



## THE RESEARCH BUREAU ON SIXTEENTH STREET

Before he married Margaret, J Noah had divided his time between his office, his club, and a cavernous old mansion up the Hudson near Fishkill, New York Even after his three children were grown and gone and he and his wife separated, he spent weekends there because, with little education and no cultural interests, his chief pleasure came from living the life of a country gentleman Eating huge meals, taking tramps and horseback rides through the woods, playing an occasional game of cards with a neighbor, he was content

But Margaret would have nothing to do with the old house She said it was too gloomy, too Victorian, too everything Until they could replace it with something smart, she wanted an apartment in town So they took a fine place in a new building at 31 Fifth Avenue near Washington Square, bought new furniture, and settled down to enjoy it, while Slee went about selling the old house

Meanwhile, Margaret plunged back into her birth-control work Ten thousand letters a month begging for contraceptive advice had poured in to her office while she was away They came from all classes of women and cried out for replies

The first thing she did was to rent Carnegie Hall for the night of October 22, 1923, and advertise "A Public Meeting to Welcome Margaret Sanger Home After Her World Tour in the Interests of Birth Control " But this time she had the sense to charge very little and to let her read-

ers know they would get their money's worth. She promised tales of the fascinating places she had visited and said the witty *New York World* columnist Heywood Brown would serve as chairman. As a result, eighteen hundred of Carnegie's two thousand seats were filled and the evening was a great success.

Next she asked Anna to reply to as many letters as possible and soon set out on a round of speaking tours that covered the entire East. Though traveling at this pace by train wearied her, and she was using potent painkillers like morphine to ease her nervous stomach pains, she couldn't resist the temptation to go. She went even though the fee was sometimes only fifty dollars—a figure she accepted because in a rash moment she had boasted to J. Noah that she would be able to pay all her personal expenses out of her lecture fees, letting fall a rare check for twenty-five hundred dollars from her pocket to prove it. But it was the boost to her ego, plus her eagerness to promote her cause, demonstrated by the streams of tragic letters that poured in, that kept her running.

These letters were full of desperate cries, like

Excuse me for writing you this letter but after reading your book *Woman and the New Race* I can't stand it. I never had much friends as I am a orphan from the age of two years, mother dying of cancer of the breast and father putting me with strangers. It just about breaks my heart to think of the past but my future isn't much better. Living with strangers up to seventeen years, I decided to marry and have a home of my own. But Oh, the wrong I done I know now, Mrs. Sanger. Being married about four years have 3 children and seem as I am pregnant again and so weak can't hardly get around and just think three babies to take care of. I know if I wouldn't have to have any more babies I would get strong and pick up again, but being pregnant every year makes a sick woman out of a healthy one. Please, Mrs. Sanger, be so kind and advise me how to take care of myself so I couldn't get pregnant so often or never again.

I have went to doctors and had illegal operations performed until I couldn't afford it any longer and then tried doing it myself until I'm afraid I'll have myself ruined. I am so nervous I just think I would lose my mind.

\* \* \*

My husband don't want more (babies) either because I suffer so much We tried so many things but I get that way any time, no matter how careful we are Our Dr told my husband to get a divorce as I could not stand having children, but we are happy together with our boys and won't do anything like that But if there is something that will keep me from getting that way I would be glad

Will you please help me? You speak in your book of some methods being more dependable than others Would you tell me what they are? No matter how expensive they must be cheaper than a baby every year

She ran letters like these in the *Review* each month, as well as items like this reprint of a story in the October 27, 1922, *New York American*

Mr and Mrs Fred Scott moved from La Porte, Indiana the other day, taking thirteen children with them and buying only two railroad tickets The oldest of the 13 children, triplets, were four and a half years old The youngest, twins, each six months That mother in ten years has had triplets five times and twins twice, and lost six children You can't add anything to that

Occasionally she even ran a humorous letter like this one from Africa's Gold Coast

Dear Friend I have the honor most respectfully to apply for your special and particular catalogue I have married two women, so try your best and send me some of catalogue Send it to me very instantaneous

Anna and a few volunteers kept answering the letters, enclosing a copy of *Family Limitation* Because they could now refer the writer to the nearest doctor friendly to the cause, they were again answering letters one by one

J Noah wanted to help When he heard how inefficiently the letters were being handled, he worked out new form replies Next he took on a huge backlog of unanswered letters from doctors and devised an easy

way to answer them, bringing to the job all his years of managerial experience. But he received little thanks from Margaret, who wanted him kept out of this part of her life and had no more intention of sharing the limelight with him than with anyone else.

But sharing his money was another matter. She needed money and a lot of it, for she had come to realize that sending out pamphlets through the mail was both a risky and unsound method of giving advice. The chief contraceptive she recommended was the diaphragm, yet women couldn't easily learn how to insert it properly themselves, much less teach others. Diaphragms came in different sizes, graduated according to the size of a woman's cervix and the number of children she had borne, they had to be individually fitted. Because of this, the need to open a clinic where she could dispense information "for reasons of health," as the law now allowed her to do, became pressing.

But there were other obstacles to opening a clinic. She needed a quiet place free from the noise of clattering typewriters, she needed a licensed physician to run it.

Finding a doctor was the harder job. Several tentatively agreed to help but at the last minute got frightened and begged off. Dr. Mary Halton took two women, obviously unfit for pregnancy because of health (one had advanced tuberculosis and the other a serious heart condition), and drove them around to every municipal hospital in town, all of whom refused contraceptive help. What's more, the hospital with which Dr. Halton herself was connected found out about what she was doing and threatened her with immediate dismissal if she went ahead.

Next Dr. Anna K. Daniels hinted she might take the job, but the Town Hall raid, plus again the possible loss of her hospital connection, scared her off.

At last Margaret found Dr. Dorothy Bocker, a young woman who was working for the Public Health Service of Georgia. Dr. Bocker admitted she knew nothing about birth control but was eager to learn, persisting even after Margaret warned her she might land in jail. But as a compensation for giving up her secure government job, Dr. Bocker wanted a two-year contract at five thousand dollars a year, a large sum in 1923.

Margaret asked J. Noah for the money. He refused, chiefly because he kept hoping that Margaret would "give up all this blooming nonsense" and become the companion for whom he yearned. Besides, Margaret had to admit to him that she was already in financial trouble.

She was, for instance, greatly in debt to the printers of the *Review*, the bills for the last half-dozen issues were long overdue

Also, the *Review* made very little money as its small ad revenue came mainly from three-liners for books on subjects like *The History of Woman's Slavery*, brought out by little-known publishers like "The Truth Publishing Company," "Health & Life Publications," or by men who operated solely from box numbers Other ads came from companies which had nothing to do with birth control, like the Carbozine Laboratory that sold things like Carbozine Goiter Cream or Carbozine Tonic Pills "certain to stimulate gland function in men "

Mixed in with these were ads for Margaret's own books, and full-page ads for Three-in-One Household Oil Yet it all brought in so little that, at the Birth Control League's Annual Meeting in February 1923, the financial report for the previous year was dismal The total income from the *Review* had been \$18,551, half of which came from ads and sales and the other half from donations, while the expenses were \$17,734, leaving the slender balance of \$817 in the bank

As for her Birth Control League, its receipts for 1922 were \$20,175 and its disbursements \$19,954, leaving the even smaller balance of \$221 The league money had gone mainly for printing 213,500 birth-control pamphlets given away surreptitiously at various meetings, usually at no charge The rest had gone for postage on the 112,775 pamphlets mailed to women who failed to enclose stamped return envelopes along with their requests, as well as for propaganda leaflets distributed to what Anna described as "carefully selected mailing-lists," meaning doctors and clergymen who could be trusted to spread the word

In addition to lack of money, there was also a curious legal obstacle to starting a clinic This was the use of the very word "clinic" In New York a special license was needed in order to use this word, because a clinic was considered the equivalent of a dispensary or place where state-supervised drugs were given out The Birth Control League could not get a dispensary license unless it was associated with a hospital and no hospital would be associated with birth control

Another obstacle was the fact that the word "clinic" meant, to poor women especially, a place where things like drugs could be had for free Margaret couldn't possibly give away contraceptive advice or supplies for free She had to pay rent for a place to operate in, as well as Dr Bocker's salary She would have to charge at least five dollars a vis-

it, though hopefully, rich women would volunteer to pay more. Also, for that minimum of five dollars she would have to provide an initial vaginal examination and explain the various kinds of contraceptives available—the best ones were the Dutch cervical cap, which was shaped like a large thimble and fit snugly around the opening of the cervix, but was hard to insert, and the diaphragm which was flatter and had a thin wire in its rim making it easier to insert. Then, if the diaphragm was requested, she had to see that it was fitted properly, give a second examination a few days later to see if it was comfortable, and a third a few months later to see if it was working well. And if the woman didn't come back on her own for these examinations, she had to send out a paid social worker to find out if anything had gone wrong.

On top of all this, she would have the expense of keeping records because she wanted her clinic to be a research facility as well as a consultation center. This meant keeping a complete file on each patient, including the patient's age, nationality, number of children, number of abortions whether done by a midwife or self-induced, as well as the answers to questions on the patient's attitude toward sex. Did she enjoy sex? Was she indifferent to it? Or did she dread it for fear she might be "caught"?

Opening a place that would do all this would take a lot of money, and with Slee refusing to donate it, she didn't know where to turn. Then she remembered Clinton Chance, a wealthy Englishman she had met in London who had promised her a large amount of money for a specific purpose connected with birth control—if she ever needed it. In response to a long telegram explaining her situation, Chance sent her five thousand dollars to cover the first year of Dr. Bocker's salary, plus an extra thousand for an examining table, instrument sterilizer, and the other equipment a good facility needed. While she was delighted to receive his contribution, it was only a beginning. Remembering what she had said years ago when she had "cast herself on the universe," Margaret was determined to stay afloat.

Originally she had rented two small rooms on the top floor of 104 Fifth Avenue for her headquarters. Now she added two rooms across the hall and had the entrance door lettered *Clinical Research*. These words were just vague enough to get around legal restraints on the use of the term "clinic," yet they conveyed the idea to the women who came to seek her service. With only word-of-mouth advertising these women

came in great numbers. Mainly Jewish, Italian, and Irish, they crowded into the tiny waiting room with the broods of children they almost invariably brought along, and a harried volunteer interpreter ran from one group to the other to keep them placated. In the first two months a staggering total of twenty-seven hundred women came. Of these Dr. Bocker found nine hundred she could conscientiously fit with contraceptives for "health reasons." Diaphragms proved to be by far the most popular contraceptive, as soon as women were assured that a diaphragm was fitted with great care and that there was no chance it would get "lost" and wander up into their bellies.

The demand for diaphragms was so great that it led to still another problem. Where was Margaret to find enough to meet the demand? A few could be bought in drug stores, but because the law was still so vague that no American manufacturer would publicly acknowledge making them and no drug store display them openly, they had to come from mysterious places and were, therefore, extremely expensive. A few had been smuggled in from abroad, hidden in copious handbags or under the girdles of friends of the cause, who would call up the Research Bureau and murmur, "Your jewels have arrived." But keeping a good supply on hand was very difficult. Then she had a break.

When Margaret was living in her cold-water flat on West Fourteenth Street she used to buy coal for her fireplace from a red-cheeked Italian named Vito Sillechia. Since she never could bank a fire well enough so that she could return to a warm flat at night, she paid Vito a few cents extra to drop in at various times during the day and keep her fire going, giving it an especially good stir just before she was due home. She often brought along several birth-control advocates as her guests, and Vito, when he had the time, would stay and listen to their conversation. One evening he asked her, "Mis' Sanger, what are those little things you and your friends talk about so much?"

"Those?" Margaret laughed. "Those are what a woman uses so she won't have too many babies."

"You mean *bambinos*? I got too many *bambinos*, my friends got too many *bambinos*, everybody got too many *bambinos*. Where you get those little things, Mis' Sanger? How much they cost?"

When she explained that they were expensive because they came mainly from Holland, Vito hesitated. Then he volunteered a bit of information. He didn't make a living just from selling coal and wood. Ever since Prohibition he had been doing some rumrunning on the

side "I got the connections in the States, Mis' Sanger You make the connections in Holland and I run them for you in liquor bottles It cost you a little something extra, but I manage if you like "

Margaret had no extra money, but she did manage to persuade J Noah to lend her some, promising to pay him back out of her clinic fees Slee capitulated, on the condition that Vito also bring him a supply of the good Holland gin he needed as a "health tonic "

So for the next few years Vito smuggled in diaphragms for Margaret and gin for J Noah from ships anchored outside the twelve-mile limit, transferring the bottles to swift motorboats As a result, Vito not only made some extra cash but he also learned to limit the size of his family and save up for the candy store he had long dreamed of owning In discreet Italian he passed on the word how to use "those little things" to his neighbors Later, at the height of Margaret's battle with the Catholic Church, Vito, a good Catholic, tried to get an interview with Cardinal Hayes to tell him how wonderful Mis' Sanger and her birth control were Here, however, he did not succeed

After finding a way to get a plentiful supply of diaphragms, Margaret had two other lucky strikes First, a brownstone town house at 17 West Sixteenth Street was put on the market for seventy thousand dollars in cash, a low price for an imposing place on an excellent street right off Fifth Avenue Slee recognized it as a good buy at once Pouring money into a nebulous movement was one thing, acquiring a chunk of fine New York real estate was another Because the plot was twenty-eight feet wide instead of the usual twenty, and because it was five stories high instead of four, he decided to buy it It was an ideal place to which to transfer the Clinical Research Bureau He raised the cash in no time and gave the beautiful old house to Margaret as a gift

Margaret got busy remodeling it for her purpose She made the basement floor into a storage room, divided the first floor with its high ceilings and black marble fireplace into a waiting room and consulting room, and made the next floor an office Then she added several bathrooms and fixed up the top floor as a cozy apartment for herself, where she could rest during the day or sleep overnight if she chose

Next a convent near Slee's old Hudson River mansion burned down, and the Church, wanting to find another place for the nuns immediately, offered J Noah a hundred acres of beautiful hilltop land with a large private lake in exchange for his house Slee accepted On a hundred acres he could build an English manor-type house, resembling

Margaret's beloved Wantley, and become the squire of a lordly domain

He engaged a firm of Italian architects to build a grand house, hired a neighboring farmer to head a crew of men to gather fieldstones for the exterior, got a team of skilled decorators to plan the interior, and another of landscape architects to design a garden. The total cost was many hundreds of thousands of dollars, but while Willowlake, named for the dozens of willows planted around the lake, was being built both he and Margaret were gay as larks

Bill Sanger was dismayed, however. In February 1923 he had finally learned through Margaret's father, with whom he was staying in Truro, that Margaret had remarried, "and so respectably, too." He wrote her that he was astonished she had suggested he continue going to Truro under the circumstances, even though it was only to paint her father's picture. He would leave at once. More, he should like to be spared the embarrassment of further correspondence with her, adding that her father had given him "some detailed and illuminating knowledge about her" which he declined to discuss. As a result, he might even change his mind about her keeping his name, and for the first time he ended his letter formally "Good luck to you, Margaret William Sanger."

Bill seldom saw his sons after this, and when he did, he acted strangely. To celebrate the Thanksgiving of 1923 he invited Stuart and Grant to his studio for dinner, promising to meet them at Grand Central Station, but when they arrived he was nowhere in sight. Not knowing what else to do, they went into the vast waiting room and sat for hours waiting for him to fetch them. When he finally arrived, he took them to his Christopher Street studio where he announced that if they would wait some more, he would see if he could find a delicatessen that was open so he could buy them something to eat. They asked him if he couldn't warm the place first, as the studio was freezing. He said he was sorry but he had no wood for the fireplace, though he thought he knew where he could get hold of a little. Grabbing an axe, he cut down the flagpole from the roof of the building and chopped it up and threw it into the fireplace. Then he went out and came back with some potato salad and cold cuts. For the boys it was a bizarre holiday. Stuart decided that Bill "wasn't much of a father," and Grant didn't know what to think.

Meanwhile, Margaret finally announced her new marriage to the press, though she said she would continue to use the name of Sanger in

public, hyphenating her name to Sanger-Slee in the English manner in private life. In 1923, she moved her research clinic to its new home on Sixteenth Street. On the front door she installed a prominent brass plaque that proclaimed *The Margaret Sanger Clinical Research Bureau*.

Soon the place was a beehive of activity. Hundreds of women came each day to its open door. Dr. Bocker saw them all.

One thing that surprised Dr. Bocker was that fully a third of the women were Catholic, some blurting out stories of being so desperate over unwanted pregnancies they had considered suicide, holding back only because of the fear of hell. One twenty-one-year-old Irish girl told the heartrending story of how her husband had tried sleeping on the floor to avoid sexual temptation but it hadn't worked, she soon became pregnant with her fourth child. The child was delivered by cesarean section after she almost died during prolonged labor, yet though her doctor told her she should not have another child under any circumstances, he refused to tell her how to avoid another pregnancy. At confession her priest had said, "God should strike you dead for even thinking about such a thing." Finally, her husband had spoken to a nurse who told her to look up the Sanger Bureau in the phone book. That's how she had gotten there.

Other women told how they had heard about the Bureau through neighbors. A grapevine of whispered information was fast becoming the magical passport to knowledge of birth control.

In advising such women, Dr. Bocker considered she was rendering the finest service a doctor could. Yet she resigned when her two-year contract was up because Margaret bossed her much as she had the workmen remodeling the Bureau's new home—something almost no doctor will accept from a lay person. Indeed, just before Dr. Bocker quit she and Margaret had such a terrible fight she walked out with nearly a thousand records, falsifying some, though later she returned them and corrected the altered ones.

Margaret didn't particularly mind Dr. Bocker's leaving because she was trying to get the American Medical Association behind her. An unknown doctor from Georgia heading the Bureau would never attract top flight medical support. Besides, as Margaret kept saying, a battle always excited her, and the one with Dr. Bocker gave her a tremendous burst of energy. She used this to resolve the problem of finding a more acceptable doctor as well as to supervise the finishing of Willowlake.

And Willowlake was coming along fast. A handsome fieldstone carriage house, almost as large as the main building, was in the process of being built as a servants' quarters. A Japanese tea house was being constructed in one of an elaborate series of gardens, and a special tree house, nestled high among the willows and elms, was being built as a retreat for Margaret. As for servants, she still had old Daisy as her personal maid, and J. Noah was lining up an additional maid and butler for her, a valet and butler for himself, a chauffeur for his three cars, and several experienced gardeners. In any event, Margaret couldn't have fired Daisy even if she had wanted to. As Robert Parker tells it, Daisy liked her liquor, and when she'd had an extra glass or two, she would show a mean streak and taunt Margaret with "If you fire me I'll start talkin'. And don't forget, I know a lot. I'm the one who used to let Mr. Goldstein in."

To replace Dr. Bocker, Margaret found Dr. Hannah Stone. Dr. Stone was a handsome woman with dark hair tied in a simple bun, skin as clear as Margaret's, and a fine, firm figure, adding up to a commanding presence. She was also backed by her husband, Dr. Abraham Stone, a highly respected gynecologist and editor of the medical journal *Fertility and Infertility*. On top of all this, she was a woman of courage, willing to take on the Bureau even though it meant losing her connection with the Lying-In Hospital. The very fact that she had a husband and a child made her more accessible than the spinster Dr. Bocker. When she sat down and talked with a patient, saying things like, "How often do you have sex relations with your husband? Do you enjoy them? You should, you know," they were less embarrassed than before Dr. Bocker.

Dr. Stone also was courageous in another way. She hated to withhold birth-control information from anyone who asked for it. When she could find no accepted medical reason for fitting a woman with a diaphragm, she would pencil the letters NHR on the corner of her record. The letters stood for "no health reason." She was running a grave legal risk in doing this, but she did it just the same.

Hannah Stone never asked for or accepted a salary from the Bureau, a feat which Margaret endlessly boasted. But she got paid in other ways. After a while she worked at the Bureau mornings only, afternoons she was to be found at her private office on lower Fifth Avenue to which Margaret referred the women who could afford private care. Her fees weren't high—seldom over ten dollars—but again she lettered most cards NHR. Also, in collaboration with her husband, Hannah

Stone soon wrote *Marriage Manual*, the first, and in some ways the best, book on sex, reproduction, and birth control, a book so comprehensive and delicately phrased it is still selling. All in all, Margaret could hardly have found a better doctor to head her clinic.

Because of the combined demands of both getting the Bureau going and settling into Willowlake, Margaret had to skip her regular trip to England during the summer of 1923, a trip she sorely missed. But she continued to make news in England. Seventeen hundred copies of her *Family Limitation* pamphlets were seized by the police from a London bookshop, and even after so eminent a doctor as Sir Arbuthnot Lane appeared in her defense, they were destroyed.

Something else began to upset her. Hugh was writing her more and more about a new friend, Françoise.

Françoise is an absolute dear. Her little ridiculous boys are here for a fortnight getting brown and well. They are little pets. The first day, of course, the youngest fell plump into the pool with all his clothes on. Françoise grows more adorable as I know her better.

Françoise? Françoise who? All this talk was a bit too much. Margaret was used to having her pamphlets seized, but she would have to get over to England as soon as she could—to learn more about Françoise.