



Mother Jones: Raising Cain and Consciousness (Women's Biography)

Simon Cordery

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A life touched by tragedy and deprivation--childhood in her native Ireland ending with the potato famine, immigration to Canada and then to the United States, marriage followed by the deaths of her husband and four children from yellow fever, and the destruction of her dressmaking business in the great Chicago fire of 1871--forged the stalwart labor organizer Mary Harris "Mother" Jones into a force to be reckoned with.

Radicalized in a brutal era of repeated violence against hard-working men and women, Mother Jones crisscrossed the country to demand higher wages and safer working conditions. Her activism in support of American workers began after the age of sixty. The grandmotherly persona she projected won the hearts, and her stirring rhetoric the minds, of working people. She made herself into a national symbol of resistance to tyranny. Sometimes exaggerating her own experiences, she fought for justice in mines, factories, and workshops across the nation. For her troubles she was condemned as "the most dangerous woman in America."

At her death in 1930 at the age of ninety-three, thousands paid tribute at a Washington, D.C., memorial service, and again at her burial in the only union-owned cemetery in America in the small mining town of Mount Olive, Illinois. As noted in *The New York Times*, the Rev. W. R. McGuire, who conducted her burial, said, "Wealthy coal operators and capitalists throughout the United States are breathing a sigh of relief while toil-worn men and women are weeping tears of bitter grief."

The courage of Mother Jones is notorious and admired to this day. Cordery effectively recounts her story in this accessible biography, bringing to life an amazing woman and explaining the dramatic times through which she lived and to which she contributed so much.

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