



HUMBLE PIE

In 1931 Margaret was campaigning for passage of her "doctor's only" bill, though she was getting nowhere She wrote Havelock

The bill was introduced in the House & we are now waiting to get the date of a hearing & then to push it to the Senate So I'm just dizzy Then the Women are giving me a medal on the twentieth—which means a speech & oh I'd rather they kept the medal than to go through the ordeal of it all!

The medal was a Medal of Honor from the American Women's Association, bearing the citation

for integrity, valor and honor for fighting her battle single-handed, a pioneer of pioneers She has opened the door of knowledge and given light, freedom and happiness to thousands caught in the tragic meshes of ignorance She is remaking the world

In September 1931, the *Corning Leader* printed a front page story about the medal, using her picture It was the first time they had ever mentioned her, and she wrote across the clipping, "A hero in my home town at last!"

In her letter to Havelock she indicated that she and J Noah were finally beginning to feel the sting of the Depression

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Our conditions re finances seem to be getting into nothing Every day that Congress acts the stock market goes down Stuart said yesterday that if Congress passes certain bills the Stock Exchange may close down for six months Any way it's a lively time to be living My habits need drastic changing, I realize now, but I'm not afraid of the simple life—I really never got very far away from it in my *very own way* What hurts us both most of all is that we cannot do the little things for others which gave us such real happiness My own were very few & small, but J N had hundreds of ministers on his pension list Now he can't carry even one & it breaks him up to even think about it You & Françoise have been absolute darlings If you can get along over August, (without my help) it may be that toward the end of the year my affairs too will pick up & I'll be ready to help push things again then It's so wonderful to have you well & to have "Secretary" helping & working beside you I should die (really) if we could not *continue* to have *her continue* to radiate her love & joy beside you

Next she wrote Grant at the university from her elegant New York apartment at 45 Park Avenue "I am through lecturing for the season and feel like going on a bat The opera or a silly play or something grand " When he answered that he had caught cold, she became motherly "Do take care of your throat and keep dry and rested Don't get overtired for a month at least

"Stay in bed till noon

"Sleep all day Sunday

"See a doctor about your eyes, your nose, your bowels, your teeth "

She also addressed him in terms like "Dearest Granty Boy," "Beloved Granty Boy," or "Beloved Sonny Boy," and signed her letters "With all our love, dearest of dears " When she found an old purse with some money in it during housecleaning at Willowlake, she sent it on to him with "I know you can use it joyfully " Yet Grant kept chiding her for not coming to Princeton except for football games, though when he went abroad at the end of the summer his letters were tender He tried to sound carefree, calling her "old girl," and signing off "with a big hug and a squeeze "

Margaret spent the summer at Willowlake, carefree herself, swimming in the tree-shaded water, riding horseback, and giving lawn parties. When Havelock sent her a copy of his latest book *More Essays of Love and Virtue*, she answered that she would take it along on a short trip to the White Mountains.

I have so much reading to do to catch up that I decided to go away on a "reading vacation." The Nation's affairs are still a worry and unless things pick up soon there will be much suffering this winter. This brings me to our own special subject about the Secretary (Bless her). It may be that I cannot or shall not be able to send the full amount of \$1500 a year in the future. I can send \$1000 a year or \$500 semi-annually. Do you think you can add to that & keep her on fulltime? I'm terribly distressed over this—as I promised to do it as long as you live. Our July income is not enough to keep us going & J. N. borrows on life insurance to get by.

Margaret tried to keep up with other obligations as well. Her check-book stubs for 1931 show she was still sending money regularly to her brother Joe, to Ethel and Nan. She lists gifts to such diverse charities as the Porto Rico (her spelling) Child Feeding Committee, to a Dr. Pepsard for "treatment for a friend's deaf child," to the defense fund of Tom Mooney, to Norman Thomas for "Art Young's illness," and to Tillie because "L. R. left her flat." She also wasn't satisfied with the work Rackham Holt was doing on her autobiography, so she added a co-writer, Roma Brasher, and paid Robert Parker for proofreading. Also for international birth-control work she sent regular contributions to Agnes Smedley in Berlin, to Gerda Ibsen at the Hamburg Clinic, and to an unidentified woman in Shanghai, in amounts ranging from ten dollars to several hundred. There was a two-hundred-fifty-dollar check to a Tom Hall for "a special pep conference for the Federal Committee." It mounted up.

What she needed most was someone to raise a large sum for birth control. Quickly. Since H. G. Wells was in town, she hit on the idea of giving a dinner in the grand ballroom of the new Waldorf Astoria. Because Wells' voice was high and thin, she had to hide a microphone under each table to amplify his speech, a new technique at the time. Wells was pleased by the reception committee she gathered from New

York's finest literary, artistic, and financial circles From the literary world, she got Theodore Dreiser, George Jean Nathan, Hendrik Willem Van Loon, Herbert Bayard Swope, Alexander Woollcott, and Louis Untermeyer, from the world of finance, Henry Morgenthau, Jr and Adolf Lewisohn, from the socialites Mrs Thomas Lamont, Mrs Otto H Kahn, and Kermit Roosevelt The famous educator, John Dewey, presided At ten dollars a plate the dinner raised five thousand dollars, a stupendous amount during the Depression "We made money for our cause with a very plain dinner and high thinking," she wrote Havelock on November 28 from her Washington home on Wyoming Avenue "Only I was over-anxious that what Wells kept saying to me (in my ear) was not being heard at the back of the room "

Unfortunately, the hugely successful dinner was soon overshadowed by a sharp setback Margaret's autobiography, *My Fight for Birth Control*, had finally come out (a second, called *An Autobiography*, also written by Miss Holt and a Warren Austin, was published seven years later), and the reviewers jumped upon her, saying it had "the flavor of a hagiography, or life of a Saint " It told of her own accomplishments only, giving no credit to the hundreds of dedicated men and women who had helped

Hugh took particular objection to her rough treatment of Marie Stopes and her falseness about her marriage She answered him with a mixture of defiance and contrition

Beloved Hugh If "joy & pain are woven fire" in the book, then you have successfully set sparks of that into your letter

Now Hugh dear—just be fair, read again those pages about Stopes & see if I was saying "I've done the whole thing " No one else so far has failed to get what I said & what I meant, that her success in the B C movement was due to the work of Havelock & the Drysdals & those who labored for those ideas long before she or I came on the horizon at all Ye gods, Hugh, but you are jumpy! Havelock says of the book "It fills me with admiration for the skill & judgment with which you have dealt with difficult situations & troublesome people & the forbearance with which you have left things out " From every side both here & in England came remarks about the way I have set the truth & facts out, *relentlessly* perhaps but as I knew them & felt them I feel no sense of guilt at all about Stopes because I never disliked her in my

heart as I did & do Dennett There you are doubtless right & I shall go over every word again & change it for the second edition which is being prepared now (if I see it as you say it is)

And now I come to my But, but before I reply to that I'll run down stairs & get that book & read those pages again

When she returned from downstairs, she went on with her letter, switching from the subject of Stopes and Dennett to his jibes about what she had put in, left out, or falsified about her marriages She had described her second husband as a "widower with three grown children who was head of a well-known business," said that she had married him "so she could educate her two boys in good schools, and had praised him for his quick intuition, unerring judgement of character, plus his kindness, radiant personality and heart of a child But he was given no credit for his birth-control work or even the dignity of a name

Bill Sanger fared little better His name was mentioned, yet he was described only as the "artist-husband whom she left in Paris and sailed away from with her children little knowing we were never to be reunited again" Giving no dates or places, she then finished the subject abruptly "We were shortly separated, then quietly divorced"

She tried to justify this vagueness to Hugh

There is always a public side to every individual, the side one allows the public to see Common decency aims to make that side inoffensive to others It's like the drawing room of a well ordered home We don't usher the public into our bedrooms Nor should a woman or man (in my humble opinion) throw open the door of a very intimate sanctuary to the public I know you do not agree in this, you have greater courage because you are a greater writer and know how to say intimate things like a poet I have never had that kind of courage darling Hugh Hate me, despise me as you may, it is the truth I shall never outgrow it

There is no lie to any caress or kiss I have ever given *Ever!* That is one of the integrities of the heart & why I say we stagger before our own complexities, when we have that integrity No use in my trying to tell you all this No man except Havelock can ever know it But that he does know it & sees it in women is why he understands so much of love & its vagaries

And now beloved Hugh I weep, I weep because the Ocean is between us & I can not stretch my arms & gather your blessed head into my lap & laugh at you & with you & at me for ever writing a book at all Margaret, with feet of clay!"

The chief fault of the book, however, was her insistence on the fact that she had been a registered or trained nurse. She had been accepted, she said, as a "probationer at a hospital in Westchester," where "the work was trying because of the long hours. But these years of training now seem a period that tested character, integrity, patience, and endurance." There had of course been no "years of training," only a few months. Still, she hammered home the point of "years" by describing a vivid fantasied scene in "a New York hospital where I was taking a post-graduate course," a scene that implied she had graduated from White Plains. But a careful check by the White Plains Hospital found no record of her ever entering their nursing school, much less graduating from it and being traditionally "capped." And the unnamed New York Hospital (actually The Manhattan Eye and Ear) found no record of her ever being there at all. At most, they say, she could have worked occasionally as a nurse's aid, but so many thousands of these come and go that no records are kept.

To add to all this, there was the exaggeration of calling the high-school-level boarding school she had attended by its more prestigious name, Claverack College, and her statement that in 1916 "someone else" had been arrested for distributing birth-control pamphlets, without mentioning that the person was Emma Goldman. And of course there was the dramatic story of her fleeing the country after the *Woman Rebel* indictment without a passport.

All of this threw the reliable parts of her book out of focus. In her defense it can be said that she was so beset by the Church, the doctors, and an indifferent or hostile public, that she had to give herself some kind of standing. If the medical profession would not listen to her because she was a "mere nurse," how much more fiercely would they have opposed her had they discovered she was not a nurse at all? And wouldn't her old anarchist friends have felt betrayed had she revealed that they had prepared her a forged passport when she had to flee?

Yet many people like Harold read her book without questioning a word. "It has completely engrossed me," he wrote. "You are the greatest woman I have ever known."

Still, Hugh's criticism hurt her, she tried to justify herself to Havlock instead

The book is going fairly well considering the slump in all books at this time, but it's fascinating to read the letters I get by the hundreds. People say they had no idea of the battle & the early history

Then of course there are the few would-be pioneers like Wm J Robinson who whines to his friends & gets them to write that I did not do justice to him & to his work as a pioneer etc

Wait until Marie Stopes reads that I was awarded the Medal for up-de-up-um things like "vision, integrity & valor" by the American Woman's Association. Now that should make her love me more than ever

Like a dog worrying a bone, she couldn't let the matter of her two marriages rest either

Hugh sent me into the depths of blues for a week. He said I was egotistical in regard to Dennett & Stopes, & cheap & false in regard to my marriage—(which marriage he did not say). Oh it was a dreadful letter he wrote me, heart breaking because he failed to know the *ME* who wrote the book.

Perhaps any treatment of Stopes was not as finished & noble as some one else could have done it, but what I said was true & *considering* the facts as you & I know them, she was not treated too badly.

Well his was the only letter that hurt. I did want him to run with me through every page but he refused to do it. Ever my love
Ever

In November she tried to make up to Hugh, addressing him in a letter by the name he loved most

Hey there Poet. You are actually getting into the Americans' stride. Lectures, books, writeups, reviews, God knows what! That's the drive & push I hate to think of you in, but it's what one must endure when popular or successful—yes? "Six lectures on Poetry." That's simply lovely, *do do do*. J. Noah has an office

down stairs & works like a slave on all the finances & bookkeeping of the b c doings We have closed our house in Willowlake The most heart-breaking thing was leaving my dogs

At this point a new note crept in "I had a letter from Havelock saying he had heard from his translator that you had been in Germany! Was surprised—so was I Is it true?"

Then she went back to his jabbing at her book, a subject she simply couldn't let go

There is something sterling & golden in that quality of you Hugh adorable one, to want the real Margaret to show herself I know that's what your letter meant You *do* believe that I had in my heart a bigger quality than I expressed in the book God knows if that is so or not I want you to believe it so But I am growing Only, if one wants (not) to pretend one is better or saintlier than they really are, then we should not write books "Ah that mine enemy would write a book" someone said & it's true that writing, like speaking in public, exposes the stark nakedness of our souls

She ended pleading "My arms can't reach up to your neck, so bend a bit & hug me tight, *tight, tight* "

Soon she was consoled by the fact that things were picking up in other directions Dickinson was becoming distinctly friendlier He had just written a scientific study called *A Thousand Marriages*, a book signed jointly with Lura Beam, and on September 19, he sent Margaret this charming note

Your note of yesterday asks us to send you a copy of our book, now in press Send you a copy? Almost the first one ought to go to you Do you know what I would do if my committee would sanction it?—only they won't—that is dedicate it to you Yours, more so than you are ever ready to believe

Margaret laughingly pooh-poohed his idea of dedicating his book to her "You forget, dear man, that M S is not 'scientific' or 'learned' or 'college-trained,' etc , etc to deserve such an honor " Still, his letter gave her a much-needed lift