

## INTRODUCTION

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ANNA GEORGE de MILLE

A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*by* AGNES de MILLE

**T**HE MOST astonishing aspect of the Henry George legend was his effect on all people with whom he came into personal contact. Without exception everyone, man or woman, was overwhelmed. He seemed to command a power, particularly in his later years, that was almost mystic. Men did not merely admire, they worshipped. I have met people who differed from his theories; I have yet to meet anyone who heard him speak or who knew him and was not dazzled. They became disciples, followers, and heralds, or in the case of his avowed political enemies, reluctant admirers. Today, fifty years after his death, old men's eyes fill with tears at the mention of his name, and I, the granddaughter, have been asked to take off my hat so that the shape of my head could be studied. If strangers could be moved to such immoderation, how should a daughter born and reared in the aura of this blazing personality set herself to tell the story with historical coolness?

She was aware of the hazard. With humbleness, with industry, with watchfulness lest she betray her purpose by any weakening exuberance, she tried to tell the facts. She was afraid that her relationship would discredit the argument. She did not realize that her relationship was her contribution, and that the overtone of faith that rings through every sentence gives the work its fervor and true meaning. She thought to safeguard her impersonal approach with little subterfuges and masquerades like the enchantingly naive paragraph on page 198 in which she says it was an accident that all of George's children adopted his ideas; indeed, a son of Gandhi would have had as fair a chance

of turning militarist as a young George of embracing high tariff protectionism.

In her effort at discipline she all but obliterated herself from the tale. She neglected, for instance, to note the fact of her birth, and the date had to be inserted by her editors. More remarkably, she very nearly eliminated her own mother in a kind of biographical suttee. Mrs. George was by all indications a woman of unusual strength and nobility, but, although she was my mother's constant companion, a real paucity of incident illustrates her memory. One gathers what she was by reflection in her husband's life and through his letters. It is in the family traditions, however, and in my mother's character that one must look for the fantasy and liveliness of spirit that I believe were hers. Henry George had heartiness, but his wife had drollery, caprice, and the delicate conceits to make all family occurrences festivals of charming invention. It was she who danced like a sprite and loved music for its own sake; he believed all art should serve a moral purpose. It was she who thought the graces of life worth time and energy, as it was only she, of course, who had the time to foster them. The decorated chair and crown of wild flowers at a birthday breakfast; the crèche at Christmas time; the puddings and black fruitcake started weeks before with all the household and neighbor girls sitting around the dining table cutting fruit, and later, when the mixing got too heavy for a woman all the neighbor boys commandeered to help; the jam and preserves in the summer; the bag of crushed grapes hanging by the kitchen door dripping purple juice into the pan below while the late bees buzzed; the fine sewing and embroidery with silks; the incredible doll's clothes made as exactly as her own reception gowns; the chic and wit of the hats with holes for Teddy-bear ears; the frock coats with holes for tails; the tiny picture books one inch square, fashioned for very little hands; and the wisdom to establish and insist on daily ritualistic courtesies so that reconciliation would have easy patterns to follow after times of anger—these were my mother's household magics. I presume they were Annie Fox's.

I imagine also that my mother's zany humor, a kind of wild impertinence, stems from her mother. When quite exhausted with respectfulness and high moral tone mother's childish candor would rip through proceedings and shock her strongly-schooled conscience with its vitality and arbitrary freshness. The women's humor was the balance wheel to George's inde-

fatigable ardor. This was the background of starch and needles and teakettles and family jokes that made it possible for him to take on the large and thankless job of persuading mankind to live differently from the way it had grown accustomed to.

The women's basic characteristic was, of course, their courage. They could not be beaten down or disheartened. In this they matched George himself, and in their passion for doing what was right, and in their ebullient enthusiasm for all sincere projects, great or trivial. Avowed high-mindedness has gone out of style these days. People are reluctant to speak of moral purpose lest they be considered smug. But my mother came of a stock that believed with the heart and acted accordingly and cared not a fig for opinion. This becomes apparent throughout the book. What is less emphasized is the enchanting sweetness and sprightliness of manner which was also part of the background. Perhaps she was not aware of it. Its first expression being the lovely evanescence of daily practices and an essential of her own nature, she may very likely have taken it for granted. Furthermore, I think she would have considered it disrespectful to her father's importance. But I believe any just picture of Henry George's life must take into account the room next to his study where women's laughter came low over their sewing and the sound of the Irish maids singing as they dusted.

George always acknowledged his women's role in his life. But they with devout feminine adoration lowered their faces, and drew their skirts about them and tried not to obtrude.

Born when George was thirty-eight, ten years younger than the next oldest child, my mother, Anna Angela George, was the petted baby in a family which revolved entirely around the father, a man who had become already a world figure. From birth she saw great men hat in hand in their modest parlor. When she was barely three the family made a trip to the British Isles that shook the economic structure of that country. When she was in her teens she watched him grapple with every powerful political figure in his country. When she was twenty he died, a martyr to his cause, and was given by the citizens of New York a hero's funeral. Her life was stamped with this sacrifice.

Like all George women she believed her activities valid only in service to others, but above all in service to her father's cause. She formed clubs, went on lecture tours, served as trustee for the Henry George schools, laid wreaths on public monu-

ments, attended conferences and banquets all over Europe and the United States, did all manner of exhausting and wearying services, and talked and talked to whomever would listen, the plumber, the cook, the distinguished foreign visitor, the traffic cop who had thought simply to give her a parking-ticket, customs officials certainly, tax advisors above all, and most wonderfully certain Shubert chorus girls who found themselves in my employ and therefore inadvertently within the orbit of her attack. Every handbag contained a pamphlet, and every pocket. Desks and cupboards and suitcases bulged with them. Her correspondence was enormous, carried on without a secretary, mostly in longhand and embracing hundreds of people from Mahatma Gandhi, Einstein, and Lord Wedgewood to the daughter of a secretary who had worked for George's newspaper in San Francisco. Was she a crank? Of course she was. Great ideas are borne forward by just such. The apostles were not exactly half-convinced, She believed her father was the greatest man she had ever met, and he probably was. She believed the world would go to ruin if it did not pay heed, and it all but has, exactly as he said it would.

She commenced writing the life of her father about eighteen years ago. Not being a trained writer, she found the work laborious; not being a scholar with a technique for collecting and annotating facts, she found the research slow. Furthermore she was discouraged by the continuing indifference of publishers. George's memory had dimmed, and he who had once been far better known than Karl Marx was no longer considered a burning political issue. But she persisted in spite of dreadful setbacks. Discouragement was not in the family tradition. Had not her father been beaten down again and again? Had he not ultimately died fighting?

Her health failed. She continued her researches staggering up to the Public Library and back with a heart that stitched her ribs together with pain. She continued writing far into the nights though she fainted and vomited with weakness. Why did we not stop her? This was all she lived for. This was her purpose. The flame burned white-hot. We could not tamper with it.

By 1947, the book was in reality all but completed. During the last months she had been in correspondence with Don C. Shoemaker, the young editor of *The Asheville Citizen*. He offered his services to help in the final editing. She urged haste.

We begged her to pause, to spare herself. But she knew her time was measured.

Mr. Shoemaker had made his first corrections and returned the manuscript to her, and she was in agreement with all suggested changes. He knew her intimately, knew her idiom of speech and her point of view. And he had taken scrupulous care not to alter either. He also, being a distant relative, (his grandmother was George's sister Chloe) was well acquainted with the background of the story.

Her last enterprise was a tour through the Negro colleges of the South lecturing on her father's work. She stayed in residence wherever she spoke and she was one of the first white women to do so. But a week after her return she collapsed with a stroke. She was carried to the hospital with a paralyzed throat. The manuscript went with her. All but blind and barely able to hold a pen she asked to have the book propped on her chest. The feel of the paper as she turned the pages seemed to bring reassurance. The last time I heard her voice was an order on the telephone for research material. "Bring me," came the dark whisper, "the English reform laws of 1884." That afternoon five hours before she died came a letter from The University of North Carolina Press saying they would publish. She read it and understood it. It lay in the last moment under her hand on the counterpane.

When Henry George, Jr., after his father's death visited Tolstoy the ailing venerable man said, "I shall see your father before you do. What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him," said young George, "I kept the faith."

We laid Anna George by her brother's side, and this message is on the stone above them.

She was very small with piercing blue eyes, red hair, and an impertinent tongue. She would and did lay down her life for what she believed in. She talked gay nonsense. She was quite capable of embracing heroism, but casually in a household way and deprecating its importance. She considered her final crisis an inconvenience. She wished to live to finish the book; failing this, she hoped her death would be unobtrusive and no burden to the family. She left exact instructions that it should not be.

I remember her with shining eyes, her curly hair unruly beneath her hat, standing tip-toe in size-one shoes and lifting her head gaily to George Bernard Shaw in the middle of a howling

group of reporters. She had always wished to meet him, and, after hearing the astonishing tribute he had paid her father's memory in the only speech of his last American trip, she faced him, shaken to the core with excitement. Tears stood in her eyes and she trembled.

"You mentioned Henry George in your speech last night. I am his daughter."

"You're better looking than he was."

"I have more hair."

"Have you also his beautiful hands?"

"Alas, no."

"Have you inherited his great gift for speaking?"

Her face transfigured with pride and devoted memory, she replied, "All I have inherited from my father is his love for ice cream."

Shaw saw the look in her eyes, heard the childish words, and was silent. He bowed, laughing, over her hand.

This book stands as testimony that on this one occasion she spoke far less than the truth.