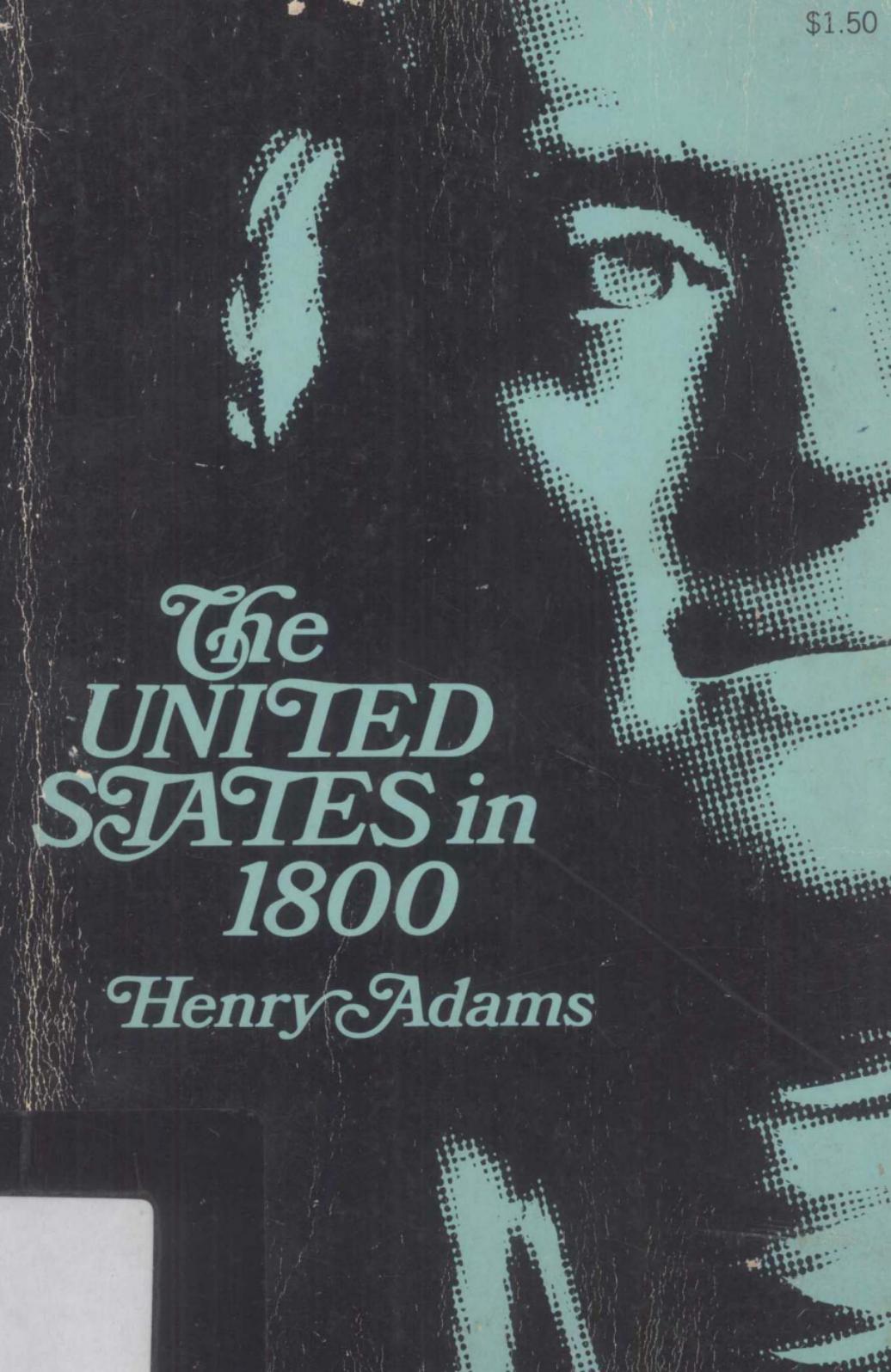


\$1.50



The
UNITED
STATES in
1800

Henry Adams

The United States in 1800

By Henry Adams

Cornell Paperbacks

Cornell University Press

ITHACA, NEW YORK



This book consists of the first six chapters of Volume I of Henry Adams' *History of the United States of America during the First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1889. Now, in 1955, these six chapters are being reissued under the title *The United States in 1800*.

CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS

First printing, Great Seal Books, 1955

Second printing 1957

Third printing 1958

Fourth printing 1959

Fifth printing 1960

Sixth printing 1961

Seventh printing 1962

Eighth printing 1962

Ninth printing 1963

Tenth printing, Cornell Paperbacks, 1964

Eleventh printing 1965

Twelfth printing 1966

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

BY VALLEY OFFSET, INC.

BOUND BY VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC.

1778

The United States in 1800

Prefatory Note

HENRY ADAMS was a many-sided genius. The Boston Unitarian who could write in profound appreciation and insight of the glass and glamour of Chartres was no ordinary workaday historian. The humanist who could appreciate, as few humanists did, the place of science in the modern world was gifted with a breadth of view denied to many practitioners of the historical craft. The writer of *The Education* was a philosopher as well as a narrator.

But there is no work on which Adams spent more effort and none that deserves more recognition than the *History of the United States* in the administrations of Jefferson and Madison and no part of this that is more remarkable than the essays on social history which constitute the six opening chapters reproduced in this little volume. It would not be right to say that Adams was the first of the social historians in the United States. John Bach McMaster had preceded him with his *A History of the People of the United States*, the first volume of which had been published in 1883. But McMaster had no coherent philosophy, no extraordinary charm of style, and no feeling for the deeper values. Henry Adams had all of these.

There is room for criticism of Adams' sketch of the America of 1800. One feels that he understood New England better

than he did the Middle States or the South. But considering the date at which they were written, the six chapters reveal fine historical sweep and genuine penetration. Furthermore, they give us a picture of the author which ought to be set beside the one often painted of him as the cynical and tired observer of events. In his chapter on "American Ideals" Adams saw to the heart of the American scene. He pictures an America in which the great forces of technology and of invention were about to be released; he sees, too, and expresses in poignant language, the fundamental promise of a society in which the career open to talents was a dominating feature. There is far more of hope than of despair in his portrayal of the United States at the turn of the nineteenth century. There is more of dignity than of disillusion. Critic, of course, Adams always was; but the *History* is quick with national pride and marked by tempered optimism.

It is refreshing, too, to find an American historian who, nearly seventy years ago, knew something of Europe and who could draw parallels and contrasts between the Old World and the New. The theme is not embroidered; it is suggested. But the suggestion is significant. American history is indeed unique, but there is no reason why it should be written by provincials. Henry Adams was no provincial. In the range and depth of his mind he has few, if any, superiors in the history of American historiography.

DEXTER PERKINS

Cornell University

Henry Adams, A Biographical Note

HENRY ADAMS (Henry Brooks Adams), 1838–1918, American historian, b. Boston, grad. Harvard, 1858; son of Charles Francis Adams (1807–86). He was secretary (1861–68) to his father, then U.S. minister at the Court of St. James's. Upon his return to the United States, having already abandoned the law and seeing no opportunity in the traditional Adams calling, politics, he briefly tried journalism. He reluctantly accepted (1870) an offer to teach medieval history at Harvard, but stayed on seven years and also edited (1870–76) the *North American Review*. In 1877 Adams moved to Washington, D.C., his home thereafter. He wrote a good biography of Albert Gallatin (1879), a less satisfactory one of John Randolph (1882), and two novels (the first anonymously and the second under a pseudonym)—*Democracy* (1880), a cutting satire on politics, and *Esther* (1884). His exhaustive study of the administrations of Jefferson and Madison, *History of the United States of America* (9 vols., 1889–91; reprinted in 3 vols., 1929; condensed and ed. by Herbert Agar as *The Formative Years*, 2 vols., 1947), is one of the major achievements of American historical writing. Famous for its style, it is deficient, perhaps, in understanding the basic economic forces at work, but the first six chapters constitute one of the best social surveys of any

period in U.S. history. Never of a sanguine temperament, Adams became even more pessimistic after the suicide (1885) of his adored wife. He abandoned American history and began a series of restless journeyings, physical and mental, in an effort to achieve a basic philosophy of history. Drawing upon the physical sciences for guidance and influenced by his brother, Brooks Adams, he found a satisfactory unifying principle in force or energy. He selected for intensive treatment two periods—1050–1250, presented in *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* (privately printed 1904, pub. 1913), and his own era, presented in *The Education of Henry Adams* (privately printed 1906, pub. 1918). The first is a brilliant idealization of the Middle Ages, specifically of the 13th-century unity brought about by the force of the Virgin, then dominant. The second, although written in the third person and reticent about much of his life, was classified by his publishers as an autobiography. Another *tour de force*, it describes his unsuccessful efforts to achieve intellectual peace in an age when the force of the dynamo is dominant. These two books, containing some of the most beautiful English ever written, rather than his monumental *History*, won Adams his lasting place as a major American writer. *The Degradation of the Democratic Dogma* (1919), edited and prefaced by a memoir of Henry Adams by his brother Brooks, contains three brilliant essays on his philosophy of history—"The Tendency of History," "A Letter to American Teachers of History" (pub. separately in 1910), and "The Rule of Phase Applied to History." Friendships, especially those with John Hay and Clarence King, played a large part in Adams's life, and his personal letters reveal a warmer man, for an Adams, than one might suspect.—*The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 2d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), by permission.

Contents

Prefatory Note	v
Henry Adams, A Biographical Note	ix
I Physical and Economical Conditions	1
II Popular Characteristics	29
III Intellect of New England	53
IV Intellect of the Middle States	77
V Intellect of the Southern States	94
VI American Ideals	112

CHAPTER I

Physical and Economical Conditions

ACCORDING to the census of 1800, the United States of America contained 5,308,483 persons. In the same year the British Islands contained upwards of fifteen millions; the French Republic, more than twenty-seven millions. Nearly one fifth of the American people were negro slaves; the true political population consisted of four and a half million free whites, or less than one million able-bodied males, on whose shoulders fell the burden of a continent. Even after two centuries of struggle the land was still untamed; forest covered every portion, except here and there a strip of cultivated soil; the minerals lay undisturbed in their rocky beds, and more than two thirds of the people clung to the seaboard within fifty miles of tide-water, where alone the wants of civilized life could be supplied. The centre of population rested within eighteen miles of Baltimore, north and east of Washington. Except in political arrangement, the interior was little more civilized than in 1750, and was not much easier to penetrate than when La Salle and Hennepin found their way to the Mississippi more than a century before.

A great exception broke this rule. Two wagon-roads crossed the Alleghany Mountains in Pennsylvania,—one leading from Philadelphia to Pittsburg; one from the Potomac to the Monon-

gahela; while a third passed through Virginia southwestward to the Holston River and Knoxville in Tennessee, with a branch through the Cumberland Gap into Kentucky. By these roads and by trails less passable from North and South Carolina, or by water-ways from the lakes, between four and five hundred thousand persons had invaded the country beyond the Alleghanies. At Pittsburg and on the Monongahela existed a society, already old, numbering seventy or eighty thousand persons, while on the Ohio River the settlements had grown to an importance which threatened to force a difficult problem on the union of the older States. One hundred and eighty thousand whites, with forty thousand negro slaves, made Kentucky the largest community west of the mountains; and about ninety thousand whites and fourteen thousand slaves were scattered over Tennessee. In the territory north of the Ohio less progress had been made. A New England colony existed at Marietta; some fifteen thousand people were gathered at Cincinnati; half-way between the two, a small town had grown up at Chillicothe, and other villages or straggling cabins were to be found elsewhere; but the whole Ohio territory contained only forty-five thousand inhabitants. The entire population, both free and slave, west of the mountains, reached not yet half a million; but already they were partly disposed to think themselves, and the old thirteen States were not altogether unwilling to consider them, the germ of an independent empire, which was to find its outlet, not through the Alleghanies to the seaboard, but by the Mississippi River to the Gulf.

Nowhere did eastern settlements touch the western. At least one hundred miles of mountainous country held the two regions everywhere apart. The shore of Lake Erie, where alone contact seemed easy, was still unsettled. The Indians had been pushed back to the Cuyahoga River, and a few cabins were built on the site of Cleveland; but in 1800, as in 1700, this intermediate region was only a portage where emigrants and merchandise were transferred from Lake Erie to the Muskingum and Ohio valleys. Even western New York remained a wilderness: Buffalo

was not laid out; Indian titles were not extinguished; Rochester did not exist; and the county of Onondaga numbered a population of less than eight thousand. In 1799 Utica contained fifty houses, mostly small and temporary. Albany was still a Dutch city, with some five thousand inhabitants; and the tide of immigration flowed slowly through it into the valley of the Mohawk, while another stream from Pennsylvania, following the Susquehanna, spread toward the Genesee country.

The people of the old thirteen States, along the Atlantic seaboard, thus sent westward a wedge-shaped mass of nearly half a million persons, penetrating by the Tennessee, Cumberland, and Ohio rivers toward the western limit of the Union. The Indians offered sharp resistance to this invasion, exacting life for life, and yielding only as their warriors perished. By the close of the century the wedge of white settlements, with its apex at Nashville and its flanks covered by the Ohio and Tennessee rivers, nearly split the Indian country in halves. The northern half—consisting of the later States of Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana, and one third of Ohio—contained Wyandottes and Shawanese, Miamis, Kickapoos, and other tribes, able to send some five thousand warriors to hunt or fight. In the southern half, powerful confederacies of Creeks, Cherokees, Chickasaws, and Choctaws lived and hunted where the States of Mississippi, Alabama, and the western parts of Georgia, Tennessee, and Kentucky were to extend; and so weak was the State of Georgia, which claimed the southwestern territory for its own, that a well-concerted movement of Indians might without much difficulty have swept back its white population of one hundred thousand toward the ocean or across the Savannah River. The Indian power had been broken in halves, but each half was still terrible to the colonists on the edges of their vast domain, and was used as a political weapon by the Governments whose territory bounded the Union on the north and south. The governors-general of Canada intrigued with the northwestern Indians, that they might hold in check any aggression from Washington; while the Spanish governors of West Florida and

Louisiana maintained equally close relations with the Indian confederacies of the Georgia territory.

With the exception that half a million people had crossed the Alleghanies and were struggling with difficulties all their own, in an isolation like that of Jutes or Angles in the fifth century, America, so far as concerned physical problems, had changed little in fifty years. The old landmarks remained nearly where they stood before. The same bad roads and difficult rivers, connecting the same small towns, stretched into the same forests in 1800 as when the armies of Braddock and Amherst pierced the western and northern wilderness, except that these roads extended a few miles farther from the seacoast. Nature was rather man's master than his servant, and the five million Americans struggling with the untamed continent seemed hardly more competent to their task than the beavers and buffalo which had for countless generations made bridges and roads of their own.

Even by water, along the seaboard, communication was as slow and almost as irregular as in colonial times. The wars in Europe caused a sudden and great increase in American shipping employed in foreign commerce, without yet leading to general improvement in navigation. The ordinary sea-going vessel carried a freight of about two hundred and fifty tons; the largest merchant ships hardly reached four hundred tons; the largest frigate in the United States navy, the "line-of-battle ship in disguise," had a capacity of fifteen hundred and seventy-six tons. Elaborately rigged as ships or brigs, the small merchant craft required large crews and were slow sailers; but the voyage to Europe was comparatively more comfortable and more regular than the voyage from New York to Albany, or through Long Island Sound to Providence. No regular packet plied between New York and Albany. Passengers waited till a sloop was advertised to sail; they provided their own bedding and supplies; and within the nineteenth century Captain Elias Bunker won much fame by building the sloop "Experiment," of one hundred and ten tons, to start regularly on a fixed day for Albany, for

the convenience of passengers only, supplying beds, wine, and provisions for the voyage of one hundred and fifty miles. A week on the North River or on the Sound was an experience not at all unknown to travellers.

While little improvement had been made in water-travel, every increase of distance added to the difficulties of the westward journey. The settler who after buying wagon and horses hauled his family and goods across the mountains, might buy or build a broad flat-bottomed ark, to float with him and his fortunes down the Ohio, in constant peril of upsetting or of being sunk; but only light boats with strong oars could mount the stream, or boats forced against the current by laboriously poling in shallow water. If he carried his tobacco and wheat down the Mississippi to the Spanish port of New Orleans, and sold it, he might return to his home in Kentucky or Ohio by a long and dangerous journey on horseback through the Indian country from Natchez to Nashville, or he might take ship to Philadelphia, if a ship were about to sail, and again cross the Alleghanies. Compared with river travel, the sea was commonly an easy and safe highway. Nearly all the rivers which penetrated the interior were unsure, liable to be made dangerous by freshets, and both dangerous and impassable by drought; yet such as they were, these streams made the main paths of traffic. Through the mountainous gorges of the Susquehanna the produce of western New York first found an outlet; the Cuyahoga and Muskingum were the first highway from the Lakes to the Ohio; the Ohio itself, with its great tributaries the Cumberland and the Tennessee, marked the lines of western migration; and every stream which could at high water float a boat was thought likely to become a path for commerce. As General Washington, not twenty years earlier, hoped that the brawling waters of the Cheat and Youghiogheny might become the channel of trade between Chesapeake Bay and Pittsburg, so the Americans of 1800 were prepared to risk life and property on any streamlet that fell foaming down either flank of the Alleghanies. The ex-

perience of mankind proved trade to be dependent on water communications, and as yet Americans did not dream that the experience of mankind was useless to them.

If America was to be developed along the lines of water communication alone, by such means as were known to Europe, Nature had decided that the experiment of a single republican government must meet extreme difficulties. The valley of the Ohio had no more to do with that of the Hudson, the Susquehanna, the Potomac, the Roanoke, and the Santee, than the valley of the Danube with that of the Rhone, the Po, or the Elbe. Close communication by land could alone hold the great geographical divisions together either in interest or in fear. The union of New England with New York and Pennsylvania was not an easy task even as a problem of geography, and with an ocean highway; but the union of New England with the Carolinas, and of the seacoast with the interior, promised to be a hopeless undertaking. Physical contact alone could make one country of these isolated empires, but to the patriotic American of 1800, struggling for the continued existence of an embryo nation, with machinery so inadequate, the idea of ever bringing the Mississippi River, either by land or water, into close contact with New England, must have seemed wild. By water, an Erie Canal was already foreseen; by land, centuries of labor could alone conquer those obstacles which Nature permitted to be overcome.

In the minds of practical men, the experience of Europe left few doubts on this point. After two thousand years of public labor and private savings, even despotic monarchs, who employed the resources of their subjects as they pleased, could in 1800 pass from one part of their European dominions to another little more quickly than they might have done in the age of the Antonines. A few short canals had been made, a few bridges had been built, an excellent post-road extended from Madrid to St. Petersburg; but the heavy diligence that rumbled from Calais to Paris required three days for its journey of one hundred and fifty miles, and if travellers ventured

on a trip to Marseilles they met with rough roads and hardships like those of the Middle Ages. Italy was in 1800 almost as remote from the north of Europe as when carriage-roads were first built. Neither in time nor in thought was Florence or Rome much nearer to London in Wordsworth's youth than in the youth of Milton or Gray. Indeed, such changes as had occurred were partly for the worse, owing to the violence of revolutionary wars during the last ten years of the eighteenth century. Horace Walpole at his life's close saw about him a world which in many respects was less civilized than when as a boy he made the grand tour of Europe.

While so little had been done on the great highways of European travel, these highways were themselves luxuries which furnished no sure measure of progress. The post-horses toiled as painfully as ever through the sand from Hamburg to Berlin, while the coach between York and London rolled along an excellent road at the rate of ten miles an hour; yet neither in England nor on the Continent was the post-road a great channel of commerce. No matter how good the road, it could not compete with water, nor could heavy freights in great quantities be hauled long distances without extravagant cost. Water communication was as necessary for European commerce in 1800 as it had been for the Phoenicians and Egyptians; the Rhine, the Rhone, the Danube, the Elbe, were still the true commercial highways, and except for government post-roads, Europe was as dependent on these rivers in the eighteenth century as in the thirteenth. No certainty could be offered of more rapid progress in the coming century than in the past; the chief hope seemed to lie in the construction of canals.

While Europe had thus consumed centuries in improving paths of trade, until merchandise could be brought by canal a few score miles from the Rhone to the Loire and Seine, to the Garonne and the Rhine, and while all her wealth and energy had not yet united the Danube with other river systems, America was required to construct, without delay, at

least three great roads and canals, each several hundred miles long, across mountain ranges, through a country not yet inhabited, to points where no great markets existed,—and this under constant peril of losing her political union, which could not even by such connections be with certainty secured. After this should be accomplished, the Alleghanies must still remain between the eastern and western States, and at any known rate of travel Nashville could not be reached in less than a fortnight or three weeks from Philadelphia. Meanwhile the simpler problem of bringing New England nearer to Virginia and Georgia had not advanced even with the aid of a direct ocean highway. In becoming politically independent of England, the old thirteen provinces developed little more commercial intercourse with each other in proportion to their wealth and population than they had maintained in colonial days. The material ties that united them grew in strength no more rapidly than the ties which bound them to Europe. Each group of States lived a life apart.

Even the lightly equipped traveller found a short journey no slight effort. Between Boston and New York was a tolerable highway, along which, thrice a week, light stage-coaches carried passengers and the mail, in three days. From New York a stage-coach started every week-day for Philadelphia, consuming the greater part of two days in the journey; and the road between Paulus Hook, the modern Jersey City, and Hackensack, was declared by the newspapers in 1802 to be as bad as any other part of the route between Maine and Georgia. South of Philadelphia the road was tolerable as far as Baltimore, but between Baltimore and the new city of Washington it meandered through forests; the driver chose the track which seemed least dangerous, and rejoiced if in wet seasons he reached Washington without miring or upsetting his wagon. In the Northern States, four miles an hour was the average speed for any coach between Bangor and Baltimore. Beyond the Potomac the roads became steadily worse, until south of Petersburg even the mails were carried on horseback. Except for a stage-coach which plied between Charleston and Savan-