James Addresses the Young*

HUGH WALPOLE

He was not aware that his long, slow, careful speech-windings were anything unusual or out of the way. I remember once, when staying with him at Rye, that, walking on a golf-course, we encountered two small children. James gave them some money with which to buy sweets but, when he had given it, began an oration to them as to what they should do with their money, the *kind* of sweets they should buy, the best time of day for the consumption of sweets and so on. They listened for a long time, staring up into his smooth Abbé-like face, then cast the coins on the ground and ran, screaming.

He was greatly distressed by this. What had frightened them? What had they seen or heard?

* 'Henry James: a Reminiscence', pp. 74–5.

NOTE

On Hugh Walpole, see p. 25. This anecdote is also recounted by Jessie Conrad, wife of the novelist Joseph Conrad:

Some three or four little girls caught his attention, and in his most ingratiating manner he stopped to talk to them. He began by presenting each with some pence and then proceeded to harangue them far above their understanding. The kiddies at last flung the coins on the ground and burst into loud sobbing before they ran away. (*Joseph Conrad and his Circle* (London: Jarrolds, 1935) p. 115)

Mrs Conrad locates the incident 'near his home in Rye'.