

Henry Adams



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著者:Henry Adams

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This Library of America volume includes the best-known works of Henry Adams, one of the most powerful and original minds to illuminate the American scene from the Civil War to World War I. Now brought together for the first time in a single volume, these works show the many forms—fiction, poetry, philosophical and historical speculation, autobiography—in which Adams gave expression to his vision of the meaning of the unsettling changes in American life and values.

Each of the two novels, *Democracy* and *Esther*, chooses a woman on whom to center the effects of social change. In *Democracy*, Madeleine Lee, an emancipated and idealistic young widow, moves to Washington to learn the nature of political power and is disillusioned upon discovering the intrigues of rampant corruption. The free-thinking heroine in *Esther*, caught in the warfare between science and religion, finds that she cannot surrender her moral independence, even to marry a clergyman.

Adams, though a man of the modern world, remained in temperament a child of the eighteenth century, his political ideals shaped by his presidential ancestors, great-grandfather John Adams and grandfather John Quincy Adams. The failure of those ideals to withstand the challenges of an industrialized America drove him to seek

refuge in the study of the medieval age of faith in France. Out of it came his skeptic's "Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres." Her presence dominates the book that followed—Mont Saint Michel and Chartres. In evocative and sensitive prose Adams moves from the architecture, sculpture, and stained glass of Chartres to the religion, literature, politics, social order, and crusades of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries. Adams translates the poetry of courtly love and recounts the drama of Eleanor of Aquitaine's life and the timeless love of Abelard and Heloise. The narrative rises at the end to the brilliantly re-enacted drama of St. Thomas Aquinas' victory over the rival philosophers.

If Mont Saint Michel portrayed a world unified by a common faith, *The Education of Henry Adams* portrayed a world irresistibly moving toward chaos. The world once unified by the Virgin was now ruled by the impersonal Dynamo and was already confronted by the "metaphysical bomb" of radium and the prospect of infinite energy for man's use. Adams balances, with extraordinary urbanity and wit, the rival claims he found as much in himself as in modern civilization. Together, these two works still pose an urgent question: can the human mind ultimately control the monstrous aggregates of power which it has wrung from nature?

作者介绍:

Born in 1838 into one of the oldest and most distinguished families in Boston, a family which had produced two American presidents, Henry Adams had the opportunity to pursue a wide-ranging variety of intellectual interests during the course of his life. Functioning both in the world of practical men and affairs (as a journalist and an assistant to his father, who was an American diplomat in Washington and London), and in the world of ideas (as a prolific writer, the editor of the prestigious *North American Review*, and a professor of medieval, European, and American history at Harvard), Adams was one of the few men of his era who attempted to understand art, thought, culture, and history as one complex force field of interacting energies. His two masterworks in this dazzling effort are *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres* and *The Education of Henry Adams*, published one after the other in 1904 and 1907. Taken together they may be read as Adams' spiritual autobiography—two monumental volumes in which he attempts to bring together into a vast synthesis all of his knowledge of politics, economics, psychology, science, philosophy, art, and literature in order to attempt to understand the individual's place in history and society. They constitute one of the greatest historical and philosophical meditations on the human condition in all of literature.

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