



ONE STAINCH SUPPORTER

Dr Robert Latou Dickinson was a peppery man with a triangular face, a pointed Van Dyke beard, and eyes as blue and bright as Havelock's. But he couldn't have been more different. Havelock was tall, Dickinson was small. Havelock was shy, Dickinson was bold. Havelock was cautious and old beyond his years, Dickinson was a vigorous man who jumped around on the lecture platform like a hurried grasshopper and took nature-hikes along the Palisades above the Hudson River for relaxation. (He insisted he had even been born in a hurry while his mother was on her way home to Brooklyn from New Jersey.) After studying medicine in Germany and Switzerland, he had become a doctor in 1882, just three years after Margaret was born, in the late 1920's he was still practicing, as well as holding down the prestigious posts of President of the American Gynecological Society, Director of the American College of Surgeons, and Senior Gynecologist and Obstetrician at Brooklyn Hospital.

Born of a well-to-do family, wealth was his natural milieu, yet he refused to think of his patients either as a source of money or as mere "cases." When his nurse would announce, "Doctor, your next case is ready," he would rebuke her with, "You mean that pleasant Mrs Miller with the auburn hair?" And to lessen his patients' embarrassment during a gynecological examination, he would hang pictures on the ceiling to distract them. He was also a skilled sculptor. To demonstrate

the differences between men and women, he sculpted two models which he called "Norma" and "Norman," complete with frank sexual details that shocked his colleagues. Indeed one reason he was made president of the Gynecological Society was to "kick him upstairs," where the conservatives thought he would become harmless. But he went on. Next he sculpted a series showing the progress of a baby as it traveled down the birth canal, the photographs of which became the high points of his *Birth Atlas*, still the chief attraction at classes in "natural" or educated childbirth. These sculptures earned him the title of the "Rodin of Obstetrics."

Above all, Dr. Dickinson was an enthusiastic champion of birth control. After he traveled to the Far East during World War I as assistant chief of the medical section of the National Council of Defense, he said "When the Far East becomes industrialized, its excessive population will be the greatest danger the world has ever known." He repeated this to everyone who would listen. But he was for birth control primarily because he saw it as a basic feminine right. Year after year at the annual AMA convention, he would ask for a corner in which to set up a birth-control demonstration. "Just a little corner?" he would plead. "Just a little one?" But year after year his colleagues turned him down, just as they had ignored Abraham Jacobi, AMA president, who had been at the very top of what doctors themselves call "the power structure," and had come out in favor of birth control many years before.

In 1921 the majority of doctors were still shutting their eyes and ears and hoping the whole subject of birth control would just go away, even though by now the law in many states allowed them to give contraceptive advice for four reasons—if a woman had heart trouble, kidney disease, tuberculosis, or gross malformation of her genitals—all of which made pregnancy dangerous for her to undertake. Some of them didn't even know they could give this advice, the rest insisted it was none of their business. If women didn't want babies, they said, let them practice continence or be sterilized. They reasoned that there were no tested, surefire contraceptive methods, and that tested methods of doing things alone separated science from quackery.

In all likelihood, there were other reasons for this medical indifference. One probably was that the vast percentage of doctors were male, and products of their time and class. When they dismissed the subject of birth control as "filthy and indecent," they were merely echoing the Victorian sentiments learned from their fathers. Men might do certain

things in private, but they certainly didn't talk about them in public. In public, they were models of decorum who wore severe, tight clothes and stiff, high collars to show they were upright gentlemen. If one occasionally sneaked upstairs to seduce the maid, at least he had the decency to do it in the dark.

Also, many doctors were extremely money-minded. "It takes at least half an hour to explain the different methods of birth control to a woman," one obstetrician put it, "and the most I can charge is around ten dollars. During the same half hour I can do a hysterectomy, or superintend a delivery and charge three hundred. Why should I change?" And many doctors simply went along with the economic theory that "all babies were potential consumers who would keep money in circulation," and that on general principles more of anything was better than less.

There were a few who thought differently. Dickinson was one. But he was in a spot. He knew as well as his colleagues that there were no proven contraceptives. As early as 1916, the very year that Margaret was opening her Brownsville clinic, he had handed out circulars to all the men who came to a meeting of the Gynecological Society, asking

What serious study has ever been made upon the harm or harmlessness of the variety of birth-control procedures, or concerning the failure or effectiveness of each? Who has or can acquire any considerable body of evidence on these matters but ourselves? What indeed is normal sex life? What constitutes excess, or what is the penalty for repression among the married? Do we still have to hark back to Luther for an answer? Some time a start must be made

Yet he didn't quite know how to make that start. Margaret and her cause seemed the only answer, and yet he hesitated lest he alienate his colleagues even more. For, while he admired Margaret as a woman of courage, he also saw her as a political radical and a patent-medicine barker, especially when she continued to claim that birth control would not only end poverty, disease, war and crime, but keep a woman forever young and beautiful, and her hair in curl.

Because he admired her, he had attended her 1921 Town Hall Conference. She promised him then that, as soon as possible, she would open "a first-class research center." But he had been sorely disappoint-

ed when she hired Dr Bocker as her director Bocker's records were ill-kept and uneven, and she had done practically no follow-up to see which of the methods her patients had chosen were helpful and which were not Unfortunately, Dr Stone was no better at research and record-keeping than Dr Bocker

So in 1925 he came to the conclusion he would have to open a study center himself "We all know that contraceptives are being used," he kept repeating at gynecological meetings "The question is, are they harmful? Are they harmless? Do you know? I don't know" He determined to find the answers quietly, experimentally, scientifically His colleagues had a choice They could either back him or let him join some Sanger group

The words "Sanger group" did it His colleagues agreed to help He gave his study center the innocuous name of the Committee on Maternal Health, and said he hoped it might eventually proceed to open its own clinic

But where could he open his study center? Because he had promised he would do it quietly, the only place seemed to be his upstairs office at the Academy of Medicine at 4 East 103 Street, New York, a tiny room which had been given him for use as president of the Obstetrical Society It would be merely a referral center, moreover Women would come there for a preliminary interview, then be referred to one of seven hospitals which had promised to cooperate with him and his committee on the strength of his prestige The hospitals would give the necessary examinations to see if contraceptives could be legally given, keep the records, and hand out the supplies

His plan proved too timid to work Though he passed the word around through his patients that his center was open, the very women who needed it most—poor women, workingwomen—were overwhelmed by the vast halls and formal atmosphere of the Academy of Medicine building They were equally turned off by the impersonal hospitals where they had to sit for hours on hard benches waiting for their names to be called And when their turn came, they were upset because the information was whispered to them by embarrassed interns To add to this, they found more often than not that there weren't enough birth-control supplies to go around The best that could be offered were condoms which they had to persuade their husbands to wear, or spermicidal jellies, or douche ingredients—all of which the doctors doled out like conspirators One intern even confessed he felt

he had to slip the women what supplies he had in an alleyway next to the hospital rather than within its own walls. Diaphragms, the device Margaret had promoted most vigorously in her pamphlets, were usually unavailable because they had been cornered by the lady herself.

Dickinson was therefore in a bind. He had endeavored to sow a few seeds of independent research, yet he had been unable to do it. When he admitted this to his fellow academicians, his hard-won Committee on Maternal Health drifted apart, and the women went back to Margaret's clinic, where they at least felt at home.

Margaret was in a bind too, she knew that to gain the respect of the medical community, her clinic needed a dispensary license. This license, granted by the State Board of Charities, simply permitted a clinic to dispense information. Every state requires one, and there are three standard requirements: proof of public need, proof of the good character of the people behind it, and proof of enough funds to carry on. In the case of the Sanger Bureau, the New York State Board acknowledged that these three requirements had been met. But unexpectedly, they came up with a fourth requirement—a waiver from "certain religious groups." Many religious groups gave this waiver without hesitation. The Roman Catholics would not, and months of negotiations could not make them budge. The license was withheld.

This was less because the members of the state board were unfriendly than because they were afraid of public opinion. One observer, though convinced that the Bureau's getting a license was an impossibility, had the impression that the state board members would really welcome a way out of the situation. If, for example, a Dickinson group took over the Bureau, they would let it operate without a license, as did 125 of the 350-odd other New York City clinics.

Dickinson was undaunted, he tried to form a new study group called by the slightly different name, the Maternity Research Council, which he hoped would be able to persuade Margaret to cooperate. He cajoled three doctors into visiting the Bureau personally, among them, the Catholic gynecologist George Kosmak. But Dr. Kosmak was shocked by the lurid propaganda posters showing the horrors of abortion. Doctors, he said, did not use such posters for any reason. Further, when he discovered what poor records the clinic kept, he stormed out, claiming "The whole Sanger research thing is a sham. It's both a violation of the law and a public menace."

When Margaret promised to take down the abortion posters, Kos-

mak was somewhat placated. He even admitted that maybe doctors should join her, but only if she could get a dispensary license. She agreed: "I can see the good a license will establish. I can see the fight practically won by such an achievement."

Kosmak now went further. He said that if Margaret would let his group take over the Bureau entirely under his direction, he would be willing to go along with a full heart. Surprisingly, she agreed again.

Dickinson was delighted, especially when the Academy of Medicine got the Rockefeller-backed Bureau of Social Hygiene to give the Maternity Research Council a ten-thousand-dollar grant. He applied immediately for the elusive license. To his chagrin, he was once more refused. This time the excuse was that his Research Council should either join Margaret's Bureau or start its own clinic before a license was granted, though privately a member admitted, "The board is too much afraid that any license will be widely exploited as a victory for Margaret Sanger."

There it was again. Dickinson could get nowhere if he associated with Margaret. His colleagues would not do anything without the license. Dickinson's short-lived delight turned to disgust, he even found himself being publicly censured by some of his own medical societies. Instead of quitting, however, he began to think of another strategy.

Margaret meanwhile continued working. She recognized the need to legitimize the Bureau and appointed a distinguished advisory board made up mainly of social scientists and eugenicists. But soon the board members were openly fighting with Dickinson and his colleagues. They wanted to use the Bureau records to do their own kind of research, they argued that "medical men have no right to take over a field that has been tilled for them by others." The Bureau at this point had become a political football, with the social scientists determined to win the day.

Undaunted, Dickinson pursued his original goal. He came up with what he called an "interim plan," which called for doctors to take over the Bureau immediately, on the premise that this would somehow gain the coveted dispensary license. For though he had begun privately to despair of getting that license, he thought that once doctors were in charge, it would be too late for them to drop out. It was a shrewd plan, but at the last minute Margaret did a turn around and blackballed it. She came up with an interim plan of her own which would admit a few

doctors to the board, but keep the social scientists in command. When she sent Dickinson a letter outlining her plan he was so furious he left it unanswered on his desk.

Margaret continued. To please her board she revamped her patient records to include information like nationality, heredity, religion, occupation, even trade-union affiliation. When the public health doctor Ira S. Wile heard about this and told her that this mixing of medical and social matters didn't make sense, Margaret ignored him. And, of course, she left everybody up in the air when she went to Europe in 1927 to stage her Geneva conference, and stayed away for eighteen months.

When she came back in the fall of 1928 and resigned from the ABCL, Dickinson was waiting for her. As she had separated herself from the ABCL, he thought she would be more pliable. He told her that he had really pulled off a coup, he had gotten the prestigious New York Hospital to promise to cooperate with him. Also, on his urging, more doctors had joined her Bureau board while she was away, and all were jubilant at the thought of working with the New York Hospital. But again Bureau board politics came into play. At a hastily called meeting, the social scientists outvoted the medical members, they would not cooperate with any hospital at all.

Margaret was in the midst of writing a letter to Dickinson telling him this when Grant had a bad motorcycle accident that made her think only of family affairs.

As soon as Grant recovered, she wrote Hugh that she was "off on a motor-trip to Quebec and Montreal with my two handsome sons," adding "I can see that devil of a fellow Harold at the wheel—bless him. He can go as fast as likes when he takes me for a drive—tell him that. He never writes to me & has forgotten that I ever walked around the sunken garden with him once upon a time."

By the end of August she was back at Willowlake, energetic enough to plan a new series of lectures. She had heard from Françoise that Hugh had been ill, and wrote on September first commiserating with him, and hoping he had behaved better than she did when she was sick. "I am positively horrible to everyone who comes near me, so it behooves me to keep well or I shall be sent to a pest house."

She also told Hugh she was planning another surprise for Havelock. When Françoise moved into the small Brixton flat Havelock had kept all these years, there was enough space for her in the room he used to

keep for Edith, but not for her boys, so they had taken a larger flat in Herne Hill, on the outskirts of London. But Margaret wanted them to have a country home as well, a place where Havelock could have a garden to sun himself in, as well as build a special three-sided writing hut that revolved to catch the fugitive English light.

In September she wrote

So if ever you hear of his finding the kind of country house he likes, send me a S O S , and I will take an inventory of my wares in bankery and I will let you do the rest. You're such a wizard at manipulating the wires of good will & loveliness that I know you will arrange this too some day.

Hugh started looking for another house for Françoise and Havelock at once. Margaret thanked him in an outburst of love: "I want to hug your dear head and kiss your blessed eyes and laugh with you and romp for very joy that you are so dear."

But almost immediately she became depressed. Her September birthday had arrived, reminding her of what she hated most to remember—her age, now forty-nine. Her beauty was going, her chin was beginning to sag, and crow's feet were forming around her eyes.

To cheer up, she took a solitary cruise to the Caribbean, but she didn't stop working. She wrote a new series of speeches for a December lecture tour in California, new arguments were needed because her audience had greatly changed over the years. No longer was she speaking to the radicals and the poor, urging them to stop breeding both to lessen their own misery and to "frighten the capitalist class." Now in 1928 she was speaking primarily to that very capitalist class, urging them to stop breeding themselves and to try to restrain the lower class, because the lower class bred the "unfit." She defined the unfit as "the retarded, the feeble-minded and the insane," adding "illiterates, unemployables, paupers, criminals, prostitutes and dope fiends," pointing out that the fit had to support the unfit. The theme she tried to hammer home was that the unfit should be segregated or sterilized if they refused to practice birth control.

Emma Goldman's biographer accused Margaret of deserting her radical friends. In a sense she did. But by 1928 she felt she had to use the kind of lectures that would curry favor with people of wealth, those who could donate the much-needed cash to her cause as well as supply the expertise they had learned in their long battle for woman suffrage.

By now Margaret was determined to become an adroit politician. And she knew that her middle- and upper-class audience would be as much taken by her political know-how as by her fame, charisma, and fervor.

She was right. On one occasion in 1928, the manager of a lecture hall in Hartford, Connecticut, tried to back out of his contract with her at the last minute on the familiar plea that if he let her speak his license would be revoked. She sued him and won, seeing to it that the papers got all the details. The result was that when she did get to speak, her upper-class audience was excited to fever pitch, and applauded loud and long before she uttered a word.

Her new speeches roughed out, Margaret began to rethink her offer to buy Havelock a country home. Would he accept her gift with the same eagerness with which she wanted to give it? She wrote Hugh on November 16: "I know the darling man is terrified of getting into deep water. He is happy when he feels he is not living up to his income, and God forbid we should push something onto him even from generosity." She also told him that her book *Motherhood in Bondage* was finally on the market, "only they left out a picture I wanted on the frontispiece of a pregnant woman facing death. Now they will hear from me, and catch hell too!"

J. Noah was catching hell too. When Margaret started on her lecture tour, she shot off a letter to him from the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco berating him for not having written her for several days. She went on to insist that he stop telling her private affairs to the birth-control people back home. "I am afraid you are a *stieve*! Everything goes through you." Then she did a quick turnabout and finished in her most soothing manner: "Devotedly and lovingly, adorable one. Your wife and sweetheart, Margy."

Margaret's increasingly extreme mood swings may have been due to the fact that she was still going through her menopause. Especially high-strung women like her sometimes react strongly to it—often fearing the loss of love. When she complained, "Too bad Harold never fell in love with me," she was expressing the fear that she might lose his love, not that she never had it. Also, without hormone replacements or tranquilizers to temper her menopausal reactions, she had become open to every crank diet suggestion and every cult leader's far-fetched promises.

She would swing especially high in 1929 when two incredible blunders played into her hands.