Jane Addams On Peace, War, And International Understanding, 1899-1932

Jane Addams

Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr decided upon Chicago as the ideal city for their new venture. Starr had worked as a teacher in Chicago and was familiar with the city's neighborhoods; she also knew several prominent people there. The women moved to Chicago in January 1889 when Addams was 28 years old. Some saw her as anti-patriotic, even traitorous. After the war, Addams toured Europe with members of the International Congress of Women. The women were horrified by the destruction they witnessed and were especially affected by the many starving children they saw. When Addams and her group suggested that starving German children deserved to be helped as much as any other child, they were accused of sympathizing with the enemy. Addams's unyielding pacifism during the Great War drew criticism from politicians and patriots who deemed her the "most dangerous woman in America." Even those who had embraced her ideals of social reform condemned her outspoken opposition to U.S. entry into World War I or were ambivalent about her peace platforms. Turning away from the details of the war itself, Addams relies on memory and introspection in this autobiographical portrayal of efforts to secure peace during the Great War. "I found myself so increasingly reluctant to interpret the motives of other people that Jane Addams was the first American woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Now Citizen, Louise W. Knight's masterful biography, reveals Addams's early development as a political activist and social philosopher. In this book we observe a powerful mind grappling with the radical ideas of her age, most notably the ever-changing meanings of democracy. Citizen covers the first half of Addams's life, from 1860 to 1899. Always a believer in democracy as an abstraction, Addams came to understand that this national ideal was also a life philosophy and a mandate for civic activism by all. As her story unfolds, Knight astutely captures the enigmatic Addams's compassionate personality as well as her flawed human side.