldn't teach truth in history because very little was known; so he soon left the profession.

He thought his seven years at Harvard were wasted, but his students, the faculty and President Eliot have said that he was a great teacher. He was deeply touched by their regard for him and said:

Yet nothing in the vanity of life struck him as more humiliating than that Harvard College, which he had persistently criticised, abused, abandoned, and neglected, should alone have offered him a dollar, an office, an encouragement or a kindness. Harvard College might have its faults, but at least it redeemed America, since it was true to its own. 14

Religion vanished from his life and he missed it sorely in later life. Henry Adams needed something to believe in, a faith, more than most men. He says:

Of all the conditions of his youth which afterwards puzzled the grown-up man, this disappearance of religion puzzled him most. The boy went to church twice every Sunday; he was taught to read his Bible, and he learned religious poetry by heart; he believed in a mild deism; he prayed; he went through all the forms; but neither to him nor to his brothers or sisters was religion real. Even the mild discipline of the Unitarian Church was so irksome that they all threw it off at the first possible moment, and never afterwards entered a church. The religious instinct had vanished, and could not be revived, although one made in later life many efforts to recover it. That the most power-

12. Ibid. p. 303
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid. p. 305
ful emotion of man, next to the sexual, should disappear, might be a personal defect of his own; but that the most intelligent society, led by the most intelligent clergy, in the most moral conditions he ever knew, should have solved all the problems of the universe so thoroughly as to have quite ceased making itself anxious about past or future, and should have persuaded itself that all the problems which had convulsed human thought from earliest recorded time, were not worth discussing, seemed to him the most curious social phenomenon he had to account for in a long life.

This loss of faith was due in part to the skepticism of his age, and perhaps in part to his having no need for a faith when he was young. He saw the need, later, for some unity, some belief, some faith and in a sense wrote his two greatest books, Mont. Saint Michel and Chartres and the Education, to prove the existence, or at least the need, of some unifying force in the universe.

To recapitulate and expand Henry Adams' criticism of education, what our schools need then is to reassert their belief in certain fundamental values. It must get back to vital, functional, dynamic education. That is, education that is assimilated into our blood, and is translated into action. Education, as Henry Adams meant it, is learning that gives us strength and power, as fully assimilated food does. It is knowledge that functions, moves in our lives, is translated into our behavior, solves problems, meets emergencies, causes us to grow in some way, become aware of what forces one will meet in life and how to control them, predict future trends fairly accurately. Education is to know what is coming and be ready for it. It should tell us how to use knowledge, apply it, put it to work. If learning isn't active in our lives it clogs up our powers of receptivity and our powers of expression. The inflow and outflow of knowledge must be

15. Ibid. p. 34
equal to each other. Learning, to be effectual, is an active process. One must work on facts and translate them into growth (called learning).

We do not learn by a mere accretion of facts. One must make facts become bone of our bone if they are to be of any value.

Henry Adams observed that man does not move by himself. He must be kicked upstairs. His inertia towards learning is man's most serious fault. The compass educated; gunpowder educated; the atomic bomb educated. Yes in the sense that they moved us—but in what direction? Have we learned enough yet? Can we use atomic energy to relieve man's suffering on this earth? Not according to experiments now being conducted in the Marshalls.

Conclusions:

His schools assumed, without question that he was being trained to fit the world in which he was to live. They didn't give him mastery of mathematics, French, German and Spanish. He needed, he said, these four tools for success in his life. They failed to give him any deep appreciation of poetry. He needed poetry in his life to give him trustworthy criteria in evaluating life.

His schools stressed memory work too much and neglected critical analysis. They didn't give him time to think. They were too busy cramming his memory. In essentials like religion, ethics, philosophy, history, literature, art, concepts of all science his schools stood nearer the year 1 than to the year 1900; they were "singularly circuitous and excessively wasteful of energy."

He needed a wise adviser, hated large classes and thought that
The lecture system was a poor teaching method. The discussion system was better. His mind required conflict, competition, contradiction, but he found none in the schools.

Lastly, religion vanished from his life.
What Did He Find Useful in Education?

He liked students everywhere. He says:

Education, like politics, is a rough affair, and every instructor has to shut his eyes and hold his tongue as though he were a priest. The student alone satisfied. They thought they gained something. Perhaps they did, for even in America and in the twentieth century, life could not be wholly industrial.

He got much from reading. He has this to say:

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.

He acquired self-possession and learned to speak:

Self-possession was the strongest part of Harvard College, which certainly taught men to stand alone, so that nothing seemed stronger to its graduates than the paroxysms of terror before the public which often overcame the graduates of European universities. Whether this was, or was not, education, Henry Adams never knew. He was ready to stand up before any audience in America or Europe, with nerves rather steadier for the excitement but whether he should ever have anything to say, remained to be proved. As yet he knew nothing. Education had not begun.

He learned to love music. He tells us how:

He supposed that, except musicians, every one thought Beethoven a bore, as every one except mathematicians thought mathematics a bore. Sitting thus at his beer table, mentally impassive, he was one day surprised to notice that his mind followed the movement of a Sinfonia. He could not have been more astonished had he suddenly read a new language.

Among the marvels of education, this was the most marvelous. A prison—wall that barred his senses on one great side of life, suddenly fell of its own accord, without so much as his knowing how it happened. Amid the fumes of coarse tobacco and poor beer, surrounded by the commonest of German Hausfrauen, a new sense burst out like a flower in his life.

16. Ibid. p. 306
17. Ibid. p. 39
18. Ibid. p. 66
19. Ibid. p. 83
Bored with his pursuit of the Civil Law in Germany he toured Europe for the next eighteen months and by what he called "accidental education" he gained more useful knowledge than he ever got out of schools. He always maintained that accidental education helped him more than any other kind.  

Women taught him much. He tells us: "In after life he made a general law of experience...no woman had ever driven him wrong; no man had ever driven him right." 

Pain educated him quickly. His sister died. It was a grave blow. He concludes: "The proper equivalent of pleasure is pain, which is also a form of education." 

He learned much from science but has this to say:

In theory one might say, with some show of proof, that a pure, scientific education was alone correct; yet many of his friends who took it, found reason to complain that it was anything but a pure, scientific world in which they lived.

He got much from his friends. He says:

Friends are born, not made, and Henry never mistook a friend except when in power.

The Civil War educated him immensely but it had cost a million lives and ten billion dollars. He was educated in regard to the waste of war but each generation has to learn its own lesson, it seems, in war, and each war becomes more expensive in lives and money.

English society taught him this:

One must expect to be treated with exquisite courtesy this week and be totally forgotten the next, but this was the way of the world, and education consisted in learning to turn one's back on others with the same unconscious indifference that others showed among themselves.

20. Ibid. p. 80
21. Ibid. p. 84
22. Ibid. p. 86
23. Ibid. p. 87
24. Ibid. p. 106
25. Ibid. p. 109
26. Ibid. p. 183
Conclusions:

He liked students, learned much from reading, acquired self-possession, learned to speak and to appreciate music.

He found that accidental education proved useful, especially when he learned to appreciate women and found that pain educated, and that science is useful, but not an end in itself.

He loved his friends and got much from them. War shocked him into awareness. He learned to treat coolness with coolness.

What Qualities Did His Models, Clarence King and Charles Francis Adams, Possess?

Henry Adams mentions his father and his great friend, Clarence King as models. King had what Adams thought was the ideal education for his day.

We shall list these qualities in the order Adams mentions them, as attributes, lifted from their context, so that at a glance we can have his idea of human perfection in his day.

Charles Francis Adams possessed:

1. The only perfectly balanced mind that ever existed in the family name.

   He had perfectly balanced judgment, mental poise and had an absence of self-assertion and self-consciousness coupled with a balance of mind and temper that neither challenged nor avoided notice.

   He never admitted a question of superiority, or inferiority, or jealousy, or personal motives from any source, even under
great pressure.

His mental faculties were in no way exceptional either for depth or range. His memory was hardly above the average and 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. 27

Henry Adams particularly admired these qualities in contrast to his father's restless-minded, introspective, self-conscious children. 28

Clarence King possessed these qualities:

He was the only one who stood out in extraordinary prominence as the type and model of what Adams would have liked to be, and of what the American, as he conceived, should have been and was not.

He knew more than Adams did of art and poetry and knew America, especially west of the hundredth meridian, better than anyone. He knew the professor by heart and the Congressman even better than the professor. He knew even women; even the American woman; even the New York woman, which is saying much. He knew more practical geology than was good for him and saw ahead at least one generation ahead of the textbooks.

The charm of King was that he saw what others did and a great deal more. He had wit and humor, had a bubbling energy which swept everyone into the current of his interest, had the personal charm of youth and manners and had a faculty of giving and taking, profusely, lavishly, whether in thought or in money as though he were Nature herself.

27. Ibid., p. 26
28. Ibid., p. 28
He was alone among Americans, had in him something of the Greek—a touch of Alcibiades, or Alexander. One Clarence King only existed in the world. He brought to friendship a certain parallelism of life, a community of thought, a rivalry of aim. King had moulded and directed his life logically, scientifically as Adams thought American life should be directed.

He could look back and look forward on a straight line, with scientific knowledge for its base. King's abnormal energy won him great success. He created one of the classic scientific works of the century—the Government Survey.

He had whatever prize he wanted, scientific, social, literary, political, and he knew how to take them in turn. With ordinary luck he would die at eighty the richest and most many sided genius of his day.

So little egoistic he was that none of his friends felt envy of his extraordinary superiority, but rather groveled before it. Women were jealous of the power he had over men; but women were many and Kings were one. The men worshipped not so much their friend, as the ideal American they all wanted to be.

The women were jealous because, at heart, King had no faith in the American woman; he loved types more robust.

He felt no leanings towards the simple uniformities of Lyell and Darwin; they saw little proof of slight and imperceptible changes; to him, catastrophe was the law of change. He cared little for simplicity and much for complexity, but it was the complexity of Nature not of New York. King loved paradox; he started them like rabbits and cared for them no longer, when caught or lost. King persuaded Adams that history was more amusing than science.29

29. Ibid., pp. 311, 312, 345
Clarence King, lost his fortune in the panic of 1893. Adams' faith in his model was shaken, not because his model was any the less perfect, but because luck had been against even such a paragon. He had this to say: 'Youth and maturity: rise and

In 1871, he had thought King's education ideal, and his personal fitness unrivalled. No other young American approached him for the combination of chances—physical, energy, social standing, mental scope and training, with geniality and science, that seemed, superlatively American and irresistibly strong. His nearest rival was Alexander Agassiz, and, as far as their friends knew, no one else ever could be classed with them in the running. The result of twenty years' effort proved that the theory of scientific education failed where most theory fails—for want of money.

He also quotes his friend, John Hay, as saying:

The tragedy of King impressed Hay intensely: 'There you have it in the face!' he said—'the best and brightest man of his generation, with talents immeasurably beyond any of his contemporaries; with industry that has often sickened me to witness it; with everything in his favor but blind luck; hounded by disaster from his cradle, with none of the joy of life to which he was entitled, dying at last, with nameless suffering, alone and uncared-for, in a California tavern. "Ca vous amuse, la vie."'

He concludes, however, that: 'The failure of the scientific scheme without money to back it, was flagrant.'

Conclusions:

Henry Adams' model must have a balanced mind, good judgment, poise, absence of self assertion and self-consciousness; must neither challenge nor avoid notice; have no sense of superiority or inferiority or jealousy or personal motives; have self restraint and instinctive mastery of form; know art and poetry, know America,

30. Ibid. p. 346
31. Ibid. p. 417
32. Ibid. p. 347
know the professor, the Congressman and women, know science; look ahead at least one generation and know what is coming. See what others do and a great deal more; have wit and humor, bubbling energy, personal charm of youth and manners; give and take profusely; be in a class by himself; be a great friend; direct his life logically and scientifically, but cultivate the emotions; be a prodigious worker; attain success in the scientific, social, literary or political field as he chose to do so; have power over men. Be the man all men want to be; admire the robust type among women; admire the complexity of nature and love paradox.

General Conclusions:

1. Henry Adams wanted political or press power.

2. He failed to get this because, among other reasons, his education had not prepared him to meet the demands of his day.
Bibliography

Books by Henry Adams referred to in this essay:


Education of Henry Adams, an Autobiography
Houghton, N.Y., 1918, 506 p.

Letters of Henry Adams 1868-91; edited by
W. C. Ford 1930

Letters of Henry Adams 1872-1918; edited by
W. C. Ford 1936

Books and articles by others referred to or consulted in this essay:

Adams, James Truslow

The Adams Family

"Henry Adams and the New Physics"
Volume 19, Yale Review, Dec., 1929
pp. 283-302

Baym, Max I.

"Henry Adams and the Critics"
V. 15, No. 1, The American Scholar
Winter 1945-46, pp. 79-89

Beard, Charles Austin

"Historians At Work" Volume 171
Atlantic Monthly, April 1942
pp. 87-93

Brooks, Van Wyck

"New England Indian Summer" 1850-1915
Dutton, 1936, 557 p.

Dennett, Tyler

"Five of Hearts" Volume 28
Scholastic, March 14, 1936
Schlesinger, Arthur M. Jr.  
"The Age of Jackson" p. 8  
Boston, Little, Brown & Co.

Tate, Allen, ed.  
"Invitation To Learning" 1941  
422 p. Random House, N.Y.

Thoron, Ward, ed.  
"Letters of Mrs. Henry Adams"  
1936