

## *Chapter Thirty-two*

### CHANGE IS HOPEFULLY BEGUN



**A**S a cause becomes more and more successful, the ideas of the people engaged in it are bound to change. While still at St. Moritz I had been getting messages and letters about the disturbing situation in the American Birth Control League. I cabled Frances Ackermann to take it in hand, but she replied she was unable to bring about a friendly solution.

I found on my return after eighteen months that the tone of the movement had altered. The machinery I had built up to be ready for any emergency was marking time. An incident which occurred almost immediately was highly indicative. During my absence the League had been invited to participate in the Parents' Exhibition in the Grand Central Palace, and had signed a contract for a certain space. The day before the opening came a letter from Robert E. Simon, who was in charge, stating that William O'Shea, Superintendent of Public Schools, threatened to remove the Board of Education exhibit if ours were there, and he therefore requested our withdrawal.

With time so short I asked an attorney to secure a court injunction to prevent our exclusion. But one member of the Board said no step should be taken without the approval of all, a meeting should be called to discuss what course was to be adopted. I tried to reach various Directors by telephone, but before I could gather a quorum it was too late, the check which paid for our space had been sent back and the Exhibition had opened. We were left out.

Obviously, the old aggressive spirit had been superseded by a doctrinaire program of social activity, the League had settled down. I had always believed that offerings should be voluntarily measured by the individual's desire. In this way you could appeal whenever a special occasion warranted and receive anywhere from one dollar to two or three hundred. Contributors were giving to something that concerned them vitally, and they did it, not because they had signed a pledge for a limited sum, but because they wanted to help forward the movement. I could not share the League's enthusiasm over the fact that our bank account had grown to sizeable proportions—thousands of dollars drawing interest, though I admit it must have been a great relief to a Board whose previous experience had been to hear wails from the President and Treasurer as to our needs for some new project.

I knew the apathy which came from a fat bank balance. I knew also the tacit disapproval which would meet every suggestion to touch that precious fund. But my policy had been to spend, not to save, when work ought to be done. I discovered that subscribers to the *Review* had not been informed it was time for them to renew their subscriptions, and that, consequently, they had diminished from thirteen thousand to twenty-five hundred. Accordingly I told the bookkeeper to give fifteen or twenty dollars to the clerk to pay for circularizing. She said she could not do it, a bylaw had been made that nobody could direct the outlay of more than five dollars without a resolution passed by the Board.

There is doubtless a place for organizations that restrict their scope to the status quo. Most charities are like that—they live on securities, install as officers those who keep pace with but are never in advance of general opinion. Two members of the Board, with League-of-Women-Voters training, saw the movement in the light of routine, annual membership dues and a budget, going through the same ritual year after year and remaining that way, performing a quiet service in the community. I looked upon it as something temporary, something to sweep through, to be done with and finished, it was merely an instrument for accomplishment. I wanted us to avail ourselves of every psychological event, to push ahead until hospitals and public health agencies took over birth control as part of their regular program, which would end our function.

Regretfully I found the League was to side-step the greatest and most far-reaching opportunity yet offered it. It was logically equipped to enter the legislative field. But it wanted to progress state by state. I was convinced action in the Federal sphere would be quicker and much broader educationally, and that, furthermore, success there would provide a precedent for the states.

When you build an organization, you try to combine harmonious elements, but you cannot tell what they will turn out to be until a certain interval has elapsed. Some of these women were in the movement for reasons they themselves did not always understand. A few liked the sensation of being important and having personal attention, they were at their best in following an individual, yet I never felt they were doing it for me. The liberals who had started with me had never demanded a reward. What they gave was for the cause, they refused to work *for* people, they worked *with* them or not at all.

Most movements go through the phase of being brought into the drawing room. Those who disagreed with me believed the emphasis should be on social register membership, and argued that my associations had been radical. The answer was "Yes," because the radicals alone had had the vision and the courage to support me in the early days. The women who were raising objections now had only joined up after it had been safe to do so. Moreover, they were, for the most part, New Yorkers, not all of whom had even gone into neighboring states. Their attitude tended to be, "Never you mind the West, let the Empire State make the decisions."

The conflict of views which reigned in various matters was based on lives and environments which had been vastly separated. The time of some of the members of the Board had to depend on what was left from other duties—husbands, children, servants, charities, church entertainments, shopping. To me the cause was not a hobby, not a mere filler in a whirl of many engagements, not something that could wait on this or that mood, but a living inspiration. It came first in my waking consciousness and was my last thought as I fell asleep at night.

I was always willing to present my facts to experts and abide by their superior knowledge, and I gave every consideration to the suggestions of the Board. But I was no paper president. Experience had given me a judgment which entitled me to a certain amount of freedom.

of action, and I could not well observe the dictates of people who did not know my subject as well as I did

June 12, 1928, I resigned the presidency of the League. Because the majority of the Directors were against this, and because I wanted to make it easier for Mrs. Robertson-Jones to take over, I stayed on the Board and continued to edit the *Review*.

But the divergence of opinions rapidly crystallized in the next few months. This had to be pondered upon and wisely dealt with. The situation was going to mean constant friction, and the League might easily disintegrate into a dying, static thing. In any event, internal discord was abhorrent. I began to ask myself whether I could pass over the *Review*, which for eleven years had been a vital part of my own being.

Then came a meeting at which the question of the editorship arose. For the first time friend opposed friend. Three voted against me, the other nine were for me. But my mind was now made up. I could fight outside enemies but not those who had been my fellow-workers, I would give complete freedom to others in order to obtain a new freedom for myself. Therefore, I surrendered the *Review* to the League as its private property. I have been sorry that this step was necessary, because the magazine changed from being a national and international medium for the expression of ideas and became merely a house organ. However, I trust that some day it will be possible to broaden its scope of usefulness once more.

The clinic, which had recently been treated rather like an orphan, still remained intact. No one in the League had ever paid any attention to it, and the doctors on the committee had been too busy with their own practices. I felt it was my responsibility, and belonged to me personally. It was an interesting angle on my own psychology. I did not regret the theoretical part of the movement going into other hands, but I would have been traitor to all that had been entrusted to me had I yielded the clinic to women who had shown themselves incapable of the understanding and sympathy required in its operation.

One of the most distressing aspects of the impasse was that members of the organization had to forswear one to choose another, and thus I hated Juliet Rublee, Frances Ackermann, and Mrs. Walter Timme came with me unhesitatingly. So, too, did Kate Hepburn, Mrs.

Day, and Dr William H Garth, the only minister on the Board, a forthright man who always spoke his mind

Dr Cooper was ready either to go with the clinic or keep on with the League in the field if I thought he could be of most use there. It seemed to me few in the country could fill his place in speaking to the profession and, consequently, I advised him to continue with the latter.

Anne Kennedy had been loyal, done her job well, served a valuable purpose. She asked whether I would approve her affiliating herself with the Holland-Rantos Company. Someone was badly needed in the manufacturing realm who was at one with our policies, who could help to instill pride in quality into the contraceptive business. Although I knew she did not like the commercial atmosphere and it would be a definite sacrifice for her, it was an excellent choice, and I was sure that any firm she was with would hold fast to ethical standards.

Mrs Delafield called me up and I went to see her. "They've telephoned me three or four times this very day. I've refused to answer until I talked with you. What do you want me to do?"

I asked her a counter-question. "What do you want? You must go as your heart tells you."

"Well," she replied, "I realize you will now require only professionals—doctors, nurses, social workers, people who know politics—perhaps I could be of more use in the work with which I am familiar."

Thus the matter was settled.

There are many ways by which the same goal may be reached, and as a rule diverse ones must be tried out in order to find the best. I still believed we were all aiming towards this, although not seeing eye to eye on procedure.

I felt very decidedly that the future of the movement was like that of a growing child. You might guide its first faltering steps, but unless you let it run and fall it never could develop its own strength. The younger generation might need a little pushing and prodding now and then, but I was confident that eventually they were going to build toward a sound civilization.

As things recede in time they become of less and less importance. One of my absolute theories is that any movement which has been based on freedom, as this had been, is like a live cell, there is a biology of ideas as there is a biology of cells, and each goes through a process

of evolution. The parent cell splits and the new entities in their turn divide and divide again. Instead of indicating breakdown, it is a sign of health, endless energy is spent trying to keep together forces which should be distinct. Each cell is fulfilling its mission in this separation, which in point of fact is no separation at all. Cohesion is maintained until in the end the whole is a vast mosaic cleaving together in union and strength.