

Chapter Fourteen: Anna Thomas Jeanes

Philadelphia, 1822

In Chapter Fourteen, titled "Anna Thomas Jeanes," we delve into the life of Anna Thomas Jeanes, born in Philadelphia in 1822. Illustrated through a posthumous portrait, where she is dressed in a modest black gown coupled with a white shawl, Anna avoided being photographed or painted during her lifetime, embodying a sense of humility. As the youngest of ten children, she grew up cherished by her father, though three of her siblings had already passed by her birth, and tragedy struck again when her mother died by the time she was four.

Anna's family was well-off; her father's merchant success afforded them a comfortable lifestyle near the Philadelphia harbor, yet their Quaker principles led them to eschew ostentation. Her older sister, Mary, took on a maternal role following their mother's death, guiding Anna and her other siblings, several of whom found success in various professions, including medicine and trade. One notable sibling, Jacob, founded what became Hahnemann Medical College.

Joseph, another brother, had a passion for fossils, contributing to the burgeoning field of paleontology. His efforts, alongside the family's donations of specimens, played a significant role in establishing the fossil collection at the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences. Anna and her family were also connected with prominent figures such as women's rights activist Lucretia Mott, perhaps suggesting Anna's alignment with progressive causes.

Quakerism, the faith of the Jeanes family, distinguished itself through its advocacy for equality and justice, despite early contradictions regarding slavery, as exemplified by its founder, William Penn. This legacy of commitment to social righteousness profoundly influenced Anna, particularly as she grew older and inherited her family's wealth after their passing.

By 1894, Anna Jeanes had acquired a fortune of \$5 million, worth approximately \$178 million today. Rather than indulging in luxuries typical of her time, she dedicated her life to philanthropy, guided by an ethos of justice, mercy, and community welfare. She began bequeathing her wealth, supporting initiatives like a home for destitute African American children founded by her sister Mary.

Anna's reclusive nature did not deter her from contributing to societal betterment, as she preferred anonymity in her charitable endeavors. Her quirks, such as purchasing the house of noisy neighbors to preserve her peace, and her insistence on rejecting athletics at Swarthmore College in exchange for financial support, reflect her distinctive perspective. This chapter culminates in portraying Anna as a transformative figure, unwavering in her commitment to extending kindness and improving the human condition .