

CHAPTER XIII
PREMATURE PARENTHOOD AND
WHY TO AVOID IT

Canada

DEAR MRS SANGER —

In the first place I only wish I had been able to get in touch with your work years ago. It might have saved my home, as it is I am a very unhappy woman working more than my strength is equal to to raise my children alone, being separated from my husband after bearing 9 children to him, unwilling mostly 8 of which are living. He being a very strong, sexually I mean as well as otherwise I being delicate found bearing children far too much for me and being married young at 18 years ignorant of any means of preventing pregnancy. Had my children very fast. Consequently we drifted apart. Circumstances going from bad to worse he taking to gambling, refusing to work, only hate and misery trouble and unpleasantness. I trying to support the family by maternity nursing often with one little one with me and at the same time pregnant. As time wore on he became more disagreeable and put some of the children from home and the others would leave as they grew up. So I was obliged to leave him, taking the six little children with me the two eldest were taking care of themselves. I have struggled on for 4 years now. I still have 4 children under 14 one not 6 yet. I find it very hard to make ends meet sometimes. I have one daughter married, and one about to be married. My son only one is 22 and so very much like all the faults in his father. I fear for his future. I struggled hard to give him a good education, and he don't make any use of it going from one thing to another, barely supporting himself and refusing to help me in any way to raise the family. One girl of 18 is anemic, and under treatment just now. Now I am going to ask you to put me in touch with some means of Birth

Control for my daughters I would go a long ways
to save them a life like mine I would rather follow
any of them to their graves than to live a life of suf
fering like I have lived, nothing but disappointment
in the tender loving ways I had such great hopes of
Thanking you in advance and wishing your work God s
Speed, and blessing, for I do see so much happiness
can come to so many people My heart just aches for
them lest they should share my kind of troubles May
God forbid such Please reply

Sincerely,

Mrs S A S

CHAPTER XIII

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COMING together with widely differing likes and dislikes varying inheritances and often with widely divergent training and ideals the two young people who marry will not be long in discovering that they may have much less in common than they had ever dreamed possible

When Society has tossed them a marriage certificate and the Church has concluded the ceremony which has legally united them they are then forced back upon their own resources Society so to speak has washed its hands of the young couple or cast this man and this woman into the deep waters of matrimony where they are left to sink or swim as best they may

The certificate of marriage solves nothing Rather it accentuates the greater and more complex problems of life To find a solution to this great problem of living together and

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growing together requires all the combined intelligence and foresight both man and woman can command. Drifting into this relation will offer no solution for very often those who drift into marriage drift out of it in the same aimless fashion.

Others who have not realized that the marriage of a man and woman is not merely a legal sanction for parenthood but that it is an important relation in itself—the most important one in human life—often find themselves defeated and forced into an accidental and premature parenthood for which they are not financially or spiritually prepared.

Two years at least are necessary to cement the bonds of love and to establish the marriage relation. Parenthood should therefore be postponed by every young married couple until at least the third year of marriage.

Why is this advisable?

When the young wife is forced into maternity too soon both are cheated out of marital adjustment and harmony that require time to mature and develop. The plunge into parenthood prematurely with all its problems and disturbances is like the blighting of a bud before it has been given time to blossom.

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Even in the fully matured healthy wife pregnancy has a disturbing physiological and nervous reaction. Temporarily the whole character and temperament of the woman undergoes profound changes. Usually nausea, headaches, irritability, loss of appetite ensue. At the beginning of this period there develop temporary eccentricities that do not belong to the woman in her normal condition.

If the bride is enforced into an unwilling or accidental pregnancy during the honeymoon or the early stages of their marital love, the young husband is deprived of the possible opportunity of knowing his wife during one of the most interesting stages of her development. He has known her in the exciting days of courtship and during the heightened though brief period of the honeymoon, and now, alas, she enters all too soon the ominous days of early pregnancy. Never under such conditions can he know her in the growing beauty and ripening of mature womanhood. He has known her as a romantic girl before marriage—and now as a mother to be frightened, timorous, and physically and nervously upset by the great ordeal she must go through.

Here often begins a spiritual separation be-

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tween husband and wife. Conscious of his own helplessness likewise of his own responsibility, the young husband feels it his duty to leave her alone. This enforced separation is spiritual rather than physical. Outwardly the relation may seem the same. It may be a separation only in the sense that no real unity or welding has been attained. Engrossed by this new problem the young wife may resign herself to the inevitable and enters a state of passive resignation that is deadening to her love life. She is in no condition to enjoy companionship. Beneath the superficial and conventional expression of happiness at the approaching parenthood there may rankle a suppressed resentment at the young husband's careless pride in becoming a father. The young bride knows that she is paying too great a price for the brief and happy days of her honeymoon. She has been swept too rapidly from girlhood to motherhood. Love and romance, as many young wives have confessed to me were but traps leading her to endless travail and enslavement. And this hidden rankling is often directed toward the husband whom the wife holds responsible for her accidental pregnancy.

This unhappy condition would not have oc-

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curred if they had time to become one if there were a period of two years during which the bonds of love might be firmly cemented for time alone can produce this unity It is a process of growth Married love does not spring fullgrown into life It is a delicate plant and it grows from the seed It must be deeply and firmly rooted nourished by the sunlight of tenderness courtship and mutual consideration before it can produce fine flowers and fruits This period is as essential for human development as the period of body building and adolescence

It is a period of mutual adjustment It is a period of spiritual discovery and exploration of finding one's self and one's beloved It is a period for the full and untroubled expression of passionate love It is a period for cultural development It thrusts forward its own complex problems—problems let it be understood intricately complex in themselves

Husband and wife must solve many problems only by *living through them* not by any cut and dried rules and regulations For marriage brings with it problems that are individual and unique for each couple

If instead of solving these problems of early

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parenthood in which the life of a third person is immediately involved a child thrusts itself into the lives of young husband and wife these fundamental problems of marriage are never given the attention they deserve A new situation arises and in innumerable cases love as the old adage has it flies out of the window

We must recognize that the whole position of womanhood has changed today Not so many years ago it was assumed to be a just and natural state of affairs that marriage was considered as nothing but a preliminary to motherhood A girl passed from the guardianship of her father or nearest male relative to that of her husband She had no will no wishes of her own Hers not to question why but merely to fulfil duties imposed upon her by the man into whose care she was given

Marriage was synonymous with maternity But the pain the suffering the wrecked lives of women and children that such a system caused show us that it did not work successfully Like all other professions motherhood must serve its period of apprenticeship

Today women are on the whole much more individual They possess as strong likes and dislikes as men They live more and more on

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the plane of social equality with men They are better companions We should be glad that there is more enjoyable companionship and real friendship between men and women

This very fact it is true complicates the marriage relation and at the same time ennobles it Marriage no longer means the slavish subservience of the woman to the will of the man It means instead the union of two strong and highly individualized natures Their first problem is to find out just what the terms of this partnership are to be Understanding full and complete cannot come all at once in one revealing flash It takes time to arrive at a full and sympathetic understanding of each other and mutually to arrange lives to increase this understanding Out of the mutual adjustments harmony must grow and discords gradually disappear

These results cannot be obtained if the problem of parenthood is thrust upon the young husband and wife before they are spiritually and economically prepared to meet it For naturally the coming of the first baby means that all other problems must be thrust aside That baby is a great fact a reality that must be met Preparations must be made for its

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coming The layette must be prepared The doctor must be consulted The health of the wife may need consideration The young mother will probably prefer to go to the hospital All of these preparations are small compared to the regime after the coming of the infant

Now there is a proper moment for every human activity a proper season for every step in self development The period for cementing the bond of love is no exception to this great truth For only by the full and glorious living through these years of early marriage are the foundations of an enduring and happy married life rendered possible By this period the woman attains a spiritual freedom Her womanhood has a chance to bloom She wins a mastery over her destiny she acquires self-reliance, poise, strength a youthful maturity She abolishes fear Incidentally, few of us realize since the world keeps no record of this fact, how many human beings are conceived in fear and even in repugnance by young mothers who are the victims of undesired maternity Nor has science yet determined the possibilities of a generation conceived and born of *conscious* desire

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In the wife who has lived through a happy marriage, for whom the bonds of passionate love have been fully cemented, maternal desire is intensified and matured. Motherhood becomes for such a woman not a penalty or a punishment, but the road by which she travels onward toward completely rounded self-development. Motherhood thus helps her toward the unfolding and realization of her higher nature.

Her children are not mere accidents, the outcome of chance. When motherhood is a mere accident, as so often it is in the early years of careless or reckless marriages, a constant fear of pregnancy may poison the days and nights of the young mother. Her marriage is thus converted into a tragedy. Motherhood becomes for her a horror instead of a joyfully fulfilled function.

Millions of marriages have been blighted, not because of any lack of love between the young husband and wife, but because children have come too soon. Often these brides become mothers before they have reached even physical maturity before they have completed the period of adolescence. This period in our race is as a rule complete around the age of

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twenty three Motherhood is possible after the first menstruation But what is physically possible is very often from every other point of view inadvisable A young woman should be fully matured from every point of view—physically, mentally and psychically before maternity is thrust upon her

Those who advise early maternity neglect the spiritual foundation upon which marriage must inevitably be built This takes time They also ignore the financial responsibility a family brings

The young couple begin to build a home They may have just enough to get along together The young wife, as in so many cases of early marriage these days, decides to continue her work They are partners in every way—a commendable thing The young man is just beginning his career—his salary is probably small Nevertheless, they manage to get along, their hardships are amusing, and are looked upon as fun Then suddenly one day the young wife announces her pregnancy The situation changes immediately There are added expenses The wife must give up her work The husband must go into debt to pay the expenses of the new and joyfully re-

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ceived arrival The novelty lasts for some time The young wife assumes the household duties and the ever growing care of the infant For a time the child seems to bring the couple closer together But more often there ensues a concealed resentment on the part of the immature mother at the constant drudgery and slavery to the unfortunate child who has arrived too early upon the scene, which has interfered with her love life

Two brothers I know married practically at the same time They were both carpenters, living in the same neighborhood The wife of the one gave birth to six children in a period of ten years In spite of the efforts of the man to sustain the family they were forced at the end of ten years to accept outside charity The wife became a household drudge nervous, broken, spiritless, neglected by her husband, despised by her children The wife of the other brother did not become a mother until three years after marriage This man remained throughout the ten years of my observation, clean, alert honest, kind to his wife and two children The wife kept up neat, tidy looks and was able to help her husband and children to advance themselves Yet at the time of

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marriage both girls were equally attractive and intelligent

The problem of premature parenthood is intensified and aggravated when a second infant follows too rapidly the advent of the first, and inevitably husband and wife are made the slaves of this undreamed of situation, bravely trying to stave off poverty whipped to desperation by the heavy hand of chance and involuntary parenthood. How can they then recapture their early love? It is not surprising that more often they do not even trouble themselves to conceal the contempt which is the bitter fruit of that young and romantic passion.

For the unthinking husband, the 'proud papa' the blushing bride is converted at once into the mother of my children. It is not an unusual occurrence to find that three months after the birth of the baby the parents are thinking and speaking to each other as 'mumsy and daddy'. The lover and sweetheart relation has disappeared forever and the 'mama-papa' relation has taken its place.

Instead of being a self determined and self-directing love, everything is henceforward determined by the sweet tyranny of the child

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I know of several young mothers despite a great love for the child to rebel against this intolerable situation Vaguely feeling that this new maternity has rendered them unattractive to their husbands slaves to deadly routine of bottles baths and washing they have revolted I know of innumerable marriages which have been wrecked by premature parenthood

Love has ever been blighted by the coming of children before the real foundations of marriage have been established Quite aside from the injustice done to the child who has been brought accidentally into the world this lamentable fact sinks into insignificance when compared to the injustice inflicted by chance upon the young couple and the irreparable blow to their love occasioned by premature or involuntary parenthood

For these reasons in order that harmonious and happy marriage may be established as the foundation for happy homes and the advent of healthy and desired children premature parenthood must be avoided Birth Control is the instrument by which this universal problem may be solved