

PROGRESS OR COMSTOCK?

By Our Readers

THE arrest of William Sanger on a charge of circulating "obscene literature," by a Comstock detective who had begged, and received, from him a copy of Margaret Sanger's pamphlet on "Family Limitation," as told in these pages last month, has aroused a strong movement of defensive and aggressive protest throughout the public. We print below a few letters which show pretty unmistakably the determination to eject Comstockery from our laws.

To the Editor:

In the current number of THE MASSES you ask, "Is Truth Obscene?" The case which you bring before the attention of the public interests me so intensely that I cannot help writing to inquire whether any practical move can be made in order to save Mr. and Mrs. Sanger and to do away with the obnoxious law that makes the truth obscene. That law has long seemed to me an intolerable anachronism, but I have never felt it so keenly as I do upon learning of the Sanger case. In an age where every other married couple say publicly, "No, we shall not have children until John's practice is established"; "We have three children, and

shall have one more, and then stop"—in this age, the law which makes it a crime to inform people of the means of preventing conception is a monstrous hypocrisy—and, as you say, it bears hardest upon those who most need such information.

There are two reasons why it is retained, which I think you did not mention. First, Catholics regard the prevention of conception as a sin, and all the power of the Catholic Church upholds the law. Second, many "good" people fear that if means of preventing conception were known, there would be much extra-marital intercourse, and hence "morality would be undermined." Closely related to these are the people who deplore modern "selfishness and individualism," and would have the unwanted, inconvenient child descend upon a household and break up all plans, for the good of the parents' souls. They have no faith in the instinct of parenthood, which would lead to wanted, planned-for children at suitable and convenient times; and so they would refuse to men and women the power of controlling parenthood.

Mr. Eastman, I would like to be one of a thousand women to sign a statement setting forth:

(1) That in our family relations we habitually exercise control of the birth-rate.

(2) That we believe this control makes for personal and domestic happiness, and lifts us out of the hands of fate and makes us self-directing human beings.

(3) That we believe society is better served by our bringing into the world children for whom we can and will care, than by having large families to depend on charity.

(4) That we believe it is better for the children themselves to come into the world with a prospect of being properly reared and educated than to come in large numbers to struggle for a bare existence, and to grow up ignorant and powerless.

(5) That we will agitate for the repeal of this law in both nation and state.

(6) That we will repeat these statements in court and take the consequences.

My fear is that none of this agitation would be admitted as having any direct bearing on the Sanger case. But it might do some good ultimately, if it rid our statute-books of this relic of tribal ideas and outworn religious conceptions. If this is impracticable,



Drawn by Elizabeth Grieg.

What Every Young Woman Ought to Have Known

will you or others who may be working on the case please inform me of any way in which I can help? If public speaking will do any good, I will gladly do what I can in that line. I am an experienced campaign speaker for equal suffrage.

If you wish to publish my letter, you are at liberty to do so.

Yours very truly,
MIRIAM E. OATMAN,
(Mrs. M. E. Oatman-Blachly.)

145 West 127th Street, New York.

FROM A WOMAN PHYSICIAN

To the Editor:

I am familiar with what Margaret Sanger has been trying to do and believe her successful vindication would save millions of women remorse and guilt. The problem she is sacrificing herself for is purely a woman's problem now, and while it may be impossible for many to identify themselves with the cause, she can assure herself of being understood.

Should there be any organized attempt to assist her in her vindication I shall be glad to do my share.

FROM AN ATTORNEY

To the Editor:

Have just read in my MASSES of the predicament of Mr. William Sanger, who has dared run counter to the modern angel of morality, Anthony Comstock, and am enclosing two dollars to help defray the expense of defending him from the criminal charge overhanging him. I hope some day to be able to do much more in matters of this kind.

FROM A GOVERNMENT SCIENTIFIC WORKER

To the Editor:

In the matter of the Sanger trial I feel I ought to come across. I enclose a small check drawn to you which you may dispose of as you see fit. Being broke, I have to send a small one. You may be sure I will do anything I can to help out.

FROM A WOMAN

To the Editor:

Will you kindly tell me how it is possible to procure Mrs. Margaret Sanger's pamphlets? I have been much interested in her work and in your article in the current number of the MASSES. And I am heartily in favor of your campaign and wish you every success.

FROM A NEWS AGENT

To the Editor:

Please send me 10 copies March issue on the strength of the Margaret Sanger article. Keep up the fight. I will boost all I can.

FROM A BUSINESS MAN

To the Editor:

Your article in the March number of the MASSES regarding Mr. Sanger, has impressed me so much that I am herewith enclosing P. O. order for \$2.00 to assist in paying Mr. Sanger's expenses in his defence.

Have been in sympathy with the work of Mrs. Sanger and I sincerely hope Mr. Sanger will beat out "Saint Anthony."

This knowledge is as necessary in the country districts as in the cities. Only last week I had to witness the expulsion of a family with six children from the farm they had worked to clear, and after 12 years of hard unremitting toil, were forced to vacate. The cause, the mother after the birth of her fourth child became an invalid, in this condition she gave birth to two more, and after the birth of her last child, she remained in bed for three years, about six months ago she underwent an operation which removed forever the possibility of her again becoming a mother, and her health is slowly returning.

A FUND OF AT LEAST \$500 IS NEEDED for legal expenses in the Sanger struggle. More is needed for a campaign of publicity outside of the courts. This is your fight. The time to fight is now. You are asked to send as much as you can, and as soon as possible to the Sanger Fund, The Masses Publishing Company, 87 Greenwich Avenue, New York City.

THE DEAR LITTLE BULLET

HOW dear to my heart are the scenes of the battle,

As every good soldier should find them to be!
How sweet to my ears is the musical rattle
Of the enemy's guns as he trains them on me!
But of all the delights that I have in full measure—
Though of wounds my idea is still rather vague—
I think it would be the most exquisite pleasure
To be shot by the bullet approved by The Hague.
The neat little bullet, the clean-wounding bullet,
Humane little bullet approved by The Hague.

How sweet in a non-vital part to receive it—
You're certain to live if they don't strike you
dead!

It seems so delightful I scarce can believe it—
(Is it safer to stand on my feet or my head?)
And when I'm removed from this loved situation
Where the enemy now I so gleefully plague,
I surely will find it a full compensation
To be killed by the bullet approved by The
Hague.

The neat little bullet, the clean-wounding bullet,
The dear little bullet approved by The Hague.

ELIZABETH WADDELL.

FROM AN OPPONENT

To the Editor:

I take the liberty of availing myself of your invitation in your March issue for communications of opinion from your readers, to address you upon the subject of contraception with an expression of views which—until you convince me otherwise—must remain opposed to your own.

Are you going to shut me off? That wouldn't be nice. You boast that you have no respect for the respectable; but surely you revere the truth, and the method which leads to truth, namely, to let the other side be heard.

You agitate—aside from the specific issue of a free press vs. P.O.D.—two causes: viz., the legitimizing of contraceptive practices, and education of the poorer classes in that subject.

Having never heard you voice a belief in the justifiability of one human being's destroying another living human, I make so bold as to assume that you are categorically opposed to murder. If you are not, that is another question; and I shall welcome the opportunity of debating the broader topic. But allowing my assumption to stand, I proceed. You no doubt would disapprove of killing a child. Would it make any difference to you whether the child were ten years old, or nine, or eight? I take it that you refrain from killing, not because the object might speak out when he saw you approaching (the child might be dumb, or an infant of eleven months), nor even because you dread to inflict pain (for you might chloroform the victim in advance), but rather, I guess, on the vaunted general principles of justice. I do not know your views on the subject of abortion, so we'll skip that stage. But can you, Mr. Editor, inform me where life begins? Are you sure that you did not exist, a number of years ago one more than your present age, in the womb of your mother and the gonoplasm of your father? And who has the right, or had the right, so to retard the evolution of the race as to have robbed you of your mission in life and use of your individual usefulness? In addition to being a materialist, are you also a denier of Evolution? Since when is artificial and factitious as well as fortuitously human selection to take the place of the old reliable natural selection? Do you advocate that blind ignorance—for what else can contraception of the unborn be—shall annihilate the blessings of uncontrolled variation which can be had only from unhindered and large-scale reproduction?

I have appealed to you in the foregoing, first, on the ground of the justice of giving each individual mind entity a chance to experience the life matrix, and secondly, on the basis of helping or at least not hindering Nature to carry out the process of Evolution as revealed to us by the history of biology. Now it may be that you believe in neither God nor Science. Yet of one thing I am certain: immortal souls, and past and future humanity may mean nothing to you; but present society is assuredly your field. You want Tom and Dick and Mrs. Harry to be happy. Very well, let us see how your cause can apply even here.

Abandoning the grand principles which our laws aim to uphold, let us grant, for the sake of argument, that the practice of contraception by all, or just by doctors, is specifically legalized. We come then to your second cause, to your plea for publicity among the poorer classes.

Do you know of any method to give the subject publicity among adults, and not among adolescents? I don't. Instill the idea of possible sexual intercourse without offspring, take away the ideal and leave the sensation, and what have you

left except unlovely, brutal obscenity Will a morbid atmosphere of that sort make more light and wholesome the hearts of the economically miserable?

If children are a burden to working women, by all means agitate that child bearing and rearing mothers shall be pensioned—or that all children shall be pensioned, or kept in barracks. Do all the social-justice preaching you desire; but please don't kill the significance of sexual life—the richest instinct of men and women—by arguing to permit and encourage short-sighted mortals to denude it of its noble fruit, the child.

I have but one remark to add. Your magazine is revolutionary, you say. I hope you will not force upon my unwilling eyes the sight of a band of dogmatic revolutionaries. Observe that I say you would be obliging me to witness your inconsistency; for you know very well that I cannot resist continuing to read the MASSES. I like your paper because I appreciate the spirit that animates you. Yet withal, I repeat, you have made a mistake this once.

I am a young, single and virtuous male, blessed with friends who boast a sense of humor. If you reproduce this letter or refer to it, kindly confine yourself to the mention of my initials only.

Yours,

I. L.

FROM UPTON SINCLAIR.

To the Editor:

I am very glad to see that you have taken up the issue involved in the case of Comrade Sanger. I do not believe there is a more barbarous law upon our statute books than the one forbidding the spreading of information concerning the prevention of conception. I have written upon the subject at various times in the *Physical Culture Magazine*, in the *Cosmopolitan*, and in *Everybody's*. I have received hundreds of letters asking for information, and I was unable to answer any of them unless I cared to take the risk that the writer might be a government spy and that I would be liable to \$5000 fine and five years' imprisonment in jail, and I assure you that Government spies are continually active in this matter.

There was an atrocious case a few years ago of a physician, Dr. G. Alfred Elliot, who served ten years in the Federal Penitentiary at Leavenworth Kansas, for giving information to a woman who wrote him that she had an insane husband of whom she was afraid.

You can see a letter of mine published in *Everybody's Magazine* about three or four years ago concerning a poor devil who had been shut up without bail for several months in a death trap called the Newcastle County Workhouse in Delaware where I had served an eighteen hour sentence for playing tennis on Sunday. This man had been arrested for selling a medical book containing photographs of prohibited portions of the human anatomy. I went to the United States Attorney about his case, and this gentleman showed me samples of horrible literature which had been found in the man's rooms. One thing was a pamphlet giving some elementary information on the subject of sexual intercourse—information for the lack of which, as any physician will testify, hundreds of marriages which might have been happy have been wrecked. And our Government official, who assured me that he was a Unitarian and a most liberal and enlightened man, held these up before me with a face of horror and gasped: "He actually had a pamphlet discussing such matters as that."

That is only one instance out of dozens which I might quote you. This law under which they are trying Sanger was forced onto our statute books by the Federation of Catholic Societies. It is one of the penalties which we pay for the domination of our politics by the dead hand of medieval superstition, and it should be fought by every enlightened person with all the weapons of publicity. Bernard Shaw has called the artificial sterilization of marriage the most revolutionary discovery of the XIXth Century. It may be said that we owe to it what little intelligence and freedom we have so far been able to win in the world. If we win any more it will be because humanity and common sense assert themselves in spite of all the efforts of Roman Catholic and Puritan inquisitors.

Conscience Corner

THROUGH laxity of editorial supervision we placed in our Book Store an advertisement of a book called "Sex Determination," which seems to us misleading and we have removed it from the list.

A LITTLE advertisement of a cure for the tobacco habit, etc., appeared once, and will not appear again, for the same reasons.

PLEASE do not overestimate our moral character on the basis of these confessions. We give no guarantee of any brands of poetry or liquor that may be advertised in our columns. People who monkey with these spiritual substances are assumed to be forewarned.