



A NEAR SUCCESS AND MANY FAILURES

Her congressional battle seemed to be successful at last. Margaret had grown increasingly adroit in her political maneuvers, she heeded her lawyer's advice to modify the "doctor's bill" to make it more acceptable to states with anti-contraception laws. When the bill came up before the Senate again in 1934, it seemed to have a good chance of being passed.

To help matters along, she mailed out hundreds of copies of her autobiography to selected people like governors' wives. She also scheduled one of her biggest conferences, on "Birth Control and National Recovery," for the very days the Senate hearings were being held and got hundreds of delegates to come from all over the country, insisting they make personal calls on their congressmen to argue in favor of birth control. "We sometimes felt we had a bit of a tyrant over us," Ida Timme commented. "But a tyrant we want to serve until she leads us to victory, and we all know that Margaret Sanger, only Margaret Sanger, can lead us to victory."

For the first time Congress was impressed by her economic arguments that the cost of relief was enormous, and that the Depression would not be solved by an endless stream of consumers. She saw to it that congressmen were handed copies of letters like these:

My husband has no job. He has been all over looking for work.

He walked twenty miles the other day for the third time to the county seat to try for a WPA job, but he had no luck

We live in a small attic room It's crowded, but we cook here, sleep and everything I've pinched pennies until I'm desperate There's only 25 cents left What if I should become pregnant again?

As a result, the Senate Judiciary Committee reported the bill out of committee for a hearing, and it was passed But its success was short-lived A few minutes after the vote was taken Senator Pat McCarran, a man in the dubious position of being a well-known Reno divorce lawyer as well as a prominent Catholic, emerged from the cloakroom, and demanded that the vote be recalled It was recalled, and he cast the deciding "nay "

It was the bill's death Though Margaret and her followers would try again, they would never be able to get it out of committee Their seven years of work and hundreds of thousands of dollars had come to nothing

Hazel Moore sensed this, and when Senator McCarran passed her on his way out of the Senate she exploded, accosting the sergeant-at-arms As she told the story later

"Sergeant, arrest this man," I said "What are the charges?" asked the sergeant "Murder of thousands of women," said I McCarran laughed and said, "I had to object to this bill because I do not believe in murder " To which I answered "Are you accusing us who are backing this bill of being in favor of murder?" "That's what it is," said McCarran I then said to the sergeant, "Arrest him for libel," and started on a tirade about an intelligent man making such a statement showing he didn't understand the bill (and probably a lot of other things)

Margaret reacted to the defeat in her own way and described it to Havelock

I left Washington and took a boat for Nassau and drank champagne When I could, I laughed long and much at nothing at all, swam, sat in the sun, and forgot the stupidity of man and loved

anew the beauties of God J N was furious (because I came back in debt) but I did not care

Now she decided to take her long contemplated trip to Russia, going the only possible way—with an In-Tourist group She had wavered over going to Russia for years, disheartened by the disillusionment of Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, and Bill Haywood, but cheered on by the enthusiasm of John Reed, who had written the momentous *Ten Days That Shook the World* The decisive factor was the news that birth control had become official policy there She would go and see for herself

She left on July 3, 1935, taking along Florence Rose and Grant who jumped at the chance to go anywhere with his mother J Noah declined to go because he was busy trying to rent or sell Willowlake Besides, he was seventy-seven and not up to the trip If he went anywhere at all, he said, it would be back to South Africa to see the town where he had been born

Margaret dissuaded him from taking the South African trip

Don't mention South Africa—you would not be happier than you are here I wonder if *any where or any place* can give you happiness God knows I've tried far harder than anything I've ever had to do and have not succeeded You'd better stick to (Margaret) and be happy to have her when you can get her

At the last minute, she almost canceled out herself Her arthritis was so bad she had one leg in a cast, and the other was very painful Still, she went

Margaret found Russia cold even in summer Worse, she discovered that birth was controlled there mainly by legal abortion rather than prevention Since the state needed a large, immediate labor force and pregnancy kept women at home, any woman could get an abortion as long as she was no more than three months pregnant and could pay the fee of roughly two and a half dollars One woman told of having eight abortions in a few months under this plan

Also, there were very few birth-control clinics, and these had diaphragms that were so dried out and old as to be practically useless, while anti-spermicidal jellies were in very short supply While some hospitals were clean, others were filthy "I never saw an O R with fly-paper before," she exclaimed

She enjoyed the Kremlin, however, which she described as a "fairy tale museum," and she visited an old anarchist friend, remarking incredulously, "After seventeen years in Russia, he still remains an Anarchist!"

Soon she had a bad attack of vomiting and diarrhea she called "Mal de Russe." This was followed by a siege of violent headaches, probably due to her disappointment in not being treated as she had expected, as the world authority on birth control. When she got to Paris and the headaches disappeared, she summed up her impressions of the visit to Havelock

The (Russian) government treats you as a crook, spy & liar from the moment you enter their damn country. They rob you white while you are there & expect you to carry off pleasant memories of your visit. They will soon learn that we won't take this kind of treatment & start treating foreigners with some respect.

Grant and Florence Rose left for home direct from Russia, but Margaret went on to Naples, hoping that J. Noah would meet her there and go with her to Marienbad where they could both take cures. Suddenly, however, she heard that Stuart was ill. After many operations on his eye, it was again leaking infected matter, and his doctor had suggested a more radical operation. Margaret rushed home and countermanded the doctor's orders, taking Stuart to a pink adobe house in Tucson and putting him on a regimen of her own choosing—a three week fast which she was sure would purify his system without medical help. Desperate enough to try anything, Stuart agreed. She tried to fast with him but had to give it up after a few days, though he stuck it out, and for a short time the infection did clear up. But in no time it was back, and she had to admit she had failed. On this second visit, though, the hot, dry climate appealed to her so much, that she and J. Noah began to consider making Tucson their permanent home.

But she was still restless. If Russia hadn't worked out, maybe India would. The first all-India Woman's Congress was soon to meet, and she had been invited to speak by a leading delegate, the Maharani of Barodes. She was sure she would be able to start an active Indian birth-control program as a result.

She set sail for India from New York in October 1935. Before she left, she tried to improve her relationship with J. Noah, which had gotten to a crisis stage. Each promised to try to cut down on the scolding

and bickering that went on almost constantly between them, for a while it worked "It has been a very happy summer since you got a few ideas of harmony into your dear head and carried them out to everyone," she wrote him just before sailing "Consequently everyone says 'how dear J Noah has grown' He always was dear but never expressed it to others, I say "

Yet he was not even up to the trip from Tucson to New York to see her off, though faithful Angus was there, as well as a group of friends who gave her such a gay farewell party that she sent J Noah a note telling him it was almost like a first trip abroad "All those old friends and then forty-five packages of books, flowers, dates, figs, toilet articles, your fruit Juliet gave me \$100 to buy myself something, and Nan gave me a lovely notebook for my story with my initials in gold " The party was so exciting and crowded, indeed, that Angus could hardly get near her Instead, he wrote her a note that reached her in France

Glorious Margaret Even the brief glimpse of you on the crowded ship had a powerful effect It has never been the same with anyone else in my life and I would not trade the few hours I have had with you for any other years Such a feeling of companionship is wonderful and precious—but there has been such scant opportunity to exercise it

But one must not begrudge the price to pay to have for a friend the greatest woman in the world and the most interesting and deliciously charming

Angus had finally gotten his divorce, and was about to marry "a sweet woman with a rare independence and bravery who will help make me a longed-for new home " He wished Margaret luck in all things

But luck had deserted Margaret for a while Her speech before the Indian Congress was a near fiasco, its president, Lady Aberdeen, a recent convert to Catholicism, gave orders to the Maharani forbidding Margaret to speak at all and insisted that if she did, the Catholic Irish, Belgian, and Roumanian delegates would walk out It was the old story The best the Maharani could do was to call a special meeting of people who wanted to hear Margaret

Her visit with Gandhi turned out to be no better After a long hot

journey she arrived at his home on his weekly day of silence, laid down her gift of flowers, took both his hands and observed that "he has an unusual light in his face that shines through the flesh, that circles around his head and neck like a mist. When I looked again it was not only the shiny appearance of his flesh that I saw but always the smile and a hospitable welcome."

Welcome or not, she soon found he was unalterably opposed to birth control. Indeed, according to Arthur Koestler, he was opposed to sexual relations altogether, preaching that wives should resist their husbands by force if necessary. Though only thirty-seven, he himself had taken a vow of chastity for life.

Gandhi claimed that he was "a slave of passion when my sons were conceived." Sex was "an expression of man's 'carnal lust or animal passion,' while women were its victim." He permitted sex for others only for procreation. Even then, abstinence was more holy.

Margaret was thrown off completely. He wouldn't even listen to her on birth control, much less change his mind. She spoke about the Indian population explosion that was so great it was leading to catastrophe, pleading "There are thousands, millions, who regard your word as that of a saint. Tell them this. They will listen to you." But it was to deaf ears. Throughout their conversation, she noted "he held to an idea or a train of thought of his own, and, as soon as you stopped, continued it as though he had not heard you."

Margaret posed for a picture with Gandhi proving that at least she had met him. Then, very tired, she set out on another long hot journey to see the almost as famous Rabindranath Tagore. With Tagore she fared little better. He was in favor of birth control, he said politely, and he hoped she would do something to have it gain greater acceptance. But he was too busy running a school of art and culture to do anything himself.

The best she could do was to get a few doctors to listen to her and start a small birth-control movement in India. "I gave demonstrations (of technique) in my room, in my dressing room, in my car," she wrote J. Noah, "and then was the guest at so many extravagant state dinners and celebrations that whole processions of people came to see me off. I have been keyed up like an electric battery."

Yet still another disappointment was in store. After a third journey halfway across the country, she finally reached one of the fabled Wise Men who for years she had hoped would teach her secrets of eternal

life, happiness, and beauty But no matter how many pleading looks she gave him, he sat silent and told her nothing

Between the intense heat, the highly spiced food, the high hopes followed by bitter disappointments, Margaret reacted in her customary way, she got ill After pushing on to Burma, Malaya, and Hong Kong, she spent two weeks in Hong Kong's Memorial Hospital suffering from an excruciating gall bladder attack But she had eight lectures scheduled for Honolulu on her way home and gave them regardless

By the time she got home, she had been separated from J Noah for six months Sexually eager as ever, he had planned to meet her in San Francisco but an odd letter made him change his mind

I have changed It's some physical and spiritual change, but I feel that the door of *sex-life* is closed for me It may be a shock to you to hear this, but I have a queer feeling about this and prefer to keep it closed It is something that cannot be helped and it's suicide to violate so sacred a feeling

It may be that you, too, have no interest in such activities and if so there will be no problem between us, but if you are still interested, then God help us to solve our difficulties

Her meeting with Gandhi may have set her to thinking that part of his great power might lie in his celibacy If so, she would try celibacy

But she still enjoyed sex too much to remain celibate long She never mentioned the subject again, and later sent Havelock a letter marked "confidential" that expressed a quite different point of view