



## THE WOMAN REBEL

As usual, Bill was the peacemaker. On December 28, 1913, he wrote Margaret a letter explaining his decision to stay in Paris.

I feel I will come through somehow. I want my work to count so that you will have the leisure to do your work without economic consideration, and be relieved of the direct care of the kiddies. Loved one, I don't want you to waste your life on anyone. I just want to have the privilege of helping you to be *yourself*.

On January 2, 1914, he wrote again. He had talked to Victor Dave about an English publisher for *What Every Girl Should Know*. Dave had also told him that there was an English group in Paris supporting not only woman's suffrage but sexual equality as well. He would look into these matters, too.

Again, he returned to the subject of their poverty and of his deep love for her. "It seems ages since you left. It's no joke to land in cold New York with a family and no money. Well, you are a brave dear woman."

He was painting straight through from 8 A.M. to 4 P.M. in order to catch the light. He asked her to write telling him her real thoughts. Had any one else seriously come into her life to make her leave so hastily? Maybe he could have kept Stuart with him and sent him to school in Paris. "It would have been a connecting link."

Bill received an answer from Margaret on January 11. It was written from an apartment at 4 Perry Street in Greenwich Village and was full of complaints. Now that she had full care of the children, her nervous malady had returned, she needed to be alone during the day for the sake of her intellectual development, but she would probably have to go back to nursing to earn money.

Two weeks later Bill wrote again about their marriage. Everyone in Paris seemed to know about their quarrel of the summer before, there was much gossip about their future relationship. He was worried that the radicals were associating her with a "J K" and gossip had convinced him she had taken a lover. As to her suggestion that he even things up by taking a French mistress, he was aghast.

I will let my name be associated with no other woman. I would be amiss to all the fine emotion that surges within me if I fell from grace. It cannot be, that's all. I still hold that intercourse is not to be classed with a square meal, to be partaken of at will, irrespective of the consequences. No other woman has interested me in the past or now, and until a woman comes across my life who means *more* to me than you do I stand on the old ground.

He went on to ponder the anarchist philosophy of sex, which was very different from his own.

Personalities are crowding around you, and if you follow the anarchist teaching, it would mean you must *know these personalities in all relations*. Well, I have not yet adapted myself to this.

Sometime I wonder whether I am not too constant and appear to narrow your life to knowing completely only one personality. But this I shall express again and again—that to be *alone* linked with your life is the jewel of my inspiration. You speak, dear love, that in our life together you have given me the best and deepest love—yes, and I have felt it—that you were the only woman who ever cared to understand me.

But you have advanced sexually—you once said that you need to be in different relations (with men) as a service for the women of your time. To all this I have no answer.

Though Bill eventually burned most of Margaret's letters, their con-

tents are usually clear from her diaries, or from his replies In February 1914 she said she had not written him lately because she had been depressed to the point of toying with suicide Bill's answer recalled that she had had a similar bout of depression in Provincetown after Peggy's illness "It was awful I hope you may never have one like it again "

Margaret replied with another complaining letter Her present upset stemmed from the fact that, though she was at last getting along with her plans to publish a paper of her own, she was unsure of just what kind of paper it would be Her primary goal was to make women, especially working women, more rebellious—rebellious about having to work such long hours in factories, rebellious about having to bear so many children, rebellious about having to be subservient to men Still, she wasn't sure, she would have to feel her way

Emma Goldman was making a living from her angry, defiant paper *Mother Earth* Max Eastman was also doing well with his quiet, fun-poking paper *The Masses* (*The Masses* had recently poked fun at Comstock with a cartoon of a policeman dragging a naked woman into court "This woman," the caption read, "has just given birth to a naked baby ")

Margaret was beginning to favor the angry approach, because it seemed easier to do But any kind of paper took money to start, and she was hard pressed She would have to move from the exciting Village to the dull Bronx, which she hated But the Bronx was cheaper, and her only sources of money were loans from her sisters or occasional nursing jobs

At the end of February, Margaret told Bill she had found a dingy flat for herself and the children She had brightened up the place with yellow draperies, further beautified it by hanging the pictures John Sloan and John Marin had presented to Bill after the Armory Show, and altogether made the place as cheerful as she could

Now she was looking for a printer, which was difficult Most of the printers she talked to refused to have anything to do with her project, but her radical friends had finally found a party member who had promised secretly to help her Equally important, her radical friends had agreed to publicize her paper at their meetings and get her some advance subscriptions at a dollar a year for twelve issues, or fifty cents for six Happily, almost a thousand women were sending in money,

mainly to get the contraceptive advice they had been led to expect it would give

With a nest egg of several hundred dollars from these subscriptions, plus loans from Jessie Ashley and Mabel Dodge, she was almost ready to start. But first she had to get Stuart out of the house, he and Grant fought almost constantly. Stuart was athletic and outgoing, Grant shy and nervous. As a result, they never seemed able to agree. She soon sent Stuart off to school, which at least kept him separated from Grant during the day.

Now Margaret was free to sketch out her first issue, then send out announcements to the press saying it would be an eight-page sheet called *The Woman Rebel*, with the slogan of "No Gods! No Masters!" taken from the I W W slogan "No God! No Master!" Underneath the main slogan she was adding "a paper of militant thought, written, edited and published by Margaret H. Sanger of 34 Post Avenue, Bronx, New York."

*The Woman Rebel*, obviously not sure of what it wanted to accomplish, made its bow in March 1914. On page one there was a long rambling editorial written by Margaret, called "The Aim."

This paper will not be the champion of any "ism." All rebel women are invited to contribute to its columns.

The majority of papers usually adjust themselves to ideas of their readers but *The Woman Rebel* will obstinately refuse to be adjusted.

The aim of this paper will be to stimulate working women to think for themselves and to build up a conscious fighting character.

An early feature will be a series of articles written by the editor for girls from fourteen to eighteen years of age. In this present chaos of sex atmosphere it is difficult for the girl of this uncertain age to know just what to do or really what constitutes clean living without prudishness. If it were possible to get the truth from girls who work in prostitution to-day, I believe most of them would tell you that the first sex experience was with a sweetheart or through the desire for a sweetheart or something impelling within themselves, the nature of which they knew not, neither could they control.

It is these and kindred facts upon which *The Woman Rebel* will dwell and from which it is hoped the young girl will derive some knowledge of her nature

It will also be the aim of *The Woman Rebel* to advocate the prevention of conception and to impart such knowledge. Other subjects, including the slavery through motherhood, through things, the home, public opinion and so forth, will be dealt with. And at all times *The Woman Rebel* will strenuously advocate economic emancipation.

Margaret was, therefore, taking on not only contraception, sex, and socialism, but marriage as well. An article by Emma Goldman—the only piece by her great rival that Margaret ever printed—denounced marriage as a “degenerate institution.”

Margaret’s next piece was followed by one taken directly from I W W material. It ended with the plea “One big strike for the eight-hour day!”

In the next issue she ran an article called “The Prevention of Conception.” Beginning with the question “Is there any reason why women should not receive clean, harmless, scientific knowledge on how to prevent conception?” she went on to tell her readers to demand this knowledge. Prevention of conception, she said, would not only free women from unwanted pregnancies, but would reduce the number of workers, and frighten the capitalist class. Equally important, it would defy the Comstock law. “No plagues, famines, or wars could ever frighten the capitalist class so much as the universal practice of the prevention of conception. A law exists forbidding the imparting of information on this subject, the penalty being several years imprisonment. Is it not time to defy this law?”

Though no advice on contraceptives was included, its very mention and the reference to the law against it was what Comstock had been waiting for. He had been watching *The Woman Rebel* from the beginning, and quickly ran to the Postmaster General, S. Marshall Snowden, to bar the paper from the mails. Though his grounds were extremely flimsy, the Postmaster General went along anyway. When Margaret demanded his reasons, Snowden answered evasively, merely characterizing the whole paper as “indecent, lewd, lascivious and obscene.”

Margaret countered by becoming more defiant In the April issue she ran a special boxed statement in capital letters headed *The Post Office Ban*

THE WOMAN REBEL FEELS PROUD THAT THE POST OFFICE AUTHORITIES DID NOT APPROVE OF HER SHE SHALL BLUSH WITH SHAME IF EVER SHE BE APPROVED OF BY OFFICIALISM OR "COMSTOCKISM "

Another special box was called "A Woman's Duty", it too was run in all capitals

A WOMAN'S DUTY TO BREED LARGE FAMILIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 211 OF THE CRIMINAL CODE AS AMENDED BY THE ACT OF MARCH 14, 1911

The rest of the April issue consisted mostly of articles supporting socialism and condemning capitalism Since she avoided the subject of contraception, the Postmaster General let the issue go through

But Margaret was eager to fight, she was, after all, her father's daughter In the May issue she featured a high-pitched article called "Cannibals"

Compared with the diseased, perverted, hypocritical ghouls of American "civilization," cannibals strike you as simple healthy people If they feed and fatten upon the charred flesh of human beings, cannibals at least do not hide behind the sickening smirk of the Church and the Y W C A They are open, frank and straight-forward in their search for food They eat their victims outright

Their tastes are not so fastidious, so refined, so Christian, as those of our great American coal operators, those leering, bloody hyenas of the human race who smear themselves with the stinking money of Charity to attract those foul flies of religion who spread pollution throughout the land

Workingwomen! Keep away from the Y W C A as you would from a pesthouse

Remember Ludlow! Remember the men and women and chil-

dren who were sacrificed in order that John D Rockefeller, Jr , might continue his noble career of charity and philanthropy as a supporter of the Christian faith

Steer clear of those brothels of the Spirit and morgues of Freedom!

Two articles in the same issue mentioned contraception indirectly One was called "Are Preventive Means Injurious?" and assured her readers that, contrary to popular belief, they were not The other was headed "Can You Afford a Large Family?" and said that few could Both articles were written in a manner that could hardly be called "vile and indecent" by anyone but a Comstock But then she added fuel to her argument by adding in "A Woman's Duty"

A WOMAN'S DUTY TO LOOK THE WHOLE WORLD IN THE FACE WITH A GO-TO-HELL LOOK IN THE EYES, TO HAVE AN IDEAL, TO SPEAK AND ACT IN DEFIANCE OF CONVENTION

As if this wasn't enough, it was followed by an article that spoke about the dangers of abortion, especially a self-induced abortion, which could kill a woman The words about abortion stirred Comstock to action Once more he ran to the Postmaster General Once more the Postmaster General obliged The May issue was called "lewd, vile, filthy and indecent," and was suppressed

A few copies of this issue were slipped through the mails by Margaret and her friends, who ran all over town depositing bundles of them in so many mailboxes that it was impossible to catch them all But the bulk was seized

Margaret was now boiling She wrote to Postmaster Snowden demanding to know which articles had caused the magazine to be seized, only to receive another evasive reply At a loss as to what to do next, she rushed a copy of the May issue to Bill in Paris He liked it because his Peg had produced it But he was worried Being a rebel was one thing, breaking a law which might land her in jail for many years was another He begged her to tone down her material and be more careful Meanwhile he said he would like to do some cartoons for *The Woman Rebel* so that he might become a part of it In fact, he had already done one cartoon showing a woman holding two children by the hand, look-

ing confidently toward the future. He enclosed it, hoping Margaret would like it well enough to use it.

Margaret emphatically did not like it. She wrote him saying that the only kind of cartoon she wanted was one of a woman lying prone on the ground with a brute standing above her, trampling on her. Bill answered that, deeply hurt, he was abandoning the whole cartoon idea, drawings of women being trampled on by men were not in his line.

What hurt him even more were new rumors he had heard about Margaret's personal life. Her name was being linked, first, with a well-known radical writer, then with a Greek anarchist, then with a "notorious free lover." He sent her one of his long, worried letters, closing with talk of coming home if the rumors didn't stop.

But Margaret was in no mood either to tone down *The Woman Rebel* or to discard her present lover. At the age of thirty-seven when she was too tired or disturbed to sleep, only one thing seemed to relax her, and that was sexual intercourse. If Bill wanted to stay celibate for a while, let him. She knew what she wanted and would do as she pleased.

But with two out of three issues of her paper suppressed, she was in deep trouble. Almost half of her subscribers were demanding their money back, as most of them had received only a single copy. They also felt defrauded because they hadn't gotten any of the expected contraceptive information, which, by now, Margaret was undoubtedly afraid to give. The socialist and anarchist material was nothing new, they weren't paying for *that*.

Even her staunchest friends began to waver. Jessie Ashley and Mabel Dodge refused to lend her any more money. Max Eastman, formerly an ardent supporter, became less enthusiastic, too. After reading her diatribes against marriage, the Y W C A, and John D. Rockefeller all jumbled together, he ran an editorial in *The Masses* calling her writing "over-excited and over-intolerant—the blare of rebellion for rebellion's sake." At the end he tried to soften his editorial by concluding "We will still hail the virtue of the fight and call it a bargain at the price." But his point had been made.

Desperate and depressed, Margaret sent out a general press release that included copies of all the issues of *The Woman Rebel*, asking if suppression of some of them hadn't been unfair. Counting on the traditional backing of free speech by the press, she hoped in this way to rally new supporters to her cause. The results were the opposite. The United Press Association called damning attention to her credo "Look



the whole world in the face with a go-to-hell look in your eyes" The *New York Journal American* hit at another credo "Rebel women claim the following Rights The Right to be Lazy The Right to be an Unmarried Mother The Right to Destroy The Right to Create The Right to Live and the Right to Love" The right to be lazy, they said, was nonsense, and no one had the right to destroy The *Pittsburgh Sun* ran an editorial calling her paper "a mass of dirty slush," ending with the sweeping sentence, "The whole thing is nauseating!"

Instead of achieving the image of savior, she was achieving that of a vulgar scold

Clearly, unless she got a new slant for her paper, or better publicity for herself, her whole project was doomed

She called a council of war Several men had been helping her with *The Woman Rebel* Among them were Otto Bobsein, an old-time Socialist who was doing book reviews for her, Robert Allerton Parker, a professional journalist who had come East from San Francisco to try to become a playwright like his friend, Eugene O'Neill, but hadn't made it, and Ed Mylius, a nephew of Henry James, who had published an anarchist paper in Paris which so cruelly lampooned King Edward V of England that the king decided to sue him for libel, making him a hero for his daring after he had fled to America

Margaret invited these men to her apartment for an emergency conference They decided that the first thing she needed was a catchier name for contraception than the delicate "preventive means" They considered "conscious generation," "Neo-Malthusianism," and several others Robert Parker offered the final suggestion He was a polio victim who was studying Yoga, in which control is an essential feature, hoping that control might help him with his partly paralyzed hand It occurred to him that control might apply to birth as well "Birth control," he mused "Birth Control I think I like it" They all liked it As they put on their hats and left, they agreed that birth control was the best name for the movement

When she became famous, Margaret would usually manage to mention when interviewed that she had invented the term Robert Parker was gallant however "I may have coined the words, but Margaret passed them around the world Without her, birth control would never have become household words"

Yet a new name was only the beginning Most of all, though she was

still doing occasional nursing, Margaret needed money. She wrote to Bill asking for some, but he answered that he was even poorer than she was.

Luckily at this point Fishel, the man who had bought their Hastings house, came through with a mortgage payment that temporarily eased the situation for both. Bill was able to buy himself a cheap suit he badly needed, and Margaret was able to pay her rent, settle some pressing printer's bills, and get out another issue.

This issue contained more attacks on marriage, plus a diatribe maligning the Postmaster for banning the last issue. She urged her readers not to be disheartened, she would get future papers to them somehow, she would "under no circumstances promise to be good."

When this issue was allowed to go through the mails, Margaret's spirits went up. Bill Sanger's did not. Although he was writing regularly, she was hardly bothering to answer, except to tell him that she really would be happier if he did not write so often, as she preferred to be left alone "to develop myself intellectually." His replies were a mixture of anger and concern.

You speak of being alone and wanting to be alone and to be left alone. All I can say, sweetheart, I wish by all that's good and holy that you *are* left alone. Indeed, I shall be glad when you finally inform me that you are finally left with yourself. Since you landed on American soil the opposite has been the case.

When she did not answer this letter at all, and he heard stories of her going around with still another anarchist whom he identified only with initials, he sent her a fiery letter.

I want you to pull away from the whole anarchist crew—I mean *every one*. Propagate an idea no matter how revolutionary, I would not care what the world might think. But unless a relationship is based on real love, a love that is real and lasting I deny its right to exist in your life. The incident with ETH simply unnerves me. I would not have a finger pointed at you. The hour has come when you must make a clean sweep of the whole crew.

She shot off a short note reminding him again, almost cruelly, that

he could even things up by getting himself a French mistress He was aghast "I am an anarchist, true, but I also am a monogamist And if that makes me a conservative, then I am a conservative!"

By now the six months in Paris that Bill had allowed himself were almost over, yet he couldn't make up his mind whether to stay or come home Theoretically, he felt he should return "I don't feel my art is as important as one would imply Yours is the grand fine spirit How can you run a paper, nurse, and start a birth control league all at once I want to return, to relieve you of the care of the children since this is the crucial time for you "

Still, he lingered on, though things were coming to a climax for Margaret When the Postmaster General kept refusing to tell her which articles had led to his barring of her paper from the mails, she lost her head She decided to run some articles in the August issue so obviously unacceptable that he would *have* to tell her what he objected to

The first of these was signed by an Alice Groff and called "The Marriage Bed "

The marriage bed is the most degenerating influence of the social order, as to life in all of its forms—biological, psychological, sociological—for man, woman and child

In order to attain the highest development of the sex-nature, the woman should not have the good of a master Such good destroys her native spontaneity or it arouses bitter antagonism and rebellion—as it prevents the development of her sex-nature to higher psychological issues

Thus we see that scientifically considered as to physical, psychological, sociological hygiene—poetically considered, as to love spiritually considered as to the flowering of the soul—the marriage bed is a decadent institution an institution that arrays itself against the great fundamental principle of life—self-preservation

Let this institution, then, be anathema to all thinking minds

This was as close to gobbledegook as one could get, but in its virtual invasion of that sacred place, the marriage bed, she was sure it would make Comstock wild

Another article had more point It was from a radical magazine *The Menace*, which in turn quoted a Catholic magazine, *The Western*

*Watchman* Its sarcastic heading in *The Woman Rebel* was "The Menace's Advice "

*The Western Watchman* (Catholic) says, according to *The Menace* "We say, a young girl's business is to get a husband Having got a husband, it is her business to beget children Under ordinary conditions of health a young wife ought to have a child in her arms or on her bosom all the time When she is not nursing a child she should be carrying one This will give her plenty to do, and she will have no time for political meetings or movements "

How do the women like that program for a life vocation? According to this authority a woman is to look upon herself merely as a vehicle for the breeding of children This editor would not even give her the protection that is bestowed upon cattle (when he says) "when she is not nursing a child she should be carrying one " The home of such a couple, instead of being a place of comfort and refinement with food for the mind and the amenities of social life, is to be a rabbit warren, a sty filled with anemic, underdeveloped children, and so continue until she drops into the grave the victim of man's distorted and perverted sense of duty Out upon such a theory! For the protection of the female sex, let her be taught how to defend herself against such teachings as these

But there were two really incendiary articles in this issue The first was a front-page editorial, undoubtedly written by Margaret herself (other articles had been written by friends under assumed names) In this one she defended three anarchists who had been experimenting with making homemade bombs in a house on Lexington Avenue and ended by blowing up both the house and themselves

The second was even more startling Written by a Herbert A Thorpe, it was called "In Defense of Assassination " This was an article that Emma Goldman herself had never dared print, but Margaret did so with calculation "If this issue doesn't succeed in smoking out Comstock and the Postmaster General and making them tell me which articles caused the suppression," she wrote the well-known radical Upton Sinclair, "I'll follow it up with an article in defense of arson "

The assassination article did succeed in smoking out the Postmaster General, but not quite as Margaret expected

On August 25, 1914, she received two visitors from the federal government, one of whom formally handed her a subpoena indicting her on three counts—two for publication of lewd and indecent articles and one for incitement to murder and riot. She was now faced, not only with the possibility of a defunct magazine, but of a long jail term. It is characteristic of Margaret that she claimed to have handled this confrontation with great aplomb. She wrote in her autobiography that she invited her visitors to sit down and proceeded to give them such a detailed lecture on the need for birth control among the poor that they wept, after which her father emerged from the next room and wept still louder. Putting his arms around her, Michael Higgins, she said, moaned in his best Irish brogue: "If only I had known then what I know now, your po-or mother would still be alive."

This story does not ring true. It is hard to believe that the subpoena servers had the time or inclination to linger and listen—or that Michael Higgins would agree to practice birth control under any circumstances.

In any event, as soon as the process servers left, Margaret sat down and did some hard thinking. She decided in the best radical tradition to make a dramatic gesture—appear in court alone, without a lawyer on the day the subpoena specified. Meantime, she wrote to the Postmaster General again, insisting that he disclose exactly which articles had caused *The Woman Rebel* to be barred from the mails.

He named seven. Oddly, he declared that the most offensive was "Are Preventive Means Injurious?" But he must have been nudged hard by Comstock, for in this article she had called Comstock and Comstockery stupid. That was something Comstock could not tolerate, for he, at last, was losing status. Many judges, tired of his arrogant manner and often silly complaints, had recently implied that he was getting out of hand. But Margaret had gone further, she had denounced him publicly. He was determined to stop her, he had her arrested and brought to quick trial.

In court, however, Margaret was so charming and demure that when she asked for a postponement in order to prepare her defense, the judge readily consented. The case was held over until the fall term, giving her six weeks of grace.

Elated, she plunged into activity. First, she got off a combined September-October issue of *The Woman Rebel*, using practically all of it to discuss her indictment. She stated that she would probably be tried in

October, and that if found guilty, she might be sentenced to as much as twelve years. She went on to say that "while practically every thinker of the civilized world is now accepting birth control, the arch-hypocritical government of the United States is not." Then, unexpectedly, she turned on her readers, berating them for not helping her enough. In a front-page editorial she declared

The so-called radical press finds nothing significant or worthy of support in the attempt of the federal government to kill the propaganda for birth control. Solve the industrial problem, they solemnly declare, and all will be well. Do they realize that the "industrial problem" is never going to be solved until working men and WORKING WOMEN use every weapon and every method in their power to *master* the situation in which they find themselves, instead of remaining slaves in everything except the use of verbose and hackneyed plans that have a thousand times proved impotent and ineffective?

This off her chest, she sneaked as many copies as possible of this combined issue through the mails. In need of publicity, she next sent out a press release, concerning her indictment, to all the major wire services, and sat back to await the reporters she hoped would come. When they did, she repeated her praise of the anarchists who had blown up a house and themselves. She also asserted that her use of the article "In Defense of Assassination" was derived mainly from the thoughts of the great American philosopher, Wendell Phillips. But her great moment came when she repeated her credo of Women's Rights: "The Right to be Lazy. The Right to be an Unmarried Mother. The Right to Create. The Right to Destroy. The Right to Love and the Right to Live." The contrast between this credo, her charming manner, and what one newspaper described as her "unexpected beauty," made startling news.

She spent the remainder of her six weeks doing at last what she had been afraid to do before. She wrote a pamphlet giving specific birth-control advice and signed her name to it. (Oddly, however, she called this pamphlet and others that followed it *Family Limitation*, instead of using the far better name of birth control.) Still, in her pamphlet she told about various douches, described the condoms which were easily obtainable, and the diaphragms which were not. There were few dia-

phragms available in America in 1914, because those that were had been brought in illegally from France and cost about seven dollars, a price far beyond the means of a working man who earned three or four dollars a week. She also gave some rather curious advice: "Any nurse or doctor will teach one how to adjust a diaphragm, and women can then teach each other." Now, "any nurse or doctor" could not or would not do this kind of teaching, either because they didn't know how to do it, or were afraid of the law. As for women teaching each other, this was almost unthinkable in 1914 when women, as a rule, had been taught by their mothers not to touch their own genitals, much less those of their friends.

Nevertheless, writing such a pamphlet at all was a courageous and daring thing to do.

Finding a man to print it also took great persistence. Twenty printers flatly refused, one answering in horror, "That's a Sing Sing job!" But finally an I W W member, Bill Shatoff, agreed to stay in his shop after hours, lock the door, and run off one hundred thousand copies immediately, plus more when needed. As soon as she got her hundred thousand pamphlets, she sent them off, divided in bundles, to friendly I W W and Socialist locals around the country, instructing that they be held until she gave a signal for their release and sale.

All of this took so much of her time and energy that suddenly she realized the six weeks' grace given her by the court was almost over, yet she had done nothing to prepare her case. Leonard Abbott and Theodore Schroeder, both able lawyers for the Free Speech League—a group formed primarily to fight for freedom of speech as guaranteed by the Constitution—offered to help her, but she spurned their offers, saying that she didn't have the time to sit down and talk with them, that she still had the none-too-easy job of raising the money to pay the printer's bill for her unreleased pamphlets. She used the same excuse to avoid writing in detail about what was happening to Bill, merely telling him she wanted "to be left alone to think and dream and regret."

The new word "regret" struck an ominous chord. A letter from him, undoubtedly sent during the summer of 1914, reflects his growing despair: "I just wonder if I can go on. I feel my life has been taken away from me. Write me—sweetheart dear. I want you dear. I love you—with all my soul and spirit. Let me serve you!"

She didn't reply. Nevertheless, he was the one who sent her the

money to pay her bills. When he heard of her arrest and indictment, he at once shipped her the recent pictures he had painted, pictures which he meant to hold for a fall exhibit in Paris. When she got only one hundred dollars apiece for them, instead of the four hundred dollars he had hoped, he told her also to go ahead and sell the Marin and Sloan pictures which he had left in her keeping. These of course fetched excellent prices.

Yet Bill himself, whose own financial situation had become desperate, did not return. He had worked so long toward becoming a good artist that he hated the idea of returning to "wage slavery" as an architect. As passionately as he loved Margaret, he could not give up his goal. Besides, he had just been invited to exhibit in a London show the following winter. So, having sent her all his finished pictures, he hurriedly painted more. If he shipped these home, too, he asked her, would she help him choose which to exhibit and then return them? He favored one portrait in particular, it was of Peggy. "Peggy is a beauty. Ah me! She seems to have captured all the beauty of the family."

But France was mobilizing for war in 1914, and by late summer Bill was wavering. He remained in Paris until September, painting steadily, but by the end of the month, like most Americans, he had little choice but to return home. On October 1, with money borrowed from fellow radicals, he bought steerage passage for New York.

While Bill was at sea, Margaret got an unexpected jolt. On October 5 a police officer phoned to ask why she had failed to appear in court that morning when her case had been called. She answered that she had forgotten, appeared the next day instead, and asked for still another extension. Her autobiography states that she was granted only one more day, actually she got eight.

At this point she panicked and decided to look for a lawyer after all. Continuing to avoid Abbott and Schroeder, she sought out Samuel Untermyer, one of the best lawyers of his day. Untermyer refused to take her case, advising her to plead guilty and throw herself on the mercy of the court. He didn't see how she could do otherwise, as her most serious indictment was that of incitement to murder and riot. By pleading guilty, she might get a suspended sentence as a first offender, but he wouldn't take a case he couldn't possibly win.

Realizing at last that she was in a bad predicament, Margaret rushed home and reread the Comstock law. It provided a maximum of five years in jail for each offense. Frightened and confused, she wasn't



sure whether she had published seven or nine offending articles in *The Woman Rebel*. If nine, she reasoned, she could be sentenced to forty-five years in jail. In truth, even if found guilty on nine counts, she probably would have been sentenced to serve them concurrently, remaining in jail only five years. But Margaret knew nothing about courts, and at this point was too distraught to learn. She decided to ask for another long extension to prepare a case and, if she didn't get it, to run away to a foreign country under an assumed name.

Now she did hurry to Abbott's office, but he was no more encouraging than Untermyer. He told her frankly that she had made a legal muddle of the whole *Woman Rebel* venture. She had said she was starting a paper mainly to test her right to give birth-control information to women who needed it, but she had done nothing of the kind. She had jeered at marriage, the Church, and the state. As she had finally written a pamphlet giving contraceptive advice, she could still have made a test case on the freedom-of-speech issue by openly mailing it, and notifying the authorities that she had done so. But she had not done this, and now that she was under the totally different indictment of incentive to murder and riot, the legal waters had been thoroughly muddied. He was afraid she was truly in a bad way. Though he would still go to court with her and do what he could if she wished him to.

On October 13, 1914, declining Abbott's offer to accompany her, she walked into court alone and asked for another long extension. She was denied it, but granted another eight days with a small amount of bail.

In her autobiography, Margaret again claims to have received only a one-day extension. She vividly describes how she spent that one day in a hotel room, her watch ticking off the minutes while she decided whether to stay or run.

She says she chose to jump the bail her friends had raised, and to run. Having done this, she claims, she phoned Grand Central Station and found that a train was leaving for Canada within the hour, she tells how she hastily packed a bag and dashed for the Canadian train, planning from there to catch a boat for England. More, she tells how she boarded the train without a passport, thought up the name Bertha Watson as she rode along, and later, on the boat to Europe, by chance met some "highly placed officials" whom she talked into getting her into England without a passport, even though it was wartime.

This is not the way it happened.

A handwritten note signed with her initials is in the Smith College

Archives It clearly reads "Bertha Watson was the assumed name I adopted on my flight to England while waiting for a passport and Comstock's attack." In other words, with the help of her anarchist friends, who were experts at subterfuge, a forged "Bertha Watson" passport was waiting for her in Canada. Canada had probably been chosen because a false Canadian passport was easier to get than an American one.

Also, since she had not one, but eight days grace before she had to run, she was able to make arrangements with two women friends in the Village, Helen Marot and Caroline Pratt, to take care of her children while she was gone. In addition she dropped a note to Bill Sanger, who had just landed in New York, telling him she was off to England and how to reach her there, got letters of introduction to radicals in Europe, and packed several large boxes containing copies of *The Woman Rebel* and *Family Limitation* to sell abroad.

From the train to Canada, she also made another of her defiant gestures. She wrote letters to both Judge Hazel, the man who had been the presiding justice on her case, and Harold Content, the prosecuting attorney, informing them that she was leaving the country under an assumed name and would return in a few months when she was better prepared. Then in each letter, she enclosed a copy of *Family Limitation* as a special thumb-to-the-nose.

In Canada she spent a few weeks visiting anarchist friends, saw Bill Sanger briefly after he begged to be allowed to come up and say good-bye, then sailed on November 3, 1914, for Liverpool. From the ship she sent coded cables to various locals that were holding the bulk of her *Family Limitation* pamphlets, ordering that they be released and sold for twenty-five cents apiece and the money sent to her under the name Bertha Watson, in care of American Express, London.

She would be away a full year instead of the few months she had promised and return a quite different woman from the one who left.