Henry Adams's History of the United States of America During the Second Administration of James Madison in MR Text

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HENRY ADAMS’S
HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DURING THE SECOND ADMINISTRATION OF JAMES MADISON IN MR TEXT
2 OCL 457

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Abstract.
In 1890 Henry Adams sent to press his histories of the Jefferson and Madison administrations in nine volumes. Our Constitutional Logic presents machine-readable text of the History of the United States of America During the Second Administration of James Madison. The three volumes in this series (1890) are numbered VII, VIII and IX in the nine volume set but are numbered I, II and III, when considered as a stand-alone series. The 264,016 words deserve their day in fully searchable MR text format and OCL hereby obliges. Additional commentary on Adams as the founder of scientific history in the United States (dated to his Address to the American Historical Association (1894)) occupies the remaining attention of this article. Adams’ legacy does not lack for a worthy successor, OCL assures the reader. This Noble Dream flourishes.

Key Words: Madison’s Second Administration, Adams’ History, scientific history, patternable events.

A. INTRODUCTION. Henry Adams’ vision for the United States of America encompassed a “society [which] could easily attain proportions of three or four hundred million persons, under conditions of undisturbed growth.”

By the reverence we accord prophets who pay off at the cash window, HA’s perspective deserves further attention.

In c. 10 of vol. 3 [that is, vol. 9) of his History of the United States of America During the Second Administration of James Madison (1892), Adams ventures scientific history as a premise, a venture which had recently received fresh impetus with the founding of the American Historical Association (1884).

Adams was elected President of the AHA in 1893 without making an appearance at its annual meeting.

B. TABLE ANNEXED. For the Table Annexed hereto and for on-line access to Peter Aschenbrenner’s articles, tables and charts see purdue.academia.edu/PeterAschenbrenner or works.bepress.com/peter_aschenbrenner/
The Table includes the work described in the abstract.

C. THE READER’S AORIA UNDONE. Adams devotes two volumes each to the histories of Jefferson’s first, Jefferson’s second and Madison’s first administration. That’s six books in boards. HA then devotes three volumes to Madison’s second administration.

$$2+2+2+3 = 9.$$  
To make matters even more confusing: when investigators – academic and scribblers alike – check the online edition they see ‘Volume III’ on the title page of the last (that’s the ninth volume) of the series and cite to ‘Volume III.’

D. THE READER’S AORIA, CONTINUED. When the copyright in Adams’s histories expired, the text was promptly vandalized by Houghton Mifflin and Herbert Agar who abridged these monuments to American intellectual history.

I will let Agar’s excuses stand on their own.  
His truncation removed all references to scientific history.

E. AGAR’S INTRODUCTION TO AGAR’S ABRIDGEMENT OF ADAMS

‘I never yet heard of ten men who had ever read my history,’ Henry Adams wrote to his brother in 1905, fifteen years after the publication of his nine volumes on the administrations of Jefferson and Madison. The statement was a typical Adams exaggeration. The family which has given more to America than any other family has always preferred to think of itself as misunderstood. This was true of Henry Adams’s great-grandfather, the second President of the United States. It was true of his grandfather, the sixth President. It was notably true of Henry Adams himself.

Yet there was point to the statement, however exaggerated. It would be unreasonable to expect a large audience for a nine-volume study of sixteen years of early American history. That is the excuse for the present condensed version. No condensation can do justice to the original. An author chooses the scale on which he feels he should write. The greater the author, the greater the loss from imposing upon him a different scale. Yet Henry Adams’s history of America from 1801 to 1817 is too important to be left to the scholars and the students. It is one of the great American documents, and is of interest to the world. If some of the wisdom and learning which Adams put into his nine volumes can be preserved in a shorter form, the truncation of a work of art may be forgiven.

In order to cut the book to a third of its original length, it has been necessary to leave out all of the footnotes and many of the quotations from source material; but Henry Adams’s comments on the scene he is describing have been preserved almost intact. There is a danger, therefore, that the comments may seem to be
unjustified by the text, for the balance which the author gave to his work has been destroyed. Even in this form the story and the running commentary may be of permanent value, for the period chosen by Adams is the ideal period through which to discuss the nature and problems of American democracy.

Readers who know only the later Henry Adams, the Adams of the *Education, Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, and the letters of his disillusioned old age, will be surprised at the reverence and understanding with which he treats the democratic ideal. The whole of this vast book was written in the light of what he called ‘the infinite possibilities of American democracy.’ It was not written in the light of any false optimism. In the eighteen-eighties Henry Adams knew that the democracy which seemed so flourishing throughout the Western world would soon be faced with a shattering and perhaps a deadly test. He was one of the first to sense that our world was moving, not toward a sunny time of prosperity and peace, but toward revolution and potential disaster. In the next decade Oliver Wendell Holmes added his voice of warning: ‘Our comfortable routine is no eternal necessity of things, but merely a little space of calm in the midst of the tempestuous untamed streaming of the world.’ It is largely because Adams found it impossible to persuade his neighbors of this simple fact that his later years were embittered. He saw the best of hopes endangered because no one would admit that danger was possible. He felt that if American democracy was to survive, its foundations must be understood, its weaknesses admitted and guarded against, its good points fostered and strengthened. So he went back to the beginnings of our government to learn all that could be learned in preparation for the troubles to come.


F. SHOULD HISTORY EVER BECOME A TRUE SCIENCE. At last, we have found our clamans in deserto. That is, if we were looking for her. Having dismissed Herbert as Hunding, we turn to Adams.

Should history ever become a true science, it must expect to establish its laws, not from the complicated story of rival European nationalities, but from the economical evolution of a great democracy. [1]

Are transactions, value added, value subtracted, the stock-in-trade of the historian? Where do we find patternable events? Was any century willing to investigate for these, in their species and genera?
G. Enter Capt. Hamilton. The former Captain of Artillery, Alexander Hamilton, computed in *Federalist No. 34* that constitutions “of civil government are not to be framed upon a calculation of existing exigencies; but upon a combination of these, with the probable exigencies of ages, according to the natural and tried course of human affairs.”

What Hamilton assumed, explicitly, is that when time passes before exigency makes its non-negotiable demands for official action some experience in the matter – formulated in an ‘issue of the day’ – will be at hand for the scientist to exploit.

This is, as Richard Price declared for his friend the late Thomas Bayes, the prior probability that the “event M had happened a times and failed b times in n = a + b trials ... .” I refer to Bayes’ *Essay on a Problem in the Doctrine of Chances* which his friend Richard Price edited and read it to the London Society for Improving Human Knowledge (1763).

Science requires patternable events, that is, events which appear as (or can be tranced into) successes and failures (to make Jacob Bernouilli happy) and studied as such (to make Thomas Bayes happy), but only if stakeholders have something to win or lose at each trial, which Bayes makes clear with the ‘wager’ he ventures (as a mind experiment) in his *Essay* and on which the author wagers energy in crafting the work and on which the gatekeepers bet capital to produce the book.

H. The Program Revealed. Adams was even more programmatic in his communication to the American Historical Association.

Those of us who read ... the Origin of Species and felt the violent impulse which Darwin gave to the study of natural laws, never doubted that historians would follow until they had exhausted every possible hypothesis is to create a science of history. [2]

However unpalatable it may be to modern tastes, Adams’ evolved human “should study his own history in the same spirit and by the same methods with which he studied the formation of a crystal.” [3]

In his *History of United States of America During the Second Administration of James Madison* Adams made clear what sort of history he didn’t like.

To scientific treatment only one great obstacle existed. Americans, like Europeans, were not disposed to make of their history a mechanical evolution. They felt that they even more than other nations needed the heroic element,
because they breathed an atmosphere of peace and industry where heroism could seldom be displayed . . . [4]

What is scientific history that enticed Adams and troubled Peter Novick and which I, successor to Adams, proclaim?

I. **Patterns Exist.** Patterns exist; events arrive unevenly, but not necessarily randomly. Viewed in hindsight, kinesis – the effort that produce these events – may be studied, with a first step (but only a first) offered by dividing this from that. In a phrase Holmes appropriated for *The Common Law: elegantia juris.* [5]

I have offered the reader ‘Moscow’ and ‘Washington’ as an opening instance of lessons readers in 1814-1815 might acquire by comparing and contrasting paired events: capital cities put to the torch on the occasion of foreign occupation. *Lessons Learned in the Fall of Washington,* 2 OCL 766.

J. **Peter Novick’s Noble Dream.** If one doubt that Adams got this, Novick got it on Adams’ behalf. Concede, as one must, “the case of Henry Adams is the most obvious American example [of] American scholarship of the highest order” [6] Novick hereby tips his hand: “What are we to make of all this? What does it mean for a historian to be ‘scientific’?” [7] Leaving us back in Adams’ ottocento and Hamilton’s settecento.

Science consumes patternable events. Print culture traps events in patterns. Why not exploit that which exploits? Study the patterns in the self-referencing culture studying culture? Let me say it this way. Each book is a probability space. The author ‘throws’ her words into the space at her whim and wish. The pattern of words traps events which exist, as it were, in a real world.

Books typically exploit celebrities and feasibilities, that is, personalities and possibilities in constructing their readable text, which invites readers.

Authors and gatekeepers are constitutionally opposed to deconstructing what has been constructed and presented.

Therefore, forcing the book to talk about its own employment of its words and forcing a book to divulge any logic which, as a deep structure, exposes the risks taken in print culture, does violence to the intentions of author and gatekeeper.

What would a method be if it reached deeper into the real world of patternable events by going through the mesne and mediate world of printed events? How would a method work if it forced a book to critique the limits of its own ability to locate and present such events?
L. REFERENCES.


[3] Id.


[5] What has been said will explain the failure of all theories which consider the law only from its formal side; whether they attempt to deduce the corpus from a priori postulates, or fall into the humbler error of supposing the science of the law to reside in the elegantia juris, or logical cohesion of part with part. The truth is, that the law always approaching, and never reaching, consistency. It is forever adopting new principles from life at one end, and it always retains old ones from history at the other, which have not yet been absorbed or sloughed off. Holmes, Common Law at 36.


[7] Id. at 33.

M. PREFERRED CITATION FORMAT. Please cite as 2 Our Constitutional Logic 457 or 2 OCL 457.

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P. FILE FORMAT. The format of this file is MS Word 2010; the format of the associated table is also MS Word 2010.