

Children Wanted

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IN A BARE flat in New York a woman lay unconscious. Her husband had found her on the floor surrounded by their children, two, three and five years of age. The woman, unwilling to bear another child when her husband's wages were inadequate for the family, had tried to effect an abortion by self-mutilation.

The doctor sent for a trained nurse who had had long experience in such cases. After three weeks between life and death, Mrs. Sacks recovered. The day the nurse was to leave she said: "If I have another baby it will be the end of me. Won't you do something to help me?" The nurse told the doctor but his answer was a coarse laugh: "Tell Jake to sleep on the roof."

Six months later the nurse was called late at night. This time Mrs. Sacks had been to a five-dollar abortionist. She died a few minutes after the doctor arrived.

It was three in the morning when the nurse got home.

She looked out over the rooftops to the distant tenements while the whole dark story came up before her. It was not the story of Mrs. Sacks alone, but of the armies of women like her — the mothers of the world's needy who spent their lives bearing children until they died of them or grew old and desperate before their youth was gone: and of the babies, puny in body and feeble in mind, for whom there was no welcome.

Dawn came, and for the nurse it was a new day. Throwing her bag into the corner, she sent her uniform flying after. She was through with nursing and doctors who, faced with this great need, took the other side of the street and went on their smug way. She was going to tell

women what to do. "I *will* be heard," she said aloud to herself. "I *will* be heard."

The nurse was Margaret Sanger. The time was 1913.

She was ill-equipped for the fight. She had neither money nor influential friends. Of propaganda she knew nothing. Nor had she specific knowledge of contraceptive methods.

Today after twenty-three years Margaret Sanger has been heard. In this country alone there are two hundred and thirty-five clinics, all operating within the law. Even in China birth-control is gaining momentum. Returning recently from India, where she traveled ten thousand miles in nine weeks, Mrs. Sanger brought news of fifty clinics and teaching centers started while she was there.

With the growth of the movement, its purpose has grown. In the beginning her one deep concern was to bring relief to the women of the poor. As she went on many young couples in better circumstances came to her for advice. Now she sees birth-control as a doctrine of human rights — the right of the child to be wanted; the right of the married to say how many children they shall have; the right of the mother to say when she shall have them.

"The term 'birth-control'," she said recently, "does not imply only family limitation. It means the control of fertility. It includes the problem of the married who want children and are not physically able to have them. In our New York Clinic our doctors have learned that a certain malformation of the male sperm is often responsible for wives who are able to conceive but not to carry a child to full-time. At present we have not the equipment for treating sterility patients. But in several centers our physicians are examining them and recommending doctors whom they know have studied the subject."

What kind of a person is this woman? In 1916 when I was assigned to interview Margaret Sanger in San Francisco, I tried to picture what she would be like. Her arrest in New York, her flight to Europe, and her trip across the continent amid a thousand jeers, had brought her into the headlines. I was sure that, while she might not be the harpy portrayed by opponents, she was at least an Amazon.

When I knocked at her door, a low-pitched, musical voice asked me to come in. Sitting up in bed was a frail and delicate woman in her early thirties. The pallor of her face and lips, her rounded chin, her easy manner and well-modulated voice had nothing in common with the battling Nelson I had expected. But as she talked with me about her mission, a swift change came over her. Gray eyes glowed. The way she raised her head gave emphasis to her chin. There was no doubt then of her fighting spirit. I saw her not as a woman hell-bent on giving out birth-control information, but as a kind of Joan of Arc, driven by some inner compulsion.

Born Margaret Higgins, she was the sixth of eleven children. Her home was in Corning, New York, where her father was a stone-cutter. Irish by birth, he was a free-thinker, a friend of Henry George and disciple of Robert Ingersoll. (One of Margaret's earliest recollections is a meeting he had arranged with Ingersoll as the orator. Out of his own pocket he had rented the town's only hall, which belonged to a Catholic priest. Hearing who was to speak, the priest promptly locked the doors. A pitched battle between the opposing forces ensued, garbage heaps supplying the ammunition. In a rain of carrot and turnip tops Mr. Higgins took Margaret by the hand, and leading the parade with Ingersoll, walked through the streets to the woods where Ingersoll spoke.)

There was affection in the Higgins household, but little happiness. The mother, gentle and resourceful, managed by hard work and careful planning to keep the family together. Food was often scarce, particularly after the Ingersoll episode. When a new baby was coming, if there was no money for a doctor, Mr. Higgins was the midwife. Mrs. Higgins washed and scrubbed and sewed and scrimped without complaint. Never strong, and worn out with child-bearing, she died at forty-eight. Mr. Higgins lived to be eighty.

Margaret's will-power had an early rooting. Her father taught her that fear and cowardice were the devil's pitchforks. Listening to him, the child took herself in hand. She made a ritual of going upstairs alone in the dark, into the cellar without whistling, of getting up on the rafters in the barn and jumping down on the haystack — things that filled her with terror.

Before she was sixteen she began to prepare for a medical course at Cornell. Then her mother died; Margaret took over the home and she soon saw that Cornell was out of the question. As the best substitute she turned to nursing.

Specializing in obstetrics, she took care of rich and poor alike. It was then she began to see the difference between patients who had their children at reasonable intervals and those who had them close together. She knew nothing then of contraception. All that she knew was that something ought to be done.

Before her purpose could be clarified she had met and married William Sanger, an artist, and at the end of a year she was expecting a baby. One day her doctor found that Margaret had incipient tuberculosis. Six months in the Adirondacks and she was back in New York for the birth of her first child, a fine, healthy boy. But her re-

covery was slow and again the tonic prescribed was a long stay in the mountains, where she went with her baby and a nurse.

Months passed in which there was no improvement. One day her sister arrived to take the baby away. In the evening Margaret overheard her whispering to the nurse, and realized that her condition had been pronounced hopeless. That night her sleep was fitful. Suddenly at dawn when she had dozed off, she awakened with a start. Sitting up in bed she rocked back and forth saying over and over to herself, "I will *not* die. I will *not* die."

Tiptoeing into the next room she awoke the nurse, telling her to pack as they were going home. In another hour they had stolen out of the house with the baby and were on their way by horse and surrey to Saratoga where they caught the express for New York.

For six years Margaret Sanger kept up her contest with death. As her health improved she grew restless. She wanted to be in the thick of life again. For a time she became interested in women's clubs and in suffrage, but they did not satisfy her. Many debts had been incurred by her long illness. She felt that the only self-respecting thing to do was to help pay them off by going back to nursing.

Several doctors who gave their services to patients in the slums often called Mrs. Sanger. With pregnancy a chronic epidemic, cheap abortionists thrived. Or the women, when purgatives and teas failed, rolled down the stairs or brought on miscarriages by the use of rusty scissors, skewers or any pointed object they could lay their ignorant hands on. Those who did not die in agony lived on in fear and suffering, unfit to bear more children but unable to keep from doing so. And they all asked the same question, "What can I do to keep from it?"

The nurse became obsessed with the desire to give them the answer they sought. Over and over in her mind she mulled a solution to their misery. Mrs. Sacks was the last straw. From that day on Margaret Sanger's life was consecrated to her mission.

Her first step was to fill in the gaps in her equipment. The whole spring and summer of 1913 were passed in search of information. Her mind became a catalogue of facts and figures on infant and maternal mortality. She could find little about contraceptive methods. The doctors to whom she went refused to reveal their secret, so she took a trip to France where physicians of standing gave her reliable instruction.

Her next necessity was support. Women's organizations, the medical fraternity and the welfare agencies, refused to listen to her. The doctors said it was against the law. The women were shocked. The feminists were either annoyed or amused. Determined to put her purpose before the public, she took what little money she had and started a magazine, *The Woman Rebel*, of which she was publisher, editor and business manager. The first issue was declared unmailable by the New York post office. As there was no contraceptive information in it, she wrote the postmaster asking him to point out where she had transgressed the law. In answer she received a copy of the first notification, nothing more. Wishing to bring the matter into the open and put the law to the test, she kept on publishing *The Woman Rebel*, placing copies of it in the mailbox with her own hands.

One August afternoon in 1914, two officers came to tell her that she had been indicted by the Federal grand jury for breaking the postal laws. They advised her to submit quietly. "I shall do nothing of the kind," she retorted, "I shall shout it from the housetops."

She was not shouting when she said this; something in her manner impressed the officers, for they asked her to sit down and tell them what she was trying to do. They remained for two hours, during which she talked so persuasively of conditions that their attitude softened. They made no attempt to arrest her and said that her case would come up some time in October and they would let her know two weeks in advance.

In the middle of September she was haled into court where she was reprimanded for not being on hand that morning. She told the judge that she had not been notified. He swept the excuse aside, setting the trial for the next day. As she had not engaged a lawyer, she asked for more time in which to prepare her defense. It was refused.

That evening Margaret Sanger fought the situation out with herself. Because of the antagonistic attitude of the court she felt sure that she would be given a severe sentence. She was not afraid of jail, but a long term would retard her program. If she were to be cut off from it for any length of time, interest might wane. If she could only get away for a while, and public opinion could be aroused in her favor, the prejudice of the court might be tempered. Writing a letter to the judge telling him that she would not appear, she took the midnight train for Montreal and in a week sailed for England under an assumed name and without passport.

The world war was two months old. Aliens without passports were being refused entrance to England. Port officials refused to let her in. Appealing to two higher authorities — she has never disclosed their names — she was permitted to enter and continue on her journey to London.

Every day of her stay there was made to count. Have-

lock Ellis became her guide and counsellor. For months she went regularly to the British Museum, learning about the movement in Europe. She found that in Holland, where contraceptive clinics flourished under government subsidy, the death rate had fallen from an average of 26 per 1,000 before they were started in 1878, to 12 per 1,000 in 1912. The tables on maternal and infant mortality gave the highest percentage of all civilized nations to the United States. The Netherlands, with the lowest, showed a continuous decline in the number of deaths among women and children in child-birth.

In September 1915, news came that William Sanger had been arrested and convicted for giving one of her pamphlets to a decoy sent to his studio by Anthony Comstock. Bound to put such arbitrary methods to the test, she returned home, notifying the Federal District Attorney of her whereabouts.

During her absence a change had taken place in the public mind. Men and women of prominence had become interested in her cause. Great newspapers were now her allies. Four days after her return William Sanger was released from jail. Protests were made to President Wilson — among them a letter from twelve English scientists and writers of international distinction. When her case came up for trial in February, 1916, it was dismissed.

She saw, then, that the time was right for a direct challenge. She knew that she would never get far by talking. Clinics were the real need. The American Birth-Control League was founded with Margaret Sanger as its president. To spread her gospel she took a trip across the continent. In Chicago, when the Women's City Club refused to hear her, the Labor Temple opened its doors to her. In St. Louis, she delivered her speech from an automobile. In Portland, where she was arrested and spent

the night in jail, influential citizens came to her defense. By the time she was back in New York birth-control leagues had been founded in nearly every city where she had been.

With her sister and a devoted friend, she next opened the first Birth-Control Clinic in America, in Brownsville, a tenement district of Brooklyn. In less than a month 480 women were given help. Then Anthony Comstock came. Her sister was charged with disseminating contraceptive information, her friend with having sold an indecent book and Margaret Sanger with maintaining a public nuisance.

In January, 1917, her sister was found guilty and sentenced to 30 days in the workhouse. Released on bail pending trial, Mrs. Sanger re-opened the clinic and was re-arrested. The day her case was called the court was crowded with smartly gowned women and women from the tenements with their children and nursing babies. The trial was short. Margaret Sanger admitted the charge and was found guilty. Before passing sentence the Judge said, "The court is considering extreme clemency if you will promise that in the future you will respect the law." There was no compromise in her response. "I will refrain pending appeal," she said. "Farther than that I will not go." She was given 30 days.

During her incarceration she lost 12 pounds and tuberculosis again threatened. And yet on the day she was let out she gave the most amazing example in her whole career of her tremendous vitality. The order had been given that she was to be finger-printed. Two robust keepers struggled for two hours trying to force her fingers down on the pad. When this failed, one got behind her and held her while the other worked with her hands. "It was really funny," she told me not long ago. "I don't

know where my strength came from. Every time they got my fingers almost down on the pad, through no effort of mine whatsoever, my wrists went up in the air in the most ridiculous gesture, or my fingers would fold up in a kind of spasm. And just when I felt as if I were going to faint, a telephone from headquarters ordered my release without the usual finger-printing."

The Court of Appeals in 1918 did exactly what she had hoped it would do. Judge Crane, who rendered the decision, although affirming the verdict of the lower court, declared that "The law, while not permitting physicians to advertise regarding such matter, or to give promiscuous advice to patients irrespective of their condition, is broad enough to protect the physician who, in good faith, gives such help or advice to a married person to cure or prevent disease." Going further he defined "disease," according to Webster as "an alteration in the state of the body, or some of its organs, interrupting or disturbing the performance of vital functions and causing or threatening pain, sickness, disease or disorder." This was the first time that the statute relating to contraceptives have been given judicial interpretation. It meant that birth-control clinics conducted by doctors could be maintained within certain limits.

With the fear of the law removed, physicians of standing offered their coöperation. Some medical fraternities, important women's organizations, and university professors endorsed birth-control. Many of the churches passed resolutions of support. From nearly every state in the Union came invitations to speak.

When the current of success was moving swiftly, Mrs. Sanger found time to answer the calls that had been coming to her from foreign lands. It required strategy to get into countries where militaristic governments demanded

high birth-rates. Her first venture into forbidden fields was her visit to Japan in 1922. In San Francisco the Japanese Consul refused her a visa. Immediately she was on her toes; experience had taught her that official opposition is the whetstone of public curiosity. She secured a visa for China.

During the journey she met the editors of two important Japanese newspapers. They were so interested that they arranged to have her explain the whole scope of the birth-control movement to the Japanese delegation returning from the Washington Peace Conference. The result was that one of the delegates radioed to his government and got permission for her to enter Japan.

The efforts to exclude her had had the effect she had foreseen. When she debarked at Yokohama, instead of interviewing the returning delegates, the newspaper reporters crowded around her, and her activities were front page material throughout her stay. University groups formed a reception committee, parading the streets with banners proclaiming, "Thousands disciple welcome you." Labor organizations were at the pier to greet her. The Rickshaw Men's Union turned out in a body and one of its members who spoke English undertook to apologize for the Home Office. "Sometime," he said, "Japanese Government little autocratic." Her visit was the beginning of birth-control in Japan.

In 1933, fully aware of the dangers, she decided to enter Italy. Knowing that Margaret Sanger would never be allowed in, she took out her passport as Mrs. J. Noah Slee, her name by her second marriage. She felt that it would be indiscreet and hazardous to go to the larger cities of the south where someone might recognize her. So she went to a small village in the Dolomites where she was visited by her correspondents, women of the

nobility and patronesses of great private philanthropies. Secret meetings were held. Thousands of pamphlets on birth-control were distributed from hand to hand through the crowded industrial districts of Italy. When the rumor came that her hide-out had been discovered, she took the night-train into Switzerland.

The following week Mussolini issued a violent manifesto against birth-control. Until then the peasants and the great mass of working women had never heard of it. With their curiosity aroused, they did some investigating. A year later the birth-rate of Italy dropped lower than it had ever been before.

Here in the United States the clinics are constantly enlarging their scope. To them come women of all classes, races and religions. Those who are financially able to do so, pay a fee. The unemployed and the very poor are helped without charge. When necessary, they are instructed in sex hygiene.

The Clinical Research Bureau in New York City has given relief from unhealthful child-bearing to over fifty-five thousand women during the past ten years. Since 1930 new patients have come in at the rate of five hundred a month. (Twenty-eight per cent of the women who have applied for help are of the Roman Catholic faith.)

The case records are a volume of the same story told many times. There is Maria, thirty-nine years old. She has been married twenty-two years and has had sixteen pregnancies. Ten of these were aborted, five of which brought her to the hospital and made an invalid of her. She bore only five living children, one of whom died in infancy. Her husband is a riveter with intermittent employment.

Margaret Sanger's dream goes far beyond anything that her enemies, who have so often accused her of min-

istering to sins of the flesh, might suspect. "There is too much license in marriage," she says, "just as there is too much suppression. There is great spiritual power in the sexual urgency. Through its restraint, its energies may be directed into highly creative channels both in the parents and their offspring."

The Utopia she envisions can come, she holds, only through the regulation of fertility. For she feels that no society can withstand the impact of an unrestrained fecundity by which vast numbers of its people are cut off, through poverty and dereliction, from the refining influences of education and plenty.

The Unreality of Realism

BY JOHN MASON BROWN

THE CONTEMPORARY theatre has become so expert at disguising the falsities it offers in the name of realism that many playgoers have grown accustomed to respecting it in inverse proportion to its character as "theatre". When they go to a playhouse they do not want to be made too conscious of the fact that they are in a playhouse. Giving their half-faith to what they like to believe is real, they do not wish to be reminded by a chorus of its unreality. The very word "theatrical" has turned in their vocabulary into a term of abuse. It is a significant term which not only summarizes the credo of the modern stage but paints the ideal of its make-believe by condemning the theatre for being too much like itself and too little like life.

The Muse most commonly invoked by this theatre which prides itself on its realism is not "a Muse of fire that would ascend The brightest heaven of invention." She is no goddess but a mortal proud of her mortality. Her feet are on the ground even if her head is not in the clouds. She is a lusty democrat whose respect for kings is small; an incurable individualist who has no understanding of the self-effacing principles dear to totalitarian states. The earth, not heaven, is her abode.

She roams it freely, preferring drawing-rooms to Olympus, kitchens to palaces, gas-jets to torches, beer to ambrosia, and avoiding heroes and the heroic in favor of the common man and conditions which are common to all men. More than Thalia and Melpomene ever dreamed of being, this plain-spoken Muse, who wears such clothes as can be seen in daily life and employs only such words