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*Henry Adams*

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**Henry Adams : The Education of Henry Adams** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Education of Henry Adams:

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Education of Henry Adams By Robert Rose-Coutreacut; The Education of Henry Adams is rich in personal observations and nineteenth-century history. Even his mile walk to school at age 6 has historical interest, because the 77-year-old man who held his hand and walked with him was the sixth US president, John Quincy Adams, Henry's grandfather. For the record, Henry's great-grandfather was the second US president, John Adams (signatory of the Declaration of Independence), then his grandfather John Quincy Adams the sixth president, and his father the US ambassador to England during the Civil War. His maternal grandfather Peter Chardon Brooks was one of the 100 wealthiest Americans, a merchant millionaire, which was rare in the 1700s and early 1800s. Adams was alive twenty-two years before the Civil War, and from his earliest years was appalled at slavery and the retrograde violation of human dignity in the southern defense of slavery (100). He met presidents from, of course, his grandfather John Quincy, through Zachary Taylor, Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, and many more, through twentieth-century presidents McKinley and Teddy Roosevelt. He died in 1918, the same year that World War I ended. It was a long way from the early American pioneer days of 1838 when he was born. When Adams was born, transportation and communication had not changed in 10,000 years. When he died he had seen the introduction of new transportation and communication that the twentieth century took for granted. Henry served as assistant to the ambassador to England for eight years when he was fresh out of Harvard University. Returning to the US around 1869 he started a career he loved as a journalist. But his family, friends, and professors he respected, persuaded him to take the position of history professor at Harvard. He did it for seven years. One of his students was Henry Cabot Lodge. Other than the friends he made during this period, he hated teaching and considered it a waste of seven years. He had little faith in standard teaching methods and outcomes. He valued the active mind and to "know how to learn" rather than the stuff that people spend most of their time studying (314). He believed in slower-paced learning to more fully and deeply absorb subjects as opposed to fast-paced surface learning. On the other hand, he felt a little guilty after Harvard had greeted him as an adult with open arms: "Yet nothing in the vanity of life struck him as more humiliating than that Harvard College, which he had persistently criticized, abused, abandoned, and neglected, should alone have offered him a dollar, an office, an encouragement, or a kindness" (305). He returned to his writing career, which over his lifetime included novels, the eight-volume History of the United States During the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, historical and legal essays, the two books I've reviewed, and many others. He was one of America's most esteemed historians though he spent his life with a sense of personal failure and a low estimation of his own education. His lifelong pursuit was to

extrapolate and understand the trajectory of human evolution, socially, politically, industrially, scientifically, theologically, and technologically. One of his comments on human evolutionary development sounds very modern. As history students know, Ulysses S. Grant had been a great general, but was corrupt as president. Speaking of Grant, Adams cuts to the chase: "He had no right to exist. He should have been extinct for ages. . . . That, two thousand years after Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, a man like Grant should be called . . . the highest product of the most advanced evolution, made evolution ludicrous. . . . Darwinists ought to conclude that America was reverting to the stone age"; (266). The Education is rife with insightful commentary on the world spinning around him, sometimes moving too fast to comprehend, sometimes moving incomprehensively backwards. He saw paradigm-shift inventions from telegraph and trains, to telephone and automobiles (he even bought a car in his later years), steam then electricity, inventions like photography, then film and the early Hollywood silent films, finally airplanes and the discovery of radium and radiation. Adams traveled more than most Americans in the nineteenth century. He spent many years throughout Europe, Russia, Asia, Africa, the Pacific islands and the Caribbean. He was an early observer of the merging of Western Cultures, noting "Hamburg was almost as American as St. Louis"; (414). The Education has hidden treasures, offhand observations that end up being the most memorable. For example, he notes the affectation of eccentric behaviors in people considered highly eccentric. Eccentricity itself becomes a convention. He observes that "a mind really eccentric never betrayed it. True eccentricity was a tone—a shade—a nuance—and the finer the tone, the truer the eccentricity"; (370). Adams's final thoughts show his disappointment: "He saw his education complete, and was sorry he ever began it"; (458). He abhorred the ever-worsening "persistently fiendish treatment of man by man; . . . the perpetual symbolism of a higher law, and the perpetual relapse to a lower one"; and principals of freedom deteriorating into principals of power and the "despotism of artificial order"; (458), referring to the rise of corporate dominance over society. He particularly disliked the growing influence of corporate power: "The Trusts and Corporations stood for the larger part of the new power that had been created since 1840, and were obnoxious because of their vigorous and unscrupulous energy; . . . They tore society to pieces and trampled it under foot"; (500). Adams had good friends who met tragic fates, his wife committed suicide at a young age, and as he grew older, found himself "A solitary man of sixty-five years or more, alone in a Gothic cathedral or a Paris apartment"; (460). So this is The Education of Henry Adams. You may wonder why I liked it so much, and recommend it. The book is a retrospective provided by one of our most observant students of life, with access to the most interesting places and people in their most interesting times. The book itself is a fascinating education for anyone who reads it. Robert Rose-Coutre Author of Call of the Active Mind 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A wonderful run through America 1938 (Henry's birth year) to the . . . By Paul Avery Still reading it. Saw it was the #1 book on the Modern Library's top 100 non-fiction books and a Pulitzer Prize winner and yet couldn't find it in a number of local libraries. A wonderful run through America 1938 (Henry's birth year) to the beginning of the 20th Century by John's great-grandson and John Quincy's grandson. Served as Secretary to his father Charles Francis when he was Minister to Great Britain during the Civil War, an unenviable job as the Confederates sought recognition from the Crown as a legitimate State. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A classic of American history By Brian V. Hunt More than a history of his time, Henry Adams' "Education" is about what it means to search for a thread through life that provides meaning and order. Born to a storied family, his life was rich and played out among the wealthy and powerful. One of his most intimate friends was John Hay, Lincoln's secretary and Teddy Roosevelt's Secretary of State. Adams' masterpiece is written with tremendous wit and insight, and reads as very modern to a 21st Century reader.

This work has been selected by scholars as being culturally important and is part of the knowledge base of civilization as we know it. This work is in the public domain in the United States of America, and possibly other nations. Within the United States, you may freely copy and distribute this work, as no entity (individual or corporate) has a copyright on the body of the work. Scholars believe, and we concur, that this work is important enough to be preserved, reproduced, and made generally available to the public. To ensure a quality reading experience, this work has been proofread and republished using a format that seamlessly blends the original graphical elements with text in an easy-to-read typeface. We appreciate your support of the preservation process, and thank you for being an important part of keeping this knowledge alive and relevant.

.com Many great artists have had at least intermittent doubts about their own abilities. But The Education of Henry Adams is surely one of the few masterpieces to issue directly from a raging inferiority complex. The author, to be sure, had bigger shoes to fill than most of us. Both his grandfather and great-grandfather were U.S. presidents. His father, a relative underachiever, scraped by as a member of Congress and ambassador to the Court of St. James. But young Henry, born in Boston in 1838, was destined for a walk-on role in his nation's history--and seemed alarmingly aware of the fact from the time he was an adolescent. It gets worse. For the author could neither match his exalted ancestors nor dismiss them as dusty relics--he was an Adams, after all, formed from the same 18th-century clay. "The

atmosphere of education in which he lived was colonial," we are told, revolutionary, almost Cromwellian, as though he were steeped, from his greatest grandmother's birth, in the odor of political crime. Resistance to something was the law of New England nature; the boy looked out on the world with the instinct of resistance; for numberless generations his predecessors had viewed the world chiefly as a thing to be reformed, filled with evil forces to be abolished, and they saw no reason to suppose that they had wholly succeeded in the abolition; the duty was unchanged. Here, as always, Adams tells his story in a third-person voice that can seem almost extraplanetary in its detachment. Yet there's also an undercurrent of melancholy and amusement--and wonder at the specific details of what was already a lost world. Continuing his uphill conquest of the learning curve, Adams attended Harvard, which didn't do much for him. ("The chief wonder of education is that it does not ruin everybody concerned in it, teachers and taught.") Then, after a beer-and-sausage-scented spell as a graduate student in Berlin, he followed his father to Washington, D.C., in 1860. There he might have remained--bogged down in "the same rude colony ... camped in the same forest, with the same unfinished Greek temples for workrooms, and sloughs for roads"--had not the Civil War sent Adams pegrave;re et fils to London. Henry sat on the sidelines throughout the conflict, serving as his father's private secretary and anxiously negotiating the minefields of English society. He then returned home and commenced a long career as a journalist, historian, novelist, and peripheral participant in the political process--a kind of mouthpiece for what remained of the New England conscience. He was not, by any measure but his own, a failure. And the proof of the pudding is *The Education of Henry Adams* itself, which remains among the oddest and most enlightening books in American literature. It contains thousands of memorable one-liners about politics, morality, culture, and transatlantic relations: "The American mind exasperated the European as a buzz-saw might exasperate a pine forest." There are astonishing glimpses of the high and mighty: "He saw a long, awkward figure; a plain, ploughed face; a mind, absent in part, and in part evidently worried by white kid gloves; features that expressed neither self-satisfaction nor any other familiar Americanism..." (That would be Abraham Lincoln; the "melancholy function" his Inaugural Ball.) But most of all, Adams's book is a brilliant account of how his own sensibility came to be. A literary landmark from the moment it first appeared, the *Autobiography* confers upon its author precisely that prize he felt had always eluded him: success. -- James Marcus There are sentences, paragraphs, whole pages that the reviewer is deeply tempted to quote. Suffice it again to recommend the public to read the book as a whole. -- The New York Times Book From the Inside Flap'I cannot remember when I was not fascinated by Henry Adams, ' said Gore Vidal. 'He was remarkably prescient about the coming horrors.' His political ideals shaped by two presidential ancestors--great-grandfather John Adams and grandfather John Quincy Adams--Henry Adams was one of the most powerful and original minds to confront the American scene from the Civil War to the First World War. Printed privately in 1907 and published to wide acclaim shortly after the author's death in 1918, *The Education of Henry Adams* is a brilliant, idiosyncratic blend of autobiography and history that charts the great transformation in American life during the so-called Gilded Age. With an introduction by renowned historian Edmund Morris.

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