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JANE ADDAMS TWENTY YEARS AT HULL-HOUSE





Jane Addams

Founder of Hull-House in Chicago, first president of the Women's International League for

Peace and Freedom, and co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for 1931, Jane Addams was a crusader for social justice, a dedicated American who devoted her life to caring for the underprivileged and the oppressed and to fighting for the rights of workers, women, and children. She was born on September 6, 1860 at Cedarville, Illinois. After receiving her A.B. degree from Rockford College in 1882, she entered The Woman's Medical College of Philadelphia. Illness compelled her to give up her studies. In 1887, on one of her many trips to Europe, she observed the social experimentations at Toynbee Hall in London; this led to her decision to establish a similar center in Chicago, where she could put her social principles into action. Her tireless work with reform groups resulted in improved housing, education, and working conditions—in a better way of life for her Chicago neighbors and for people all across the land. A delegate to the first national convention of the Progressive Party in 1912, Jane Addams gave campaign speeches on the social justice planks of the platform, and seconded the nomination of Theodore Roosevelt as presidential candidate. In 1915 she founded The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Jane Addams's concern for humanity is reflected in her writings: *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902), *Newer Ideals of Peace* (1907), *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (1910), *The Second Twenty Years at Hull-House* (1930), *The Excellent Becomes the Permanent* (1932). In 1931 Miss Addams was co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, and characteristically enough she donated the prize money to the Women's Peace Party. She died in Chicago on May 21, 1935.

Twenty
YEARS
at
HULL-HOUSE

WITH AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES



by JANE ADDAMS

With a Foreword by
HENRY STEELE COMMAGER

Drawings by
NORAH HAMILTON



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To the Memory of
MY FATHER

FOREWORD

Even as a little girl in the pastoral community of Cedarville, in northern Illinois, Jane Addams was—as she herself tells us—“busy with the old question eternally suggested by the inequalities of the human lot.” There were not many inequalities in Cedarville, but even there were poverty and frustration: the war widows, the forlorn old couple who had lost all five of their sons, the farmers who were victims of the postwar depression, and the newcomers who could never really get started. And when she visited the neighboring town—was it Freeport?—she was shocked by the “horrid little houses” and, characteristically, wondered what could be done to make them less horrid. She could sympathize with the misfits and the victims of society for she was herself a misfit—so she felt anyway—“an ugly, pigeon-toed little girl whose crooked back obliged her to walk with her head held very much upon one side,” who was constantly afraid that she might embarrass the handsome father she adored.

At nearby Rockford Seminary, too—it was not yet a college—the air was heavy with a sense of responsibility—moral, cultural, and even social. Here the girls, most of them deeply religious, encountered a strong missionary tradition, and here too a compelling sense of the obligation of women to prove themselves in what was still a man’s world. It was all very Victorian: the passion for Culture, the passion for Good Works. Miss Addams’s Greek oration on Bellerophon and his fight with the Chimera “contended that social evils could be overcome by him who soared above them into idealism”—not precisely the doctrine that she later espoused.

There was a brief effort to study medicine—still a bit daring in the eighties—then a breakdown, and after that a long visit to Europe. She was sent abroad to drink up

the culture of the Old World, like any Daisy Miller (Henry James was a fellow passenger), but she would have none of it. She wrote later, and bitterly, of "the sweet dessert in the morning, and the assumption that the sheltered, educated girl has nothing to do with the bitter poverty and the social maladjustment which is all about her, and which, after all, cannot be concealed, for it breaks through poetry and literature in a burning tide which overwhelms her; it peers at her in the form of the heavy-laden market women and underpaid street laborers, gibing her with a sense of her own uselessness."

This assumption was valid enough for most of the girls who made the Grand Tour in the comfortable eighties, but not for Jane Addams nor for her friend Ellen Starr, who was her companion. Miss Addams's travels on the Continent and in Britain merely strengthened and deepened her already lively concern for the welfare of those whom Jacob Riis was to call "the other half." What she visited was not cathedrals and galleries, but factories and slums. It was on one of these visits in London's East End that she found herself looking at the spectacle of hunger and want through the eyes of literature, instead of the thing itself, and concluded even then that "lumbering our minds with literature only served to cloud the really vital situation." She had already visited Toynbee Hall, which applied Christian Socialism to the needs of the London poor, and she saw that if she would be true to herself she would have to cast her own lot in with the poor and the neglected, with those whom Theodore Parker called "the dangerous and perishing classes." She too would open a settlement house—not another Toynbee Hall, for it could not be religious or even give the appearance of a gesture of *noblesse oblige*. With Ellen Starr she returned to Chicago, and on that long *via dolorosa*, Halsted Street, found a decayed mansion that had been built by a merchant, Charles Hull, and now belonged to the ever-generous Helen Culver. On September 18, 1889—a day that Chicago should commemorate—Hull-House opened its doors to those who cared to enter. Jane Addams liked to remember that her father had never locked his doors; the doors of Hull-House were always open to the world.

As Miss Addams saw it, there was nothing dramatic about the opening of Hull-House; yet it was a historic event. For here was the beginning of what was to be one of the great social movements in modern America—the Settlement House movement; here, in a way, was the beginning of social work. As yet there was no organized social work in the United States—the beneficent program of Mary Richmond was still in the future—and as yet there was not even any formal study of sociology. It was no accident that the new University of Chicago, which was founded just a few years after Hull-House, came to be the center of sociological study in America, and that so many of its professors were intimately associated with Hull-House—Albion Small and John Dewey and the wonderful Miss Breckenridge and the two famous Abbott sisters, Edith and Grace, and thereafter two generations of academic reformers.

The time was ripe and the place logical. By 1890, just a hundred years after the founding of the Republic, the "Promise of American Life" was becoming an illusion. The extremes of wealth and poverty were as great as those in the Old World. Millions of immigrants crowded into the slums of American cities, constituting a proletariat not only impoverished but alien: these newcomers were the first immigrants who had not been absorbed. The Negro had achieved his freedom, but as yet not acceptance or recognition. Unemployment plagued the land, organized labor was in retreat, farmers were becoming peasants. As Woodrow Wilson was to say in his First Inaugural Address, we were in a hurry to be great and did not stop "to count the cost of lives snuffed out, of energies overtaxed and broken, the fearful physical and spiritual cost of the men and women and children upon whom the dead weight and burden of it all has fallen pitilessly the years through." It was an America familiar to us in the novels of Theodore Dreiser and Upton Sinclair, an America that accepted uncritically the grim doctrines of Social Darwinism that promised success to the strong and the ruthless, and remorselessly condemned the weak and the helpless to defeat. The welfare state was as yet unknown and almost unimagined; even social legislation was a thing of the future. Men worked twelve or fourteen hours a day, and thought

themselves lucky to have work. Women toiled long hours at night as well as day; even little children of five or six were unprotected by enforceable legislation. Slums grew apace, and with them disease and crime and vice. Business and government combined to smash strikes, break unions, silence critics, and jail agitators who disturbed their peace.

As for Chicago, all the evils and vices of American life seemed to be exaggerated there. It was, wrote Lincoln Steffens at this time, "first in violence, deepest in dirt; loud, lawless, unlovely, ill-smelling, new; an overgrown gawk of a village, the teeming tough among cities. Criminally it was wide open; commercially it was brazen; and socially it was thoughtless and raw." Happily, it had other qualities, too—the qualities that built the University of Chicago, established the Art Museum and maintained the great symphony orchestra, laid out a network of parks and boulevards, and responded to the challenge that young Jane Addams flung before it.

If there was one part of Chicago that dramatized all its problems more than any other, it was the five miles of Halsted Street from the Chicago River to the stockyards—the great street teeming with Irish and Germans and Russians and Italians and Poles, lined with dingy saloons, pawnshops, and—on the side streets—houses of prostitution. It was Halsted Street that Jane Addams came, and Ellen Starr, and soon the indefatigable Julia Lathrop and the remarkable Florence Kelley and the wonderful Dr. Alice Hamilton, and a score of other intrepid women, and men, to inaugurate what was to be a great experiment in social service.

A great experiment. They thought of it as a simple matter of neighborliness. "It is natural to feed the hungry and care for the sick," wrote Jane Addams. "It is certainly natural to give pleasure to the young, comfort the aged, and to minister to the deep-seated craving for social intercourse that all men feel." That is what they proposed to do and that is what they did.

The "first resident" was an old lady who had lived at Brook Farm and had known Emerson and Bronson Alcott and that pioneer of social reform, Theodore Parker. Soon men and women and children of all ages

thronged through the hospitable doors of the old mansion now reborn to new life; before long 2,000 people crossed its portals every day. Hull-House caught the imagination of Chicago—as it was to catch the imagination of the whole nation. There were gifts of buildings and of land from the ever-benevolent Miss Culver and eventually of money from many others. Hull-House grew and spread until in time it came to be a kind of community center for the whole of Chicago: a boys' club, an art museum, a theater, a music school, a gymnasium, and a dozen other buildings, all in use from morning until late into the night. Children came to play; the young to act or to draw or to dance; girls in trouble who had been turned out of their homes; men out of work, or on the run; the sick and the tired and the frightened and the lonely, and along with them scholars from universities like John R. Commons and E. A. Ross, down from nearby Madison, or John Dewey, or young Robert Morss Lovett. And along with them came the leaders of Chicago society, for Hull-House had become fashionable.

Calm and serene and authoritative, Jane Addams presided over it all. She took care of babies, even acting as midwife—had she not planned to be a doctor? She supervised all the varied activities of the sprawling community, kept the accounts, dealt with the scores of visitors, found work for the eager assistants and even trained them; she lectured, she wrote articles and books; she carried on a tremendous correspondence with social workers throughout the country, she served on committees and pleaded with legislatures and won over governors. Nothing was too difficult for her, and nothing too simple. She tells us of the tasks that fell to her in the early weeks—and that continued to make demands upon her:

For six weeks after an operation we kept in one of our three bedrooms a forlorn little baby who, because he was born with a cleft palate, was most unwelcome even to his mother, and we were horrified when he died of neglect a week after he was returned to his home; a little Italian bride of fifteen sought shelter with us one November evening to escape her husband, who had beaten her every night for a week when he returned from work because she

had lost her wedding ring; two of us officiated quite alone at the birth of an illegitimate child because the doctor was late in arriving, and none of the honest Irish matrons would "touch the likes of her"; we ministered at the deathbed of a young man who, during a long illness of tuberculosis, had received so many bottles of whisky through the mistaken kindness of his friends that the cumulative effect produced wild periods of exultation, in one of which he died.

Over the years Jane Addams built a bridge between the immigrants and the old-stock Americans, between the working classes and the immigrants, between the amateur reformers and the professional politicians, even between private philanthropy and government. She made Hull-House a clearinghouse for every kind of social service, an experimental laboratory in social reform, in art and music and drama and education as well; she made it a school of citizenship and a university of social service.

It was all done so simply and so naturally, so much as part of the day by day housekeeping, that contemporaries did not always realize that was a product of head as well as of heart. Miss Addams knew what she was about; she has told us that

The Settlement then, is an experimental effort to aid in the solution of the social and industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of life in a great city. It insists that these problems are not confined to any one portion of a city. It is an attempt to relieve, at the same time, the overaccumulation at one end of society and the destitution at the other. . . . The one thing to be dreaded in the Settlement is that it lose its flexibility, its power of quick adaptation, its readiness to change its methods as its environment may demand. It must be open to conviction and must have a deep and abiding sense of tolerance. It must be hospitable and ready for experiment. It should demand from its residents a scientific patience in the accumulation of facts and the steady holding of their sympathies as one of the best instruments for that accumulation. It must be grounded in a philosophy whose foundation is on the solidarity of the human race, a philosophy which will not waver when the race happens to be represented by a drunken woman or an idiot boy. Its residents must be emptied of all conceit of opinion and all self-assertion, and ready to arouse and interpret the public opinion of their neighborhood.

Jane Addams had many talents, but none more remarkable than her ability to work from the immediate to the general, from practical problems to philosophy, and even from the local to the national and the international. She always began with the job at hand, no matter how elementary or undignified; she took on the job of inspector of garbage removal for her ward to show how it should be done—and did it so well that the boss had to abolish the job itself in order to protect those collectors who held their jobs as sinecures; she went to the Illinois legislature with case histories of working women to push through labor legislation—legislation struck down by the courts. What she saw of youth on the city streets ended up as a program of school playgrounds; what she learned of children in trouble with the law ended as the first juvenile courts in the nation.

She had another genius, too. "You utter instinctively the truths we others vainly seek," William James wrote her. Yet it was not really instinct, but experience and wisdom—experience so full and wisdom so deep that they functioned like a second nature. Long before Lincoln Steffens she learned that corruption in politics was not the exclusive privilege of the wicked but stemmed from the respectable as well, and she learned, too, that it was possible to win politicians and spoilsmen to your side. *Democracy and Social Ethics* anticipated E. A. Ross's penetrating discovery that personal virtue was not enough—that social virtue was necessary to triumph over social sin. Her essay on the Pullman strike, "A Modern King Lear," saw the problem of capital and labor not so much in moral as in psychological terms, and she anticipated scholars like Frank Tannenbaum in seeking the deep social conservatism of the labor movement. And in her appreciation of art as experience, her realization that "life consists of processes . . ." and that "democracy is that which affords a rule of living as well as a test of faith," she both anticipated and influenced John Dewey.

Yet to what end all of these melioristic activities? "In the face of desperate hunger and need," Jane Addams wrote in 1894, the depth of the worst of our depressions, "these activities could not but seem futile and

superficial." More and more she came to feel like Alice with the Red Queen: no matter how fast she ran, she was still in the same place; the poverty, the slums, the crime and vice, the misgovernment, the illiteracy, the exploitation, the inhumanity of man to man—all these were still there. How futile to bind up wounds that should never have been inflicted; to put together parts of lives that should never have been shattered; to rescue girls from city streets when fair wages would have kept them safely at home in the first place; to give children a chance to play in the late hours of the evening when the whole day should belong to them; to provide emergency nursing for diseases that should never have infected their victims. How futile was the cure, how imperative was prevention!

One of the many merits of *Twenty Years* is that it dramatizes to us that lesson which every generation has to learn anew if it is to achieve understanding of either past or present: that those who stand at the levers of control, whether they are Southern slaveholders in the 1850's, or industrial barons in the 1890's, or labor bosses in the 1950's, tend to use power ruthlessly, and that there seems to be a close correlation between the social respectability of power and the ruthlessness. Certainly no farmer or labor organization in our history ever displayed the contempt for law, the brutality toward women and children, the prejudice against aliens, the ferocity toward those who stood in their way, that corporate wealth displayed in the Chicago, and in the Illinois, that Miss Addams describes in these tragic pages.

Very early Miss Addams and her Hull-House associates found that they had to move into the political arena. They helped push through labor legislation, set up juvenile courts, provided school playgrounds, worked for adequate enforcement of housing and sanitation laws, improved the school system, agitated for broader participation in politics—including woman suffrage—called for legal protection for immigrants, served as an embryonic Civil Liberties Union to preserve due process. They turned first to the municipal government, then at the very apex of corruption; then to Springfield, which was not much better. Eventually they looked to Congress

and the President for national action. By the end of the first twenty years so lovingly chronicled in these pages Jane Addams was ready for a national crusade for social justice—a crusade to be waged in politics. Another five or six years and the World War launched her on an international crusade: the last years of her life were dedicated to the cause of peace, and the little girl from Cedarville who had always walked a few steps behind her father ended up by organizing the women of Austria and Italy, Japan and India, for world peace. She became the first woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. That is the story of the Second Twenty Years.

Yet, of course, Hull-House remained the center of her interest, and indeed of her world, and when she came to record the later years and the larger crusades she called the story, quite appropriately, *The Second Twenty Years at Hull-House*. There it was, growing, flourishing, spreading its influence throughout the city, the state, the nation, the entire world. It was, in all these years, a Settlement House, a cultural center, a social service training school, a university, and almost a church. An institution, it has been said, is the lengthened shadow of one man. Hull-House is more than the shadow of Jane Addams; it is the very substance.

Miss Addam's earlier activities on behalf of labor laws and slum clearance and the rights of the poor and the despised had earned her the suspicion and hostility of some businessmen and of some conservative politicians; her later activities on behalf of what we would call the welfare state, and the cause of peace, won for her the hatred and contumely of the professional patriots. The American Legion denounced her as un-American, and the Daughters of the American Revolution stigmatized her as "a factor in a movement to destroy civilization and Christianity." She was used to these pin pricks; she had fought stouter opponents most of her life. Nor did she ever allow her serenity to be ruffled by attack, or her judgment to be warped by bitterness.

In time, of course, she weathered all attacks; in time, the querulous dissents were drowned out by a ground swell of acclamation and affection. She had long been the first citizen of Chicago; by the second decade of the new century she was widely regarded as the first citizen of

the nation, and she came in time to occupy something of the place in the affection and admiration of the world that Eleanor Roosevelt holds today.

Jane Addams had many talents; not the least of them, and not the least astonishing, was her literary talent. She wrote for the best of reasons, because she had something that very much needed to be said. She wrote with the best of styles—direct, lucid, and simple. She knew by instinct what the great encyclopaedist Jean D'Alembert taught: "Have lofty sentiments and your manner of writing will be noble." Miss Addams did not consciously entertain lofty sentiments, but her whole character was noble, and so too her style. She never thought of herself; even her autobiography is the story of Hull-House. Was there ever a more impersonal autobiography? Henry Adams pretended to impersonality by using the third person, but it is Adams, Adams, all the way, and in the end the cosmos is invoked to explain the Adams family. Miss Addams does not ask us to consider her, but only the society she served; yet how luminously her character shines through: firm, just, gentle, efficient, tenacious, upright, and endlessly compassionate.

She was, the British labor leader John Burns said, "the only saint America had produced." It was as Saint Jane that she was known to millions around the earth and none now will challenge her right to that name.

—HENRY STEELE COMMAGER

Amherst, Mass.