

Charles Adams in honor of his grandfather and also of Henry Adams, whose *Education* had been published posthumously in 1918.²⁶

Engel & Hevenor had been contracted to replace railroad tracks within blocks of the Capitol. This meant ripping out the existing track and breaking up concrete slabs with a pneumatic drill. It was risky work; if the driller nicked the third rail, the shock could hurl him through the air. Chambers was assigned a less dangerous task, cracking bolts with a sledgehammer and chisel. Even this required know-how he conspicuously lacked. He gripped his instruments too tightly, and by afternoon his hands were scraped raw. That night, when he joined the other workers in a boardinghouse, near the Capitol, he held out his wounded hands while another man poured iodine over them.

He had left Lynbrook in search of the wider world, and at his first stop he found it—in the men with whom he worked, dined, and bunked. They were the wretched of the earth, massed at the base of the social heap. There was a Russian, a Pole, a Belgian, and numerous Latin Americans. With his quick ear, Chambers managed to communicate with them all and to learn something of their Hugolian misfortunes. On Saturday nights he and a Venezuelan coworker strolled along Pennsylvania Avenue and debated the merits of the League of Nations—Manuel convinced “it was the hope of mankind,” while Chambers scoffed “in a kind of pidgin Spanish.” It was the same debate going on just a few blocks distant, where the U.S. Senate was in the process of rejecting the League’s Covenant and of spurning the one-world vision of President Wilson.²⁷

Even as he guarded his identity, Chambers boasted of his adventures in letters to schoolmates, colorfully dilating on his experiences. He also wrote to Laha, disclosing that he was in Washington, a clue she passed along to Jim Chambers, who notified the police. But local law enforcement officials were occupied with matters more pressing than hunting down a high school graduate who dutifully sent letters home to his mother. Chambers and Tony Muller lasted on the job, unharassed, until it ended in September.²⁸

They had spent little of their wages and so were able to prolong their adventure, proceeding by the Southern Railroad to New Orleans, where they took a room in a hotel near the depot. New Orleans had been a major naval station during the war, and in these peak months of demobilization the streets teemed with jobless veterans. Tony Muller fell in