Henry Adams and Wayne MacVeagh

Discussing in *The Education of Henry Adams* the “failure” of his nine-volume history of the Jefferson-Madison administrations, Adams remarked that as far as he knew he had “but three serious readers—Abram Hewitt, Wayne McVeagh [sic], and [John] Hay.”

Isaac Wayne MacVeagh (1833–1917) was not as close to Adams as Hay or Clarence King; he was not one of the “Five of Hearts”; but there is no doubt that he held a special place in Adams’ circle of friends—“one of my closest,” Adams wrote in 1894. There is no better measure of Adams’ regard than the fact that he chose MacVeagh to be one of the handful of first readers to whom he sent the privately printed volumes of his great *History* for criticism and emendation. (Of the first volume only six copies were printed and bound in this edition.) Adams had come to know MacVeagh through Hay, who had first met the young Pennsylvania lawyer on Lincoln’s journey to Gettysburg in November, 1863, and later through the Cameron clan of Pennsylvania into which MacVeagh had married. Writing in 1883 to James Russell Lowell, then ambassador to the Court of St. James’s, Adams summed up his judgment of his friend: “McVeagh is a man of extraordinary ability and character; the only man in American politics who says what he thinks, and thinks honestly.”

Several factors determined MacVeagh’s role in Pennsylvania and Washington politics: the venal character of political life in the era

1 *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston and New York, 1918), 327; hereafter referred to as *Education*. Adams steadily misspelled MacVeagh’s name, though he usually (not always) wrote “Mrs. MacVeagh” correctly. The standard form in the contemporary press was “McVeagh”; there is a possibility of Adamsian irony. In a letter to James Russell Lowell, however, Adams writes “MacVeagh” and “McVeagh” in successive sentences. Henry Adams to James Russell Lowell, May 15, 1883, in Harold Dean Cater, ed., *Henry Adams and His Friends* (Boston, 1947), 127–128.


4 Cater, 127.
after the Civil War, MacVeagh's own character and ability, his second marriage. Hay's account of the Gettysburg trip suggests MacVeagh's characteristic lifelong stance. Riding in the Presidential train, MacVeagh, so Hay recorded, "talked 'radicalism' until he learned he was talking recklessly"; he "pitched into the President coming up, and told him some truths." 5

A widower at thirty, MacVeagh married in 1866 a daughter of the Pennsylvania political boss Simon Cameron, whose son, the Senator Don Cameron familiar to readers of the Education and of Adams' letters, was married to Elizabeth Sherman of Ohio. Thus by his second marriage MacVeagh allied himself to two of the great dynasties of nineteenth-century Republicanism. Family connections doubtless helped to secure for MacVeagh the appointment as minister to Turkey in 1870; it is characteristic of the man, however, that he should make a point of taking Turkey's part on the issue of free passage through the Bosporus, against the judgment of Secretary of State Hamilton Fish and seemingly against the self-interest of the United States.

MacVeagh was not the man to rest on unearned advantages or ride with the current. The Grant administration disgusted him, as it disgusted Henry Adams; so did the tactics of the Cameron machine; and he broke from Republican orthodoxy in 1871 and became a leader in the "Insurgent" wing of the party. Having opposed the "Stalwarts" in 1876, he was picked by President Hayes to negotiate the political settlement in Louisiana that preceded the end of Reconstruction in 1877. In 1881 he was a natural selection as attorney general in the Cabinet of President Garfield, whose nomination represented a victory for the Insurgents. Even that great Stalwart James G. Blaine conceded the advantage of MacVeagh's presence in the administration and wrote to Garfield: "There is no other cabinet stone in your hand that will kill so many political dogs at one throw. I guess you'd better fire it." 6

A series of hitherto unpublished letters from Henry Adams to Wayne MacVeagh, in the possession of The Historical Society of

Pennsylvania, sheds new light on their relationship and on the events, issues, and ideas that caught their common interest. Garfield's administration had been in office only four months when, on July 1, 1881, the President was shot by Charles Julius Guiteau, a disappointed office seeker and professional crank of doubtful sanity. Adams' letter of July 18, 1881, reflects the widespread relief at the apparent recovery of the President, Vice-President Chester Alan Arthur being widely known as a machine politician with no discernible interest in civil service reform or any of the Insurgent principles. Like the next three letters, written in 1882 and 1884, it bespeaks the political attitude—Insurgent and reformist, skeptical, ironic, and amused—which Adams and MacVeagh shared and which provided a solid foundation for their friendship.

Beverly Farms, Mass.
18 July 1881

My dear Representative,

Your letters encourage me to think that you are still able to be about. Now that your chief is in a fair way to boss you again, I suppose your imprisonment will not be so long or so wearing. He is a wonderfully lucky man, and I don't know but that this bullet is as lucky a hit as any he ever made.

Apropos to this subject, inquiry has been made of me in regard to the course intended to be pursued by him about the "Garfield Fund," whose projectors wish for subscriptions hereabouts. Of course you can't doubt my opinion as to the impropriety of such gifts to men in office, but I could only say that I would try and find

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7 Headings of the letters (place and date) have been standardized throughout.
8 Cf. Henry Adams to Wayne MacVeagh, July 9, 1881: "As long as Mr. Arthur gives me my right;—that is one satisfactory representative in his cabinet;—I shall not speak harshly of his virtuous administration." Cater, 108.
9 Immediately after the assassination attempt, when there was little hope that Garfield would recover, friends and supporters of the President, and of the Republican Party, initiated a fund in the name of Mrs. Garfield for the relief of the President's family in the event of his death; the shabby treatment by the Congress of Lincoln's widow was fresh in the public mind. Garfield then rallied and seemed likely to recover. Subscriptions to the fund, however, were not discontinued, nor were they made contingent upon the President's death. Since Garfield had come to office as more or less a reformer and opponent of political corruption, an embarrassing situation developed. The fund, the Nation commented, had been "set on foot by a number of well-known capitalists. That these gentlemen are simply animated by a generous sympathy does not alter this fact." "The Fund for Mrs. Garfield," Nation, XXXII, July 14, 1881, 26-27.
out the President's intentions, because, if he stops it, there is no use in going on. Until it is settled that he consents, subscriptions will be slow. I need not add that in a political and especially in a second-term point of view, in the interest of the party to which you know by experience my awfully utter devotion, I should regard his acceptance of this gift to Mrs. Garfield as most unfortunate.

Why is the District Attorney so eager to prove Guiteau sane?¹⁰ You can't hang him. Your only chance of shutting him up for life is to prove him not sane. More than this, the assertion that Guiteau is sane is a gross insult to the whole American people. We are all of us ready to shoot the President or anyone else if we can find a good reason for it, but we don't go round banging away with horse-pistols at our neighbors without good cause. To say that any sane American would do this is a piece, not of insanity, but of idiocy, in the District Attorney. The peculiarity of insanity is the lack of relation between cause and effect. No one has yet succeeded in establishing any sane cause for Guiteau's effect. That he is rational proves nothing. We are all more or less rational; it is an almost invariable sign of insanity. I have no doubt the District Attorney is rational, though his course is not.

Will you be so kind as to offer our friendly regards to Mrs. MacVeagh¹¹ and inform her that the tables are ordered and will be on their way in about ten days. One plain red at $8. One mahogany and ebonised border, $12. We hope they will give satisfaction and that you will mention us to your friends.

We have been awfully hot here. One day the thermometer rose to 86. If it returns, I shall return with it, to Washington, but just now I am shivering in winter clothes, and we cower over our blazing fires.

Your very obedient and humble constituent

Henry Adams

¹⁰ The trial of Guiteau, in the late fall of 1881, became a scandal, and the issue of the assassin's sanity was directly involved. Guiteau's pathologically eccentric behavior made a travesty of judicial procedure. The district attorney, Col. George B. Corkhill (d. 1886), was severely criticized on the grounds that his laborious, solemn effort to "prove" that Guiteau was sane and had indeed fired the shots simply encouraged Guiteau's courtroom antics. Wayne MacVeagh, who had resigned as attorney general shortly after the accession of President Arthur, was criticized for leaving the Cabinet before the business of the trial was concluded; he ought to have stayed on, it was argued, "for the sole purpose of watching over the prosecution." *Nation*, XXXII, Nov. 17, 1881, 384. Henry Adams defended MacVeagh's resignation in a letter to E. L. Godkin, editor of the *Nation*, on Sept. 30, 1881. Cater, 115-116.

¹¹ Virginia Rolette Cameron MacVeagh (d. 1920).
My dear McVeagh

Many thanks for your letter. After your wife has overcome the thraldom of house-moving, please tell her that your report is all I expected. I only wanted to know whether she had ever come across the family or knew of anyone who had done so. I did not intend to investigate the young woman. That pleasant task, I fear, cannot be delegated. Indeed I must confess that I see very little good likely to result from my own investigation, for a mere personal visit would leave me probably as much in the dark as I am now. Nevertheless I may be impelled to take this course, though even in that case I should only run on for an hour or two, and could not avail myself of your kind offer.

I doubt, however, about going into Pennsylvania at all. I might compromise myself. Just now I am on lovely terms with the bosses and the administration. To blight my young life by contact with independents would be sad. I feel sure you would not advise it.

As I have no idea of tempting the fate of poor DeLong, we shall linger here yet a few weeks before seeking our ice-bound home. If you return here to protect or prosecute thieves, please come in to dinner or something.

Yrs truly
Henry Adams

Beverly Farms, Mass.
20 July, 1884

Dear Boeotian

How are the cows? All the milk here is frozen. We look back upon Bryn Mawr as our last glimpse of the tropics; although Bryn Mawr was chilly compared with New York.

12 See Henry Adams to Charles Milnes Gaskell, Apr. 30, 1882: "I cannot say that I am an admirer of our new President, who is to my fancy a low character, but he tries to conciliate what is supposed to be good society, and somewhat to my horror, I find myself bidden to the White House, although I have been six months across the way without as yet having so much as left the tribute of a card there." Letters, 1858–1891, 336.

13 George Washington DeLong (1844–1881), American Arctic explorer whose ship was crushed and sunk by ice floes, June 12, 1881, and who died of starvation and exposure in Siberia in October, 1881.

14 MacVeagh's house, Brookfield Farms, was in Bryn Mawr, Pa.
Oh, no! I disavow monocrats altogether. The word is redolent of T. J. and I meant it satirically. I will put him in quotation marks.\textsuperscript{15}

You are not much of a critic anyway. I thought at least you would give me a few legal points, but I suppose Pennsylvania lawyers can’t. You should see the way my brother Charles and I improve each other’s shining hours.

I know where and why the book fails. I can tell you exactly what it wants. The trouble is that it is weak just where my mind is weak, and its strength is bounded by my mental limitations.\textsuperscript{16} If you can patch an extra brain on to mine, and give me scope double and different from my present range, I will write four times as good a book.

As it is, I am going to suppress the work. I won’t compete with my friend J. G. B. The public doesn’t want me; and it cries for Jim. Have you read the letter of acceptance? I have not, but I read a paragraph here and there, and just wilted. My theory that a liar is not necessarily corrupt occasionally gets rude shocks.\textsuperscript{17}

Our love to Mrs. McVeagh. When come you hitherwards?

Ever Yrs
Henry Adams

Beverly Farms, Mass.
30 September, 1884

Dear McVeagh

I can’t comply with your condition. I appeal to the noble womanhood of your establishment against this attempt of a soulless corpora-

\textsuperscript{15} The word “monocrat” is not used to describe Jefferson in the History as it was finally published, 1889–1891. There are numerous passages in the first volume in which it would be the appropriate epithet, such as Chap. VII (“The Inauguration”) or Chap. X (“Legislation”).

\textsuperscript{16} Two passages in other letters of the same period illuminate this somewhat obscure piece of self-criticism. To Henry Cabot Lodge, Adams wrote on Dec. 26, 1882, speaking of Thomas R. Lounsbury’s biography of James Fenimore Cooper: “If we could only be impersonal, our books would be better than they are, but I am too much of a sinner myself to blame him.” Letters, 1858–1891, 344. And to Charles Milnes Gaskell, he wrote on Feb. 3, 1884, concerning his History: “I admit to thinking the book readable, but to you it would be sadly dull reading. You see I am writing for a continent of a hundred million people fifty years hence; and I can’t stop to think what England will read.” Ibid., 357.

\textsuperscript{17} James G. Blaine was nominated for the Presidency at the Republican Convention in Chicago, June 6, 1884, a defeat for the Insurgents. Anticipating the outcome, Adams had written to John Hay on May 27: “Dry rot is the present situation. I look for a big political crash like the Wall Street one, which will squeeze both parties till the rottenness bursts out. My friend MacVeagh has alone told God’s own truth, and of course is howled at.” Ibid., 358–359.
tion, through counsel, to destroy my peace. Produce your own certificate!

We have got to hurry straight to Washington to see after our new house, as soon as we can get away from here. Please thank Mrs. McVeagh warmly and tell her that we are particularly anxious to discuss the marriage laws soberly, without frivolous jests or laughter; but until we have set our house in order and get our contract signed, we are in a baddish way and unable to meet our friends.

What the American people want is a sense of humor. All by myself I have to roll on the floor and kick. Some jokes are so colossally perfect, so far beyond the loftiest flight of human wit, that they dazzle and blind our simple natures. Dear Blaine is such a joke. Positively I love him. Never have I dreamed of getting such amusement from a candidate for office. And when I think of Mrs. Blaine's "giant intellect," and of the loss we suffered in dear Stanwood, so early taken from us, I wonder how the American people can help putting them into the White House for life.

Ever Yrs
Henry Adams

One cannot help observing the different tone, the element of personal strain, in the next letter from 1888. Adams was still very much in the shadow of his wife's tragic death in 1885, and was driving himself to finish the History.

My dear McVeagh
Will you now do me the kindness to send me by express here (care of Mrs. C. F. Adams, Old House, Quincy, Mass.) the two volumes of

18 To Charles Milnes Gaskell, Sept. 21, 1884, Adams wrote that he was supporting Cleveland. Ibid., 360.
19 Stanwood Blaine, first-born child of James G. and Harriet Stanwood Blaine, died in infancy, but became an issue in the sordid campaign of 1884. When the Republicans tried to exploit the scandal of Grover Cleveland's illegitimate son, the Democrats replied with the allegation that Stanwood had been born out of wedlock. The Blaines were married in Kentucky in 1849 and Stanwood was not born before due time, but when, subsequently, Kentucky passed a new law requiring a civil license for marriage, the Blaines went through a second, civil ceremony; hence the confusion. See David Saville Muzzey, James G. Blaine (New York, 1934), 299.
my history which you have. I want all the marginal notes, suggestions, corrections and general vituperation you can annotate them with, and do not mind your keeping them a few days if you profit by the time to make yourself obnoxious; but I am now gathering myself for a fatal attack on the publishers, and in a few weeks more must begin to print—So I must call in my circular notes.  

I was sorry to hear that you were out of sorts in the winter. Take to growing roses in a winter-garden as I do. It will give you more dyspepsia and keep you poor in life, which is, I take it, what you want. Apparently it is what I want, for I have lost account of time and place, and no longer know whether I am living in the past or future. The present I know I do not live in; but I still have views on Asia and Polynesia.

Give my love to your wife, and believe me

Ever Yrs

Henry Adams

The three Adams-MacVeagh letters of 1893 form an interesting cluster, in so far as they speak for one of the critical moments in Adams' intellectual career. Adams had sailed for Europe on June 3, 1893, and had got as far as Lucerne by July 22, when news reached him of the financial panic of 1893; his brothers wrote "requesting his immediate return to Boston because the community was bankrupt and he was probably a beggar." It was soon apparent, on his return, that he had nothing to fear personally ("As far as I know I am the only prosperous man in America," he wrote to Elizabeth Cameron), and he turned to measuring the value of the episode for his "education."

That in these letters to MacVeagh Henry Adams is promoting his brother Brooks for a job in the State Department is especially inter-

20 To John Hay, Adams wrote, July 8, 1888: "... the frenzy of finishing the big book has seized me, until, as the end comes nigh, I hurry off the chapters as though they were letters to you. ... I shall begin printing next autumn." Letters, 1858-1891, 389. See also Henry Adams to Wayne MacVeagh, July 22, 1888, in Cater, 180–181.

21 By 1888 Adams had made a trip to Japan (June 12–Oct. 20, 1886), but had not yet been to the South Seas. Letters of 1888 repeatedly discuss his plans to go there, but his long trip to Hawaii, Samoa, and Tahiti was not made until 1890–1891.

22 Education, 337.

23 Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, Aug. 31, 1893, in Letters, 1892–1918, 31–32.
esting in the light of the brothers' relationship during the summer and fall of 1893. Brooks was deep in the reflections on civilization and commerce which were to lead to his _Law of Civilization and Decay_ (1895), and which, as Henry Adams acknowledged, were immensely influential in the process of thought that resulted in his own _Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres_ and the _Education._ Henry's conversations with Brooks, and his study of the panic and of Washington and Wall Street during the crisis over the gold standard convinced him that he had witnessed an epochal turning point; to understand what had happened and what it signified became almost his vocation for the rest of his life. It will be noticed that between August 31 and September 25 Adams passes from genuine interest in promoting Brooks' political career to severe indifference; now there were better things for a man of analytic intelligence to do than serve an imprisoned and fundamentally powerless administration.

In these letters Adams obviously assumes that MacVeagh's voice carried weight in the Cleveland administration in the matter of appointments. MacVeagh, who had been for several years an active leader in the Civil Service Reform Association and its Pennsylvania chairman, was by this time known as a Democrat, or at least as a supporter of President Cleveland, whose first administration (1885-1889) had satisfied the proponents of civil service reform and good government. In December, 1893, Cleveland appointed MacVeagh ambassador to Italy.

Old House, Quincy
31 August, 1893

Dear McVeagh

My brother Brooks tells me that, when Quincy leaves the State Department, as he has announced his intention of doing, he (Brooks) intends to suggest his own name to the President for the appointment of Assistant Secretary of State, with such support as he may be able to obtain from the Democratic leaders of Massachusetts. His chief difficulty seems to be want of acquaintance and relations with Secre-

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_24_ _Education_, 338-339, 360.

_25_ Josiah Quincy of Boston (1859-1919), Assistant Secretary of State during the first months of the second Cleveland administration. He had been appointed, on the basis of his activity in civil service reform, to administer the consular appointments, which were notoriously subject to partisan considerations. Quincy was mayor of Boston, 1895-1899.
tary Gresham; and knowing that you are personally acquainted with the Secretary he has asked me to consult you, and if possible obtain your support.

You know how little I mix in such matters, and for more than one reason I doubt whether any interference or appearance of mine would help a candidate for that position. I am acquainted neither with the President nor with Secretary Gresham. I am far from eager to place any member of my family in office in Washington. But if Brooks wishes for the opportunity of serving, I am free to say that he is better equipped for the office than any other person I can suggest; that his abilities are, I believe, sufficiently well known to need no guaranty of mine; and that, whether socially or officially, he would probably be a distinctly useful, and perhaps even very valuable assistant to the Secretary.

I do not know whether any such considerations, or any considerations at all, will warrant you in offering your assistance, or in acting as an ally in the matter, but if you are on such terms with Secretary Gresham that you can write him a note in support of Brooks's appointment, I am inclined to think that your aid might be of great service to the candidate. At all events Brooks thinks so, and I should think so, in the same position.

Next to success in the attempt, Brooks's chief anxiety is to escape newspaper notice. In that, I warmly agree with him, and therefore beg you will consider the matter as confidential between the Secretary and the sufferers. One is badly enough off when one is a candidate for anything, without newspapers to make it worse.

Give my love to Mrs. McVeagh and your daughter. The times are rough enough to bring us together before long.

Ever Yrs
Henry Adams

Quincy
6 Sept. 1893

Dear Wayne

I was aghast at the idea of your taking the trouble to go to Washington on such an errand, but you have certainly a Napoleonic

26 Walter Quinton Gresham (1833–1895), Secretary of State, 1893–1895.
27 Margaretta Cameron McVeagh Farrar Smith (d. 1938).
method of your own, and I suspect you have upset somebody's cart. I shall be much surprised if the Sphynxian Josiah\textsuperscript{28} has not views of his own in regard to the succession, and if those views have not been disastrously crossed, by you. Josiah is in all respects admirable, of course, but, as far as I know, he runs his own machine for all it is worth, and he certainly has nothing whatever to do with the welfare of any possible rival, such as Sherman Hoar, John Andrew,\textsuperscript{29} or my brother, if my brother can be classed in the category.

Attorney General Olney is, I believe, the only person whose assistance at Washington has been asked, and who has promised his influence.\textsuperscript{30}

I write at once, on receiving your letter, before my brother—who has gone to town—has read it, so that I can only thank you on my own account. Between ourselves, as you probably well know, my brother at Washington will be anything but a source of repose to me, and will probably drive me away; for I dislike nothing so much as indirect claims on office; but I cannot stand in his way, and he must take his course. This for your most private ear.

By the bye, the President does know him, and knows too the much more important person, his wife, a sister of Mrs. Cabot Lodge.\textsuperscript{31} They were both at the President's house only a week ago.

\textsuperscript{28} The "Sphynxian Josiah" is Quincy. By late summer, 1893, it had become apparent that the consular appointments were going as usual to party hacks and campaign contributors, and in an unfortunate talk to the Massachusetts Civil Service Reform League Quincy admitted as much and even defended this operation of the spoils system; he was, of course, accused of a sell-out. See the \textit{Nation}, LVII, Oct. 12, 1893, 261; Oct. 26, 1893, 298.

\textsuperscript{29} Sherman Hoar (1860-1898), son of Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar; Representative (D.) from Massachusetts, 1891-1893; U. S. District Attorney for Massachusetts, 1893-1897; active in civil service reform. John Forrester Andrew (1850-1895), son of the Civil War governor of Massachusetts, John Andrew; Representative (D.) from Massachusetts, 1889-1893; chairman of the Committee on Reform in the Civil Service; unsuccessful reform candidate for governor of Massachusetts in 1886.

\textsuperscript{30} Richard Olney (1835-1917), Attorney General, 1893-1895, and Secretary of State, 1895-1897.

\textsuperscript{31} Evelyn Davis Adams (d. 1926), sister of Anna Cabot Mills Davis Lodge (1850-1915). That Brooks Adams had much chance for appointment by President Cleveland may be doubted. Cleveland wrote to Olney in 1895 rejecting the nomination of William Hallett Phillips, a member of the Adams circle, for a job in the State Department: "I learn that he is a good deal of a club man, and what is a settler with me, that his close associates are John Hay, Henry Adams, Henry Cabot Lodge, and such." Quoted in Allan Nevins, \textit{Grover Cleveland} (New York, 1932), 518.
I shall seriously try to stop on my way to Washington to see you and Mrs. MacVeagh, and have some conversation which is beginning to weigh on my mind. The tendency of the world’s affairs at home and abroad; the tactics of capital and labor; the condition of society in the present, and its prospects in the future, are such that I see no alternative but a choice of sides which will, I imagine, place me fairly in antagonism to most of my friends. This matters nothing at all to anyone, for I have neither the power nor the wish to influence so much as a mouse; but I don’t want my friends to think me madder than I am, and I do want them, if possible, to understand why the madness of the times makes sanity impossible. This once off my mind, I promise to relapse again into eloquent silence.

Ever truly Yrs.

Henry Adams

1603 H Street
Monday morng.
25 Sept. 1893.

Dear Wayne

Yours of the 22d has followed me here. I will send it back to Brooks.

I neither know nor care very much about the State Department. The van Alen job was one of Whitney’s and the President has had to carry it out—unwillingly I guess. The Senate will sit on it. Grover has lost all hope of credit now that his gold fight is lost. I do not care.

32 The crisis over the gold standard clinched Adams’ feeling that society had taken an inevitable though hateful turn and had attached itself irrevocably to the machinery of finance capitalism. His use of the epithet “gold-bug” dates from this period: see letter of Sept. 25, 1893.

33 James J. Van Alen of Rhode Island (1846–1923), an amiable and accomplished gentleman with no previous experience of public office, who had contributed $50,000 to the Democratic campaign of 1892, and who was known in Newport society as the “American Prince of Wales,” was appointed ambassador to Italy in September, 1893. No appointment of President Cleveland and Assistant Secretary Quincy was more severely attacked. See “The Van Alen Case,” Nation, CVII, Oct. 5, 1893, 240. The Nation agreed that Cleveland’s Secretary of the Navy, William Collins Whitney, was responsible for this flagrant breach of civil service reform principles. Whitney (1841–1904) occupied a peculiar place in Henry Adams’ iconography of political types. In the Education Adams sets him against Clarence King, seeing Whitney as the pure case of the conscienceless politician, the manipulator of power for its own sake, and thus, in a sense, “the new American.” Education, 347–349. In 1905 Adams with rueful irony called Whitney “the ideal American”: see below, letter of Sept. 13, 1905. Van Alen resigned, under fire, before the end of the year, and Wayne MacVeagh was appointed ambassador to Italy in his stead.
to see Brooks attached to such an administration, and Brooks now
has grave doubts whether he could honestly serve a policy, to which
he is, on the domestic side, radically hostile. The silver question has
broken us democrats all up. Brooks and I are radical silver men, and
Grover is a gold-bug.

Luckily the administration shows no wish for Brooks's services.
I have heard not a word more on the subject, and as I have now other
views for Brooks, and hope to switch him onto another line, I am
willing to leave the matter undisturbed.

Probably I shall run down to see you at the end of this week, possi-
bly pass Sunday if you are at leisure. I have so much to discuss that
I want a day at least, and by that time I hope lots of things are going
to be settled.

Don is in great force, happy as a canvas-back duck in rough water.
He swears by the great silver spoon that he will make a speech, and
do it today. I am curious to know what he will say if he gets up his
courage to talk. If he really dares to talk to the Senate as he talks in
private, he will take my breath away a good deal, but, by Jingo, I'll
go with him every step.34 This last panic, and the hopeless and im-
becile incompetence, cowardly imbecility, and gross dishonesty of
our eastern capitalist class, has settled me once for all. I am tired of
Wall Street and State Street.35 They are failures from their own
standpoint. Let come what may, I go no further with the gold-bugs.

Ever Yrs.
Henry Adams

1603 H Street
Friday, 4 P.M.36

My dear Wayne

I shall, after all, be obliged to postpone my visit till after my re-
turn from Chicago. My brother Charles telegraphs that he and his

34 Senator Cameron spoke in the Senate on Sept. 25, 1893, opposing repeal of the Sherman
Silver Purchase Act and thus taking a stand against the "gold-bugs." To John Hay, Adams
wrote on Sept. 28, enclosing clippings of the speech: "Quay [the other Pennsylvania Senator]
told him it was a good speech, and his wife must have written it. We who know him feel pretty
sure that someone helped him, perhaps Wayne MacVeagh, but the speech is a good speech
anyway, and it is certainly his." Cater, 290–291.

35 Adams wrote in the Education that his family had an "inherited quarrel" with the
financial community of Boston; resistance to State Street was a "moral principle." Education,
21.

36 The probable date of this letter is Sept. 29, 1893. Adams wrote Hay from Washington,
Sept. 28; on Oct. 18 he wrote again, reporting that he had returned the previous day from the
Chicago Exposition "where I have just passed a fortnight." Cater, 290–291.
party start Sunday morning instead of Monday as previously arranged. This obliges me to start one day earlier, and that day happens to be the day I had set apart for Bryn Mawr. On my way back, about a week later, I shall try to stop to see you. My visit will keep. Philosophic views of society change mighty fast in these days, as I infer from my own experience and that of Grover Cleveland, but they will hardly change so fast as to spoil in a week. Just now I am fairly stationary—like Grover.

Give my best regards to your wife and Margareta, and believe me
Even Yrs
Henry Adams

The letter of October 10, 1895, is of special interest for its reference to Adams' mind-opening tour of Normandy during the second half of August, 1895. The "new sensations" he casually reports to MacVeagh are the first sign of Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres and the closing chapters of the Education. In Normandy, among the twelfth- and thirteenth-century cathedrals, Adams found a spiritual home in the historical past ("the sensation is that of personal creation," he wrote to Hay), a moment of "unity" in the development of civilization, a fixed point of reference for his speculations on history.

London
10 Oct. '95

My dear Ambassador

As I cannot now come to see you, seeing that I sail for home the day after tomorrow, I write you this line to mention that I have just put in the post for you a copy of a new volume published today by my brother Brooks. As you have been so kind heretofore as to interest yourself in his interests, you have a right to be told of what his demerits are.

As for him, I believe he is now taking ship for India where he and his wife are to make holiday for a year. I know not whether he is to pass or return your way.

38 The Law of Civilization and Decay.
In Paris I saw Larz Anderson who gave me a flattering account of you and all yours.\textsuperscript{39} I am glad you have enjoyed it. I have just finished three months in France and England which I have enjoyed surprisingly—mostly owing, I must admit, to my brother Brooks who induced the Cabot Lodges to do Normandy and Touraine and take me with them. I had some new sensations.\textsuperscript{40} I should have much liked to follow them up as far as Rome, but apparently Washington has the first call.

My best love to all yours.

Ever truly

Henry Adams

In Europe for the summer of 1896, Adams met MacVeagh in Paris in late June and went with him to Homburg in August.\textsuperscript{41} The election of 1896, with the choice between Bryan, campaigning for free silver, and McKinley, campaigning for Mark Hanna, put a strain on men of principle like MacVeagh, who in the fall wrote to Adams "asking wisdom."\textsuperscript{42} By now Adams was feeling well beyond the Washington battle and maintained a steadily ironical attitude toward the election. He does not seem to have doubted that McKinley and eastern capitalism would win.

1603 H Street
8 October, 1896

Well, well, well! Our diplomatic service is getting pretty low down when Ambassadors go into partnership with washerwomen. Of course, I never dispute with governments, or bandy words with blue jays. If I did you would indict me under the Neutrality Act, and put me in prison for disrespect to foreign governments in time of peace; which is as good an indictment as our Attorney Generals ever draw

\textsuperscript{39} Larz Anderson (1866–1937), first secretary in the U. S. Embassy in Rome, 1893–1897; later ambassador to Japan.

\textsuperscript{40} Adams sailed from New York on July 10, 1895, and from London on Oct. 12, 1895. He was in Normandy between Aug. 14 and Aug. 28, passing through Bayeux, Caen, Coutances, Mont-Saint-Michel, and Chartres on his way from London to Paris.

\textsuperscript{41} See Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, July 1, 1896, in \textit{Letters, 1892–1918}, 106; also Henry Adams to Rebecca Gilman Rae, Aug. 26, 1896, in Cater, 380–382.

\textsuperscript{42} Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, Oct. 9, 1896, in \textit{Letters, 1892–1918}, 117.
up. So I shall say nothing; but how the dickens you expect me to pay that 20.20 something, may the Kaiser imprison me if I know. If I say a word about it here, I suppose your creditors will seize it. If I send you a bill of exchange for five dollars, you will spend and waste it in riotous and profligate living. What do you expect me to do about it? 43

Oh, yes! I know exactly how the election is going. I have the most precise inside information. The Major 44 is sure of 248 electoral votes, or two dozen to spare, Bryan is certain either of 317 or 319, I forget which, and can throw away a dozen or two without missing them. Wall Street and State Street are perfectly confident when they want stock; they are sure of immediate Sheol when they want to sell. In my own private opinion, it is quite certain that the Major will be elected unless Bryan beats him. Only I am privately told by both parties that it is quite impossible to find out how anybody except the corporation managers mean to vote. 45

Don’t repeat all this information as coming from me. It might damage my chance for an office. Don seems very cheerful, and, as you know, he supports the Major: so this is proof that the Major is going to be elected.

My best regards to Mrs. MacVeagh and Margharettta [sic]. 46 I’m only sorry for their sakes that I am not there to keep you in order.

Ever Yrs.

H. Adams

After 1897 Wayne MacVeagh was in private law practice in Washington and Pennsylvania, but maintained both interest and

43 This obscure transaction must explain itself; evidently Adams neglected to pay a laundry bill.
44 McKinley reached the rank of brevet major by the end of the Civil War and was popularly known as “the Major.”
45 To John Hay Adams wrote, Oct. 23: “... to me Bryan and McKinley are one.” Cater, 391. Hay had written to Adams, Oct. 4, 1896, that in his opinion Wayne MacVeagh would “die for the Majah.” Thayer, II, 151–152.
46 From Homburg Adams had written to Mabel Hooper LaFarge, Aug. 28, 1896: “Margaretta MacVeagh has to use me for a young man, which seems at first sight somewhat moyenageux and rococo, but I might dye my hair Titian red, and turn up my trousers and do better. ... My time has passed in devouring books about Europe, and disputing with MacVeagh.” Cater, 383–384.
influence in politics and the cause of reform. He was famous for impassioned denunciations of political insincerity and ineptness. Henry Adams, however, no longer had any illusions about taking even an informal part in Washington political life and was growing more and more doubtful whether any man, however intelligent and well-intentioned, could distract the massive, senseless forces of history; he had fully developed and refined his late manner of irony, condescension, and ridicule. He was most scornful of the reformers and independents, and even as good a friend as Wayne MacVeagh was fair target so long as he continued to act as though moral indignation were in itself an effectual political weapon.

The fact that MacVeagh was counsel for several Pennsylvania corporations, including the Pennsylvania Railroad, sharpened Adams' scorn. On February 3, 1901, he wrote of MacVeagh, who had just delivered a commemorative oration on John Marshall: "I see that Wayne preached his usual high morality, which requires Philadelphia cheek in these days. As a moral spectacle, the world, including America, presents a panorama for Wayne's grandchildren to enjoy as a specimen of their grandfather's humor; but it is a profitable doctrine to preach, and Wayne knows where to get his clientele."47 And on April 2, 1901: "Wayne is back here, and, in half an hour's stroll last evening, he sprinkled me with a mass of political misinformation after his usual kind. Wayne is now a very long-passed article. He would like to be an anarchist like me, but he daren't. His soul is saurian,—which means Pennsylvanian,—and he clings to the skirts of the corporations, but he sasses them in the form of the individuals who run them. He is very bitter against everybody, and justly, no doubt; but he still admires England and the Church. After all, a Pennsylvanian is a wonderful thing; like an anthracite coalbed; dark and dirty in itself but the cause of light."48 On March 16, 1902, Adams wrote even more sharply: "Wayne is nearer my idea of the devil than any chimère of Notre Dame. If he were an anarchist like me, his attitude might be sane, but for a limb of Satan and a leech of Pennsylvania rings, he is weird."49 Two weeks later Adams had a second thought: "The fun to me is that I am catching on to Wayne's play.

47 Letters, 1892–1918, 313.
48 Ibid., 323.
49 Ibid., 379.
Heretofore I assumed that he wanted something for himself; but this winter I can see quite clearly that he wants only to amuse himself."

None of these judgments can be taken at face value, however, for in each case Adams’ correspondent is Elizabeth Sherman Cameron, MacVeagh’s sister-in-law, to whom Adams unburdened himself with special élan. His letters to Mrs. Cameron during 1901 and 1902 are peppered with jeers at MacVeagh; they seem intended for the ears of the whole Cameron circle and of MacVeagh himself; it is as though some such remark was expected of Adams whenever he wrote. His letter to Mrs. Cameron of March 20, 1904, seems more likely to represent his real judgment: “What Wayne says, I do not know. . . . Cabot assures me . . . that his Panama campaign has exhausted the President’s patience; but I grin. They are all afraid of Wayne. His tongue is a sword. What checkmates Wayne and all the goo-goos is the rapid progress of Hearst’s campaign.”

Writing to MacVeagh himself, Henry Adams remained cordial and familiar. Year by year as the new century lengthened, Adams settled deeper into the prophetic pessimism of his last phase, yet in one respect there was a tempering of his old acerbity; his judgments cannot be said to have mellowed very much, but they did, in these years of the Education and the final essays on history, become less gratingly personal. The last of these letters to MacVeagh strikes a somewhat different note than any of the earlier ones. Derision and self-despisal blend into resignation and even humility; the valedictory note has the ring of truth.

23 Avenue du Bois de Boulogne
13 Sept. 1905

My dear Wayne

Thanks for your kind letter. Margaretta must be excused. She is young and impulsive. She will learn better. We all make errors of judgment, especially about ourselves. I pass most of my time now in trying to count the errors of judgment that have caused me, about ten times, to miss the certainty of becoming rich and respected. Of

50 Ibid., 382.
51 Ibid., 430.
course the primary blunder was to be born outside of Pennsylvania; the second was to run after literature, politics and reformers. And now I sit alone and think! I might have been Bill Whitney, who was the ideal American.

All is over, even Theodore Roosevelt, for, in my experience, "the greatest President since Washington" never lasts more than eight years, and we have seen a dozen. Next winter, Washington will be a new world to me, and I doubt whether it can be made to run. The horizon is narrowing down very close. I think sometimes of poor dear old George Bancroft, my only contemporary, with terror.

Never mind! We have much to be sorry for, and for that let us be thankful! Every living American has been in Paris this summer,—as well as most of the dead ones,—and I have set up as a book guide, at 25 cents per diem which is more than anyone at home ever would pay me. I’m doing a big business.

You’ll be in Washington, thanks, before I close up.

Love to Yrs

Ever

Henry Adams

52 In Adams’ iconography of political history, "Pennsylvania" had a special place. In the first volume of the History he presented Pennsylvania as "the ideal American state, easy, tolerant, and contented," "too thoroughly democratic to fear democracy, and too much nationalized to dread nationality." "In deciding . . . every issue that concerned the Union, the voice that spoke in most potent tones was that of Pennsylvania." "The value of Pennsylvania to the Union lay not so much in the democratic spirit of society as in the rapidity with which it turned to national objects." History of the United States of America during the First Administration of Thomas Jefferson (New York, 1889), I, 114–115. And in the Education, examining the figure of Senator Cameron, Adams wrote: "The Pennsylvania mind, as minds go, was not complex; it reasoned little and never talked; but in practical matters it was the steadiest of all American types; perhaps the most efficient; certainly the safest." As such, the Pennsylvanian makes for Adams the perfect foil to his own New England character, being capable, in a crisis, of actions which no New Englander could ever encompass, and continue to function: "Practically the Pennsylvanian forgot his prejudices when he allied his interests. He then became supple in action and large in motive, whatever he thought of his colleagues." Education, 333–334.

53 See Note 33.

54 George Bancroft, who died in 1891 at the age of 91, became for Adams a symbol of the horrors of old age, forgetfulness, failing powers and obsolescence. See Letters, 1892–1918, 19, 444, 508, 628. In the Education Adams couples himself with Bancroft as unhappy “survivors of the Civil War,” living into a hostile era and writing history of the remote and forgotten American past. Education, 317, 320.
The careers and expectations of the two friends had grown slowly apart in the quarter-century of their correspondence, yet the pattern of their friendship had not much altered. To the end Adams continued to admire MacVeagh's vitality and independence, but to be skeptical of his worldly undertakings and the steadiness of his judgment. A final comment to Elizabeth Cameron, written in 1912, may be taken as Adams' last word on MacVeagh: "... I sat an hour yesterday with Wayne, who was in fine form, dodgasting everybody, but especially Theodore, and dancing over the ruins of human society. As usual Wayne's comments lack a certain element of accuracy, and his personal point of view is a long way off, round the corner, but he is the only man who has anything to say that is worth saying,—if indeed anything is worth saying."55

Bryn Mawr College

Warner B. Berthoff

David Bonnell Green

55 Letters, 1892–1918, 580.