

NEW SKIRMISHES

I REMEMBER almost innumerable instances of crude and usually unsuccessful attempts to silence me in those days hotels boycotted by such organizations as the Knights of Columbus because the managers have purveyed luncheons to birth control advocates, halls, contracted and paid for, barred at the last minute on account of Catholic Church pressure brought to bear upon their owners, permits to hold meetings withdrawn by mayors or other officials in cities having powerful Roman Catholic constituency. Priests denounced me in churches and warned those who came to hear me of hell fire and the Devil! Few politicians, though they have sworn to uphold the Constitution, dare jeopardize their future as office holders by incurring the displeasure of the clerical authorities who often control the vote of their adherents.

Papers would not take articles stating the facts. News was what they wanted—news, fights, police, controversy, arrests. Only in this way could my voice reach the millions. Innocently my enemies helped to make this possible.

In Milwaukee, Mayor Hoane was approached by the Catholic Women's Marquette League with an angry request to stop a meeting at which I was to speak. Mayor Hoane's reply was "I believe in freedom of speech, freedom of press, and religious liberty. You have no right to censor this woman because you do not agree with her."

At Hagerstown, Maryland, a group of women tried to engage a meeting hall for me. Everywhere they were indignantly refused. In desperation, they at last secured a dance hall without chairs, and they rented the chairs from a neighboring undertaker who, when he learned that the chairs were to be used at a meeting where I was to speak, exclaimed reluctantly, "My chairs for that Sanger woman?" The owner of the dance hall promptly—and to me amusingly—defended me by saying, "She's not a woman, Mr.—, she's a lady." Cartoons had pictured me in a plane delivering a lecture from the air. There was an overflow crowd at the Hagerstown meeting.

Rabbi Mischkind, of Tremont Temple, New York, invited me to speak in his temple one Sunday morning. He was rebuked by his trustees, who forbade the meeting to be held. Rabbi Mischkind resigned from the Temple, and found another synagogue for my message at the same time.

In Cincinnati, Ohio, a birth control conference was to be held at a hotel, but the Knights of Columbus opposed the plan and threatened the managers of the hotel with a future boycott unless we were barred from meeting. A group of Masons then came forward and stood firmly behind the management, insisting that we were in our rights to hold a scientific conference there. The meeting was held.

It was no wonder I was always uncertain in going to a new city as to my return. I never knew where I should spend the night.

In Albany, New York, two birth control meetings were to be held, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. However, the manager of the Ten Eyck Hotel, where the meetings were to be held, broke his contract at the order of Mayor Hackett, who forbade any meeting to be held in Albany at

which I was to speak. The meeting in the afternoon, with other speakers, was allowed to go on, but the evening meeting, at which I was to be the principal speaker, was closed down. It was held in a private home a week later.

In Syracuse, New York, where a state conference on birth control was to be held, a Catholic city council passed an ordinance making it a misdemeanor to congregate for such a purpose. Great publicity resulted, with violent protests from citizens and the faculty of Syracuse University. Mayor Walrath vetoed the ordinance, the Common Council failed by two votes to override his veto, and the conference took place.

Boston still remains the one city whose Mayor (Curley) threatens the loss of license to any manager of hall or theater who allows me to speak within its portals. The Civil Liberties Union still has this threat in its files, and I have offered myself on the scaffold of Free Speech any time the citizens of Boston request me to come to make the fight.

The then reactionary attitude of the Protestant Church reflected itself when, on September 15, 1922, the House of Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church, meeting at Portland, Oregon, put itself on record against birth control. This was a feature of the report by the Joint Commission on Home and Family Life presented by Bishop Moreland of Sacramento, California. It was one of the few reports which went through the meeting without discussion, as if intimidating the members into silence.

I knew that this opinion reflected the sentiment of only a minority in the Church.

To offset this report, a questionnaire was sent out to professional men and women which brought back a splendid harvest for our files. Distinguished men of many scientific fields spoke out in favor of our object. The list included such men as Professor E. A. Ross, Theodore Dreiser, Major General John O. Ryan, Thomas Nixon Carver, professor of economics at Harvard University, W. F. Wilcox, professor of sociology at Cornell University, Owen R. Lovejoy, general secretary of the National Child Labor Commission, Professor E. M. East of Harvard University, Judge Ben Lindsey, Dr

C C Little, Norman Thomas, Dr Raymond Pearl of Johns Hopkins University, Rabbi Sidney E Goldstein, David Starr Jordan, Dr S Adolphus Knopf, and John Haynes Holmes. Many of these names still stand on our councils. I should like to see these first of the fearless written in bronze and handed down to posterity.

It is as a result of the support that this splendid group of men gave to birth control during those dark early days that the movement has so quickly won for itself a recognized place in social science.

Each year interest has increased, but the growth and development of the cause has meant eternal vigilance and activity. When in New York I hurried to the office at eight o'clock every morning and worked there until seven in the evening. Every night I carried home with me a large folder containing hundreds of problem letters, upon which I'd write the answers for my secretary to type the following day. In this way, we were able to give the very best of our individual selves to work fully for the advancement of the idea.

The workers who helped to build up the movement and who, in harmony and love, put soul and brains and thought into its very structure can never be forgotten. Those staunch and loyal ones include Mrs Anne Kennedy, Mrs Juliet B Rublee, Miss Kitty Marion, Miss Helen Todd, Miss Anna Lifshiz, Mrs B P Smith, Mrs Lewis L Delafield, Mrs Richard Billings, Mrs Frances B Ackerman, Mrs Ida Timme, Mrs George F Day, Mrs Kate Hepburn, Dr James F Cooper, and Dr Hannah Stone, and later Mrs F Robertson Jones.

I had set up the League to do educational work on a sound and practical foundation. Its first aim was to carry on such a program by agitation, lectures, letters and debates, and then to organize for legislation. While we were interested in all kinds of legislation as an educational means of furthering our cause, we had left the field of federal legislation clear for the Voluntary Parenthood League, of which the sole function was the revision of federal legislation.

After the Roman Catholic Church had called upon Bishop

Manning in the press to assert his views concerning birth control, I wrote that churchman a long letter begging him, if he should make such a statement, to make it clear where the Protestant Episcopal Church stood on the following points

1 Shall mothers and fathers either of whom may be known to suffer from transmissible disease be denied knowledge to prevent conception?

2 Shall mothers already suffering from tuberculosis, heart disease, kidney disease, or any other ailment wherein pregnancy endangers the life, be denied information to prevent conception?

3 Shall parents, already having brought subnormal children into the world, continue to be denied knowledge which might prevent further conception of abnormal children?

4 Shall parents who desire to space the births of children in their family, because of the health of the mother, economic stress of the father, or for any other reason consistent with the conscience of the parents and their growing moral responsibility, be denied such scientific knowledge now available to the intelligent and well to-do classes in this country?

I requested the Bishop to make clear to us all where his church stood on this question as it concerned the health and economic status of parents. No answer to this letter ever came, but Bishop Manning did not voice his opposition to birth control.

It seemed to me then that the whole world was discussing birth control. Even Mexico had a stormy period over the publication of the little pamphlet, *Family Limitation*.

The pamphlet had been published by reformers in the Mexican state, Yucatan, and had fallen into the hands of opponents who urged the District Attorney to prosecute. The press took up the question pro and con, and a petition was sent to the Governor of Yucatan requesting official action against the pamphlet. It was refused. The District Attorney then issued a statement in the *Diario Oficial* of March 14, 1922, which was a classic.

I had already been to Canada and Alaska, leaving nucleus organizations behind me. An invitation from the Mexican Federation of Labor to attend the sixth convention and to speak at Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, on November 17 could not be accepted, owing to my trip to London. That Labor was beginning to look into our question was shown by letters from labor circles requesting speakers and literature.

Universities in America also began to show an interest. In the space of two months students from no less than twenty colleges wrote asking for scientific and historical data upon which to write essays and theses. Lectures were delivered in all the large universities of the eastern states. The Institute of Politics at Williamstown, Massachusetts, had a round table discussion on Population and Related Problems, in which Professors H P Fairchild and E M East took part.

The movement covered a broad field. Books, papers, and magazines continued to treat the question in its broader relations to overpopulation, increase of food supply, falling birth rate, child labor, and eugenics. Dr E M East's book, Man kind at the Crossroads, was published, and circulated among students. Professor Edward Aylsworth Ross's books continued to popularize the sociological and economic aspects. A new literature was taking its place in our social outlook.

There was growing respect for the movement among impartial scientists both here and abroad. Despite the complexity and menacing aspects of the problem it has attacked, despite its limited resources, despite the intellectual inertia of the medical profession and the languid interest of the churches, the movement gradually enlisted the competent cooperation of cool headed, impartial, and unbiassed scientists and because of its irrefutable claim for respect, it will continue to do so.

Meantime, our legislative activities continued on their way. In Albany we found a fine young man, Assemblyman Rose man, who was willing to introduce our bill on the floor of the New York Legislation. As we expected, it was killed in the Codes Committee, after a public hearing. In Connecticut and New Jersey a similar bill was also introduced and killed.

in committee In all three hearings the subject was discussed in full and our work was supported by fine speakers whose standing in the community was unquestioned

With the passing of each year our friends were multiplying by the thousands In constantly increasing numbers, Roman Catholic women sought our advice Women of all denominations appealed to me to save them from the cruel slavery of conscripted motherhood The publication in 1920 and 1922 of my books, *Woman and the New Race* and *The Pivot of Civilization*, brought to my desk, in response, hundreds and sometimes thousands of appeals for help every day The stories of these forsaken women, written in simple, sometimes broken English were so tragic, so desperate that I had to establish a department of trained women to help me reply to them

But even this was not enough Sensitive women of my staff, in reading letter after letter every day, were constantly breaking down in health under the nervous depression these letters caused I myself was keyed up to a high pitch of nervous strain With never sufficient finances to see a month ahead, with more meetings to attend than I could physically stand, with my own personal health and resources depleted, it was phenomenal that we could exist at all

One important investigation which had taken place the preceding year was a thorough canvass of the hospitals in New York City by Dr Mary Halton, aided by a social worker Two women suffering from tuberculosis and with a 4+ Wassermann reaction were taken to twenty nine hospitals In twenty eight of these, contraceptive instruction was refused them *

The reports of social agencies, agendas of clubs and women's organizations were constantly upset by the injection of the controversial and hotly discussed subject of birth control Julia Lathrop's study on infant mortality gave us facts from life which many of us already knew, but here they came at last from a government bureau

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The New York State League of Woman Voters discussed and voted to support the bill at Albany

At its 26th annual convention, the New York State Federation of Women's Clubs voted 149 to 97 for endorsing favorable legislation in 1920. The Catholic women of Utica opposed this, but to no avail.

The *Pictorial Review*, *American Medicine* and many other periodicals kept the subject alive through articles, editorials, and letters.

Through it all I was constantly lecturing. Parlor meetings day after day, open meetings in forums or halls at night, returning home too tired to eat, too excited to sleep. Then I would write out my thoughts in articles or books as they had been stirred or stimulated by questions from the audience. This would often go on until three or four o'clock in the morning, at eight o'clock the telephone would start me off on another day. I look back and wonder at the strength, the endurance, which seemed to come from outside a frail body and a distracted mind.

A new interest was awakening in England as well as in the United States. Important events and distinguished people in Great Britain had helped to awaken public opinion—among them, the Bishop of Birmingham, the Very Reverend Dean Inge of St. Paul's Cathedral, Sir James Barr, Ex President of the British Medical Association, Dr. C. Killick Millard, Health Officer of Leicester, H. G. Wells, Mr. Harold Cox, ex member of Parliament, a one-time close friend of King Edward VII, and editor of the *Edinburgh Review*. These and many more were now speaking out openly in favor of birth control, giving testimony before the Birth Rate Commission. This commission had been formed through the Royal Geographical Society. It met voluntarily and informally to ascertain the facts on the subject, and eventually brought forth a report.

There had been a decided change in public opinion since my visit in 1914-1915, as I realized on my first visit since the World War, in 1920.

Already could be seen evidences of good results from birth control practices in many sections of London slums. This was especially demonstrated in the region of Rotherhithe, one of the East End's direst slums. Here Miss Ann Martin, a courageous and talented woman, had many years before settled herself to live among the workers. She had early realized the problem of too frequent child bearing, and had induced Dr Alice Vickery to come into the neighborhood to instruct the mothers in the best means of contraception. Dr Vickery had made frequent visits to Miss Martin's home during the ten years previous. How proudly those mothers of small families acknowledged their thanks to Miss Martin for her wisdom and kindness and vision!

During my visit to England in the spring of 1920 I addressed meetings in all parts of London and Scotland. The women's guilds were especially awake to this need. How freely and frankly they responded! How amazingly ignorant they were, these old mothers, mothers of ten and twelve children—ignorant of their bodies, ignorant of any possible beauty in marriage, in love. Yet their worries and problems were the same as those of women in every country. These conscript mothers, as elsewhere, demonstrated an eagerness to know as they awakened to consciousness of their possible power. I longed to forge that latent energy into purposive action, but there was not time to give to this during that visit, as I was booked for many lectures.

I went to Scotland. Glasgow awakened old sleeping memories and reminded me of my visit eight years before. A large mass meeting was arranged for me on the Glasgow Green on July Fourth. What a sight that was! Nearly two thousand men in baggy trousers, caps, and working togs, standing close together, eager to catch every word. What silence, what interest, what an intelligent attitude, demonstrated as by no other group equally large anywhere!—with such comments heard as 'she grips ye!'

It was announced that I would speak that evening in a hall rented for the occasion by the Socialists. The hall was packed

to the doors. Women came also. One old timer arose during the period for discussion and said that this seemed to be a subject that interests the women that he had been a party member for eleven years, attending regularly the Sunday night lectures, but had never been able to get his wife out to any of them, tonight he couldn't keep her home.

Look! he cried, the women have crowded the men out of this hall tonight. I never saw so many wives of comrades before.

I went out to a town not far from Carnegie's birth place to address a group of dockers, newly recruited from Lancashire mill towns to help out in the World War. I arrived about four o'clock in a driving storm. I had no umbrella, and was not prepared for this storm. No taxi had ever graced the railroad station of that town. We trudged through the rain to the home of one of the most advanced friends of Labour's cause. I was soaking wet. A hurry call was sent to neighbors and friends for an extra skirt, a pair of shoes—but in that town of five thousand people no one had an extra skirt to lend. Finally I succeeded in getting into a new pair of Sunday shoes. That night I slept in the one bed in the house with my hostess, the husband graciously making his bed on two chairs in the kitchen. Such was the kindness and genuine hospitality of these simple and sincere people. There was not a hotel within miles of the place. I was told that I was given the same accommodation that had been given Sylvia Pankhurst, and I knew we had had the best.

To Germany through that dreary, war-racked Europe I went. I had determined to trace a rumor I had heard in London that there was a new contraceptive, a very special prescription made up into jelly, conveniently dispensed in tubes ready for application. This was the object of my visit to Germany in 1920. I was finally able to trace it from Berlin to Dresden, on to Munich, and at last to Friedrichshafen where the chemist, who was also the proprietor of the compound, was then living. I was impressed by the simplicity of its composition,

and arranged to have a supply sent for a test to New York. This eventually led to the same or a similar jelly being compounded in England and other countries, and it is today one of the methods advised by physicians and sold openly in many drug stores everywhere.

On the surface of things, Germany seemed dead, crushed, broken. One who is sensitive to thought felt at once a terrible sadness in that poverty stricken land. People had forgotten how to smile. Millions of children did not even know how to laugh or play! A grim silence everywhere—for there was little street traffic even in a city the size of Berlin.

When I talked to the Germans, I noticed a slight hope of the future, providing always Labour emerged to power. They were optimistic according as they had a philosophy, a religion, or a cause.

But the women broke down all the reserve of my emotions, they were the sufferers. They had neither faith, hope, philosophy, nor religion. They looked out of eyes dried by suffering, deepened by hunger. They were the real sufferers in defeated Germany. They were resigned to poverty and want for the rest of their lives, resigned to peace or war, love or hatred, a living death or a sudden end—but there was one thing they were not resigned to, and that was to continue to be breeders of children for any State, either militaristic or socialistic! They had gone so far in this that there was even then before the Reichstag a bill removing the penalty for abortion. Another, introduced by the independent Socialists, not quite so radical, aimed to make abortion legal if done before quickening. Only the Catholic party was opposed to these bills. I visited prominent gynecologists and suggested the use of contraception instead of abortion.

After leaving Germany, I went to Amsterdam to attend the first International Conference on the Technique and Methods of Contraception. Dr and Mrs Drysdale joined me there, as did also Dr Norman Haire, a brilliant young medical practitioner then just feeling his way about in medical circles in London. Dr Haire is an Australian by birth. He had spe

cialized in gynecology, and realized early in his career that something must be done about contraception. He had been one of the few medical men in England at that time openly advocating the practice of birth control.

Throughout Europe governments were clamoring for larger populations. France began a system of bonuses for parents who had large families. In Germany, however, the women arose against this tendency, and were then campaigning to change legislation on abortion.

Returning to New York, I was overjoyed to find everywhere a steadily growing interest.

During the spring and summer of 1921 I sent out a questionnaire to the principal and influential leaders in social and professional circles, asking if the time had not come for a national organization which should represent the birth control movement as advanced by the principles promulgated in my books, lectures, and writings. The replies from hundreds of medical officers, social workers, teachers, scientists, and others confirmed me in the opinion that the time had come for organization. I sent out a call to the members of the American Public Health Association, who were to meet at a conference in New York in the autumn. Plans and announcements were made that the first national birth control conference would be held at the Hotel Plaza November 11-13, 1921.

Mr. Harold Cox, one of the leading experts on population questions, was invited to come from London to participate. Mr. J. O. P. Bland was also invited to take part. This brilliant statesman and journalist was familiar with the problems of Asia as were few Occidentals.

We had a magnificent program, with distinguished backers from all walks of life. At last the plan was forming. Of our original program—agitation, education, organization, legislation—the third stage was now to begin.