

**THE DEGRADATION OF THE
DEMOCRATIC DOGMA;
WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY BROOKS ADAMS**

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HENRY ADAMS & BROOKS ADAMS

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

BEFORE submitting the following pages to the public, I have a few words to say, lest my purpose should be misunderstood. I want to make it clear, once for all, that I am not proposing to write anything approaching to a memoir of my brother. He has written his memoirs for himself. For me to try to improve on them would be superfluous, not to say impertinent. Nor do I suggest any criticism of his essays which are annexed. These I have long thought unanswerable. With their conclusions I fully agree. I have no further comment to make.

I am attempting something quite different from this. I am seeking to tell the story of a movement in thought which has, for the last century, been developing in my family, and which closes with the "Essay on Phase," which ends this volume.

At this particular juncture of human affairs the tendency is very strong throughout the world to deify the democratic dogma, and to look to democracy to accomplish pretty promptly some approach to a millennium among men.

This form of belief was strong in my family a century ago, and found expression through my grandfather, John Quincy Adams, who made the realization thereof the work and ambition of his life and who, when he grew old, practically gave his life for the cause. As an apostle of this doctrine, I take it, he must always be one of the most commanding figures in our history, when he comes to be fully understood, and as such I give him the chief place in my story. He based his hopes of success, in his supreme effort, on the belief that God, in whose existence, at that period in his life, he did not doubt, favored him, and would aid him; but he died declaring that God had abandoned him, and was only kept from confessing agnosticism by his love and veneration for his mother, which even passed the adoration of Catholics for the Virgin, and whose memory was an obstacle which he could not surmount, when it came to renouncing his dream of immortality. But so far as he had watched, during a lifetime, the progress of the democrat toward perfection, he had little to say in the way of hope. And so he died. His life was a tragedy, ending in the Civil War, which he had long foreseen approaching, but which he had been unable to do anything to avert. Yet the greatest tragedy of all for us, and for all optimists who believe in the advent of perfection through the influence of democracy, is the

condition in which we have been left since the close of the war. I wish to point out that the Civil War was fought, presumably, to enforce the democratic principle "of the natural equality of man, and the possession of certain rights of which he cannot be deprived by violence." But, viewed in this light, our country is as much in the midst of a social war now as she was when Lincoln died. And she is so because she has tried to ignore certain fundamental facts which are stronger than democratic theories. I suppose that the time has now come when I must refer to myself as a part of this family tree, although no work of mine has any interest for the present discussion save in so far as something I may have said or written may have been suggestive to Henry. Like Henry, I inherited a belief in the great democratic dogma, as I inherited my pew in the church at Quincy, but, as I have explained in my preface, in my early middle life I fell into difficulties which only good fortune prevented from turning out as tragically for me, as did the election of 1828 for my ancestor. In this crisis of my fate I learned, as a lawyer and a student of history and of economics, to look on man, in the light of the evidence of unnumbered centuries, as a pure automaton, who is moved along the paths of least resistance by forces over which he has no control. In short, I reverted to the pure