

# Divine Sex, Happy Marriage, Regenerated Nation: Marie Stopes's Marital Manual *Married Love* and the Making of a Best-Seller, 1918–1955

ALEXANDER C. T. GEPPERT

*Department of History and Civilization  
European University Institute*

Marie Stopes is a bloody nuisance. She worries the life and soul out of me about Birth Control . . . , and seems to have nothing to do but bounce about the earth, shoving her nose into what doesn't concern her. Too much energy and not enough sense.

St. John Ervine, Secretary for the Society of Authors

## I

IN DECEMBER 1929, advertisements in several major British journals announced the publication of *Mother England: A Contemporary History Self-Written by Those Who Have Had No Historian* (figs. 1 and 2).<sup>1</sup> This rather unusual book, bound in blue cloth with a gilt design, quickly found an audience although by no means commercial success: H. G. Wells called it “a most striking and useful book” and writer and journalist Arnold Bennett found it “rather awful—in the right sense.” *Mother*

I would like to express sincere gratitude to Judith Walkowitz for her expert and critical but benevolent comments on various earlier versions of this article. I also wish to thank the participants of the British History-Works-in-Progress Workshop and the European History Seminar at Johns Hopkins University, the Kolloquium zur Frauen-und Geschlechtergeschichte at Bielefeld University, and everyone else who commented on a draft, especially John Brewer, Ute Daniel, Mary Fissell, Till Kössler, Lara Kriegel, Jan Paxton, Josh Pollack, Jay Shah, Gabrielle Spiegel, Bernd Weisbrod, and the three anonymous reviewers of the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* for their careful criticisms and valuable suggestions. The epigraph is taken from Ervine's letter dated May 22, 1941, University of California at Santa Barbara, Department of Special Collections, Marie Carmichael Stopes Collection, XXVII.

<sup>1</sup>Marie Stopes, ed., *Mother England: A Contemporary History Self-Written by Those Who Have Had No Historian* (London, 1929).

[*Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1998, vol. 8, no. 3]

© 1998 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved. 1043-4070/98/0803-0002\$02.00

**MOTHER ENGLAND**  
**A CONTEMPORARY HISTORY**      Price 10 6

Self-written by those who have had no historian.  
 Edited by

**MARIE C. STOPES, D.Sc. Lond., Ph.D., F.L.S., etc.**

"... should leave him furiously thinking. It is a book to read."—Richard King in the *Tatler*.

"Rather awful—in the right sense."—Arnold Bennett.

"A terrible book. . . . You are a brave woman."—Robert Blatchford.

"A most striking and useful book."—H. G. Wells.

"Is a more powerful comment on conditions prevailing among large numbers of the mothers of this country than any official reports or unofficial propaganda so far made available to the public."—*Yorkshire Post*.

**BALE & DANIELSSON, LTD., 83-91, Great Titchfield Street, W.1**

FIG. 1 From the Department of Special Collections, University of California at Santa Barbara, Marie Carmichael Stopes Collection, V/7.

**Mother England**  
**A CONTEMPORARY HISTORY**  
 Edited by **MARIE C. STOPES**

---

"Rather awful—in the right sense."—Arnold Bennett.

"A terrible book . . . you are a brave woman."—Robert Blatchford.

"A most striking and useful book."—H. G. Wells

"I congratulate you heartily on the great work you are doing."—Sir William Arbuthnot Lane.

"It is a book to read."—Richard King in "The Tatler."

"A more powerful comment on conditions prevailing among large numbers of the mothers of this country than any official reports or unofficial propaganda so far made available to the public."—*Yorkshire Post*.

Gold-tooled cover 10/6 net. Pp. viii + 206

*A peculiar interest attaches to the two pages of items under "Doctor" and to "Maternal Mortality" in the Index.*

---

CONTRACEPTION (Birth Control) The Standard Textbook.  
 2nd Edition. 15/-

---

**JOHN BALE, SONS & DANIELSSON LTD.**  
 83-91 Great Titchfield Street, London, W.1

FIG. 2 *Eugenics Review* 22 (1930-31): 160

*England* was bound to draw some public attention on account of its redactor, the notorious birth control advocate and sex-advice writer, Dr. Marie Carmichael Stopes (1880–1958). What made the book so unusual, however, was less the person of Stopes than the contents of her work: a collection of approximately 180 letters from working-class mothers, all beginning with “Dear Dr. Stopes.”<sup>2</sup> Dedicated to those “who are expected to be the mothers of an imperial race,” *Mother England* focused on the plight of overburdened working-class mothers who desperately begged for “some advice how to prevent any more little ones coming,” thus linking the alleviation of poverty and the indispensability of birth control. In addition to these letters, the compilation included a conclusion by Stopes herself as well as a very detailed index as an “interesting guide to this Inferno,” ranging from “A,” for “Abortifacients, high price of” to “Y” for “Young couple, alternatives of death or abstinence.”<sup>3</sup> In a short preface Stopes presented her book as part of a wider enterprise, as a chapter of “a true history of the common people [that] has never yet been written.” According to her, these letters had to be regarded as an authentic mirror of another world hitherto ignored by history and society. They presented a “self-written record of the dumb class of working mothers of whose lives history has taken no cognizance” but who had at least written to her “as a friend.”<sup>4</sup>

*Mother England* was only a preliminary endpoint of Marie Stopes’s publications about modern sexuality.<sup>5</sup> While Stopes now presented herself as a historian whose task was to help give voice to the silent, she had previously claimed to have actually changed history through the publication of her book *Married Love* in 1918. This guide to sex and marriage had, in Stopes’s own words, “crashed into English society like a bomb-shell,” making her indisputably a celebrity known throughout the world

<sup>2</sup>This genre had been pioneered by the Women’s Cooperative Guild; see Margaret L. Davies, ed., *Maternity: Letters from Working-Women Collected by the Women’s Co-operative Guild* (1915; New York, 1978). The writers of the 160 letters contained in *Maternity*, however, were not just average working-class mothers but mostly experienced activists working for a political purpose, who had not written on their own initiative but, rather, had answered a questionnaire.

<sup>3</sup>Stopes, ed., *Mother England*, pp. 18, vi, 192, 206. In an advertisement for the second edition of the book, readers of the *Eugenics Review* were even referred to what was thought to be their special field of concern: “A peculiar interest attaches to the two pages of items under ‘Doctor’ and to ‘Maternal Mortality’ in the Index” (see fig. 2). Compare also *Eugenics Review* 21 (1929–30): 313.

<sup>4</sup>Stopes, ed., *Mother England*, p. v.

<sup>5</sup>Stopes published one more book about contraception, *Birth Control Today: A Practical Handbook for Those Who Want to Be Their Own Masters in This Vital Matter* (London, 1934). However, for reasons of practicability and space this rather insignificant book will not be discussed in this article.

for her works on sex, and leading the mothers whose letters were published in *Mother England* to write to her.<sup>6</sup> But *Mother England* differed very markedly from Stopes's earlier publications. In order to create a reading public and promote herself as an uncontested expert, Stopes had employed a number of strategies to address different audiences, including the general public, the working classes, and the medical and legal professions. The letters in *Mother England* had an almost sociological objective, for they were intended to enlighten their educated middle-class readership about the deplorable state of affairs among the lower orders of society. Stopes's career by no means followed a simple straight line: her writings inspired bitter reactions; they provoked a backlash from the medical profession; and finally they can be regarded as revealing a struggle over power and authority in interwar Britain, especially with medical practitioners, who deplored, as one of *their* critics put it, "the incursion of a mere D.Sc. and Ph.D. into the august and sacred realms of medical Mumbo-Jumbo."<sup>7</sup>

When historians have tried to assess Stopes's powerful role in shaping the discourses on sexuality in interwar Britain, they have tended to focus on her personality and ideas as a birth control pioneer. They have also used correspondents' letters to her as a transparent archival key to explain contemporary sexual practices and popular views of the period. In contrast, I do not intend to attribute the success of her books, *Married Love* in particular, to Stopes's creative qualities. Nor do I wish to use *Married Love* and some of her later writings as a tool for a preliminary reconstruction of contemporary sexual attitudes.<sup>8</sup> Rather, I will analyze

<sup>6</sup> Marie Stopes, *Married Love: A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties* (1918; 24th ed., London, 1941); all citations refer to the 4th ed. (London, 1918) unless stated otherwise. Before *Married Love*, Stopes had already published in such diverse fields as science, literature, and travel. For a useful but incomplete ersatz bibliography, see Peter Eaton and Marilyn Warnick, *Marie Stopes: A Checklist of Her Writings* (London, 1977); Marie Stopes, *Marriage in My Time* (London, 1935), p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> See George Rees, "Let Joy Be Unconfined," *Egyptian Gazette* (June 2, 1932), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> In connection with an analysis of Stopes's extensive correspondence such an attempt has been made mainly by Ellen M. Holtzman, "Marriage, Sexuality, and Contraception in the British Middle Class, 1918-1939: The Correspondence of Marie Stopes" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1982), and a short summary, "The Pursuit of Married Love: Women's Attitudes toward Sexuality and Marriage in Great Britain, 1918-1939," *Journal of Social History* 16 (1982): 39-51; Claire Davey, "Birth Control in Britain during the Inter-war Years: Evidence from the Stopes Correspondence," *Journal of Family History* 13 (1988): 329-45; Lesley A. Hall, *Hidden Anxieties: Male Sexuality, 1900-1950* (Cambridge, 1991), and "Impotent Ghosts from No Man's Land, Flappers' Boyfriends, or Cryptopatriarchs? Men, Sex and Social Change in 1920s Britain," *Social History* 21 (1996): 54-70; Evelyn Faulkner, "'Powerless to Prevent Him': Attitudes of Married Working-Class Women in the 1920s and the Rise of Sexual Power," *Local Population Studies* 49 (1992): 51-61.

the reasons for the success of this and others of her works by regarding them as commodities with a life history of their own, and thus as a part of public print culture.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, I hope to raise new questions about the link between a best-selling product and images of professional expertise. How did Stopes create a best-seller out of *Married Love*? In what way did she attempt to position herself as an expert—as a recognized and therefore trustworthy birth control authority with privileged access to special knowledge—and promote this expertise publicly? How did Stopes make and remake her image as well as her career in the eleven years after the book's publication and beyond? As well as providing insight into the making of this best-seller that established Stopes's significant role in the controversies concerning sexuality in interwar Britain, the analysis of hitherto overlooked correspondence, advertisements, and review articles casts new light on her and her publishers' careful attempts to construct and to cultivate Stopes's image as "the first philosopher of contraception."<sup>10</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century, books were considered highly commercialized industrial products rather than luxury goods. Nonetheless, they present a special case for modern theories of consumer culture, consumption, and capitalism. Arjun Appadurai has argued that an object's commodity status is historically and culturally contingent, but his model presents challenges when applied to books produced in the early twentieth century. To borrow his terminology, as so-called commodities by destination (i.e., objects intended by their producers principally for exchange), the commodity phase of a book's social life begins at the very moment of its birth. Books do not have to move into this commodity state as other objects do; they are already in

<sup>9</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 3–63, esp. p. 41. For an introduction to the ever growing literature on consumption, see Jean-Christophe Agnew, "Coming Up for Air: Consumer Culture in Historical Perspective," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London, 1993), pp. 19–39; for a synopsis of current developments in the historiography of sexuality, cf. Franz X. Eder, "Die Historisierung des sexuellen Subjekts: Sexualitätsgeschichte zwischen Essentialismus und sozialem Konstruktivismus," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 5 (1994): 311–27.

<sup>10</sup> These materials have been made available primarily through the auspices of the Department of Special Collections of the University of California at Santa Barbara. Though the bulk of its Marie Carmichael Stopes Collection consists of printed material, it also contains a certain amount of correspondence and manuscript material. Hereafter, I will refer to this collection as UCSB/DSS/MS, citing the box number before the folder; all sources cited by permission. Quotation in K., "Dr. Marie Stopes' Masterpiece," *New Generation* 3 (1924): 78.

it.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, since books intend to sell knowledge about the world (in whatever form), they distinguish themselves by their relation to knowledge in general. Unlike other commodities, there is an overlap between the knowledge that goes into the production of a book and the knowledge that goes into appropriately consuming it. For books, the two contrasting poles of knowledge (as Appadurai calls them) at the production and at the consumption ends almost melt together. Thus, meaning can be less freely ascribed, for it is always connected with the actual product. Nonetheless, at the same time meanings did not and do not stay stable in a text; their reception is obviously fluid.<sup>12</sup>

Choosing such a perspective for the analysis of a marital manual and best-seller like *Married Love* forces one to seek the reasons for its cultural influence and commercial success. What kind of knowledge did the book offer its readers and for what reason was this knowledge considered so attractive? How was *Married Love* different from the innumerable pamphlets on familial matters existing at that time? In what way did the medical profession ultimately react, and how did Stopes herself respond to their reaction? From this viewpoint, *Married Love* proves to be a fine example of the production and commercialization of an influential commodity whose shifting meanings (and their practical effects) its author could not completely control, in spite of skillful attempts through professional business and marketing strategies.

Five years after the publication of *Married Love*, the anonymous author of a review article in the *Hospital and Health Review*, frankly entitled "More about Sex," saw "some danger of having too many books about sex and its problems, and the right conduct of marriage both physiologically and physically." Despite his anxiety, this writer carefully tried not to "derogate from the importance of the subject." Moreover, he had to admit that there was in postwar Britain an "unquestionable need" for simple commonsense instruction on these subjects, the extent of which was suggested by the "very large scale of Dr. Stopes's books."<sup>13</sup> While this reviewer seems to have assumed a direct match between supply and demand, this explanatory presupposition itself must be questioned. Is the rather simplistic argument valid that the book just appeared in the right place at the right time or are there possibly more complex reasons for its stunning success?

<sup>11</sup> Appadurai, pp. 13–16. Conversely, books can move out of this state. For example, by the mid-1950s, *Married Love* had left this phase to become a "historical source." While the above-mentioned studies treat it as such, this article rather understands the book as a commodity with a "social life" and hence attempts to write its "cultural biography."

<sup>12</sup> Appadurai, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> "More about Sex," *Hospital and Health Review* (October 1923), pp. 379–80.

Recently depicted as being as much a canonical text for sexuality as the Bible is for religion,<sup>14</sup> the inordinate influence of *Married Love* facilitated Stopes's later career. Likewise, it remains to be examined not simply whether, but also how *Married Love* might have produced such a demand. As this article demonstrates, the interwar period involved three significant transformations: first, nonfiction books such as *Married Love* became mass-selling commodities; second, as they were commodified, these works grew increasingly dependent on a system of extensive publicity and advertisements; and finally, the rise of popular nonfiction contributed to the refashioning of the role of the "expert." In this regard, a comparative analysis of a second work by Stopes—the textbook *Contraception* (1923)—and its marketing strategies promises to be instructive.<sup>15</sup> The more specialized approach of this work challenged medical doctors, who had barely noticed *Married Love* but quickly attacked *Contraception*, which they saw as a threat to their authority. This difference in their reaction was apparently only a symptom of a broader historical development in the professionalization of the medical guild: an outsider, Stopes, had found a field whose affiliation to medicine and the medical profession was still highly contested and successfully drew attention to this, if she did not in fact close the gap. Indirectly and possibly unwittingly, Stopes's work finally served to further the medicalization of birth control and contributed to the increasing codification of sexuality at the beginning of the twentieth century.

## II

With the publication of *Married Love: A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties* in March 1918, Marie Stopes became extremely influential both as an advocate of birth control and as an adviser on a whole range of sexual questions.<sup>16</sup> At the somewhat expensive price of

<sup>14</sup>Roy Porter and Lesley Hall, *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650–1950* (New Haven, CT, 1995), p. 5.

<sup>15</sup>Marie Stopes, *Contraception (Birth Control): Its Theory, History, and Practice: A Manual for the Medical and Legal Professions* (London, 1923). Unless otherwise stated, all citations refer to the first edition.

<sup>16</sup>There is no lack of mostly popularly oriented biographical writing about the personage of Dr. Marie Stopes; see, in chronological order, William Heinemann, "Men and Women of To-Day—Professor Marie C. Stopes," *World's Work* (January 1914), pp. 129, 133; Aylmer Maude, *The Authorized Life of Marie C. Stopes* (London, 1924), and *Marie Stopes: Her Work and Play* (London, 1933); Harold Begbie, *Marie Stopes: Her Mission and Her Personality. An Impression* (London, 1927); Keith Briant, *Marie Stopes: A Biography* (London, 1962); Ruth Hall, *Passionate Crusader: The Life of Marie Stopes* (New York, 1977); June Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution* (Boston, 1992).

five shillings, the first edition contained only 133 pages.<sup>17</sup> It was bound in maroon cloth and had gilt letters on its spine. *Married Love* began with a preface by Dr. Jessie Murray, one of the first British psychoanalysts, and with letters by Professor E. H. Starling, a physiologist at the University of London, and Father Stanislaus St. John, a Roman Catholic priest. While the first three editions did not contain any advertisements, from the fourth edition onward, one page of press notices about *Married Love* appeared at the end of the book with favorable quotations from well-known journals such as the *English Review*, the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *Cambridge Magazine*. Once she had become notorious for her advocacy of birth control, St. John's letter and Stopes's reply were withdrawn from a revised and expanded seventh edition in May 1919.<sup>18</sup> The title page carefully listed all of Stopes's academic degrees and fellowships: "Doctor of Science, London; Doctor of Philosophy, Munich; Fellow of University College, London; Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and the Linnean Society, London." However, Stopes and her publisher withheld from her readers that she did not hold her doctoral degree in medicine, but rather in palaeobotany. Stopes's reliance on the authority of personal experience instead of academically credited medical expertise proved to be the basic dilemma of her career—and of her book's career as well—for it both contributed to the book's success and simultaneously undermined its credibility in professional circles.

*Married Love* quickly became a tremendous commercial success. It sold over two thousand hardback copies in the first two weeks, went through six editions, and sold more than seventeen thousand copies in the first year alone. The small original publishing house, A. C. Fifield & Co. in London, was soon overwhelmed. As sales exceeded the capacity of the firm, the rights were transferred to G. P. Putnam's Sons. By 1925, after thirty-nine reprints, sales of *Married Love* had passed the half-million mark. It far outsold popular fiction of that era, and became one

<sup>17</sup>For instance, the average industrial wage for men in 1924 amounted to less than £3 (60 shillings) per week; see John Burnett, *A History of the Cost of Living* (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 299–304.

<sup>18</sup>Stopes had sent the manuscript to Father St. John without knowing him personally. See the last sentences of her "Reply to Father St. John, S.J.": "I thank you very sincerely for your kindness to a stranger, and remain, always yours respectfully, Marie Carmichael Stopes" (Stopes, *Married Love*, 6th ed. [n. 6 above], p. xvii). Although the priest had given permission for his letter to be used in her manual, Stopes did not inform him that she intended to publish it together with her reply almost as an imprimatur at the beginning of the first edition. St. John was immediately reprimanded by his superiors, who placed the book on the *Index Expurgatorius*, but Stopes, despite his protests, continued using the letter as a testimonial for several editions; see R. Hall, p. 163; Eaton and Warnick (n. 6 above), p. 23.



**W I S E P A R E N T H O O D.**  
By MARIE STOPES, D.Sc., Ph.D.  
3s. 6d. net (postage extra).  
Medical Schools generally have omitted Training on Birth Control  
so that many Doctors lack the knowledge to advise  
their Patients.  
"WISE PARENTHOOD" is the text-book on the subject and  
the first scientific discussion of the various practical methods. It  
should be read by every Medical Man and Woman.  
"It should be read, as it is intended, by married people."—THE  
JOURNAL OF STATE MEDICINE.  
At all Booksellers or direct from  
G. P. Putnam's, 24, Bedford-street, Strand, W.C. 2.

FIG. 3 *Lancet* (September 9, 1922), p. i

of the first modern bestsellers. By 1955, 1,032,250 copies had been printed in twenty-eight editions, the last four after the Second World War. In the meantime, the text had undergone several revisions and had been enlarged from 133 to 191 pages; the book's twenty-second edition contained no fewer than eight pages of advertisements.<sup>19</sup>

*Married Love's* overwhelming success was, however, the exception rather than the rule in Marie Stopes's career. Of her many later books, only *Wise Parenthood*, its companion volume on birth control, turned out to be a similar best-seller (figs. 3 and 4). Published only eight months later, and even shorter than *Married Love*, it sold half a million copies by 1930, went into twenty-five editions and sold altogether more than 700,000 copies by 1951. It contained a short introductory note by Arnold Bennett which stressed the social significance of information on birth regulation for "millions and tens of millions of potential parents," vainly crying for "sound advice" despite widespread opposition. Like

<sup>19</sup>While "best-seller" had been a common term in the United States since the 1890s, it was not until the 1920s that the term was widely used; Billie Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (Basingstoke, 1988), pp. 3, 41. Additionally, *Married Love* was translated into fourteen different languages. Special English editions were published in Australia, Canada, India, and the United States; see Eaton and Warnick, pp. 23–26. Because of a federal ban prohibiting the importation of obscene matter, publication of the complete U.K. edition of *Married Love* was not allowed in the United States before April 1931. By that time, approximately 715,000 copies had already been sold in Great Britain. See "Book Many Endorsed Held to Be Obscene," *New York Times* (April 23, 1921), p. 11. For other articles, see also (January 19, 1924), p. 6; (April 7, 1931), p. 20; (April 8, 1931), p. 22; and (May 1, 1931), p. 25.

**W I S E P A R E N T H O O D.**

**THE HANDBOOK ON BIRTH  
CONTROL FOR MARRIED PEOPLE.**

**By MARIE STOPES, D.Sc., Ph.D.**

Author of "Married Love," "Radiant Motherhood,"  
"Contraception," etc.

12th Edition, Revised and Enlarged. 3s. 6d. net (post 3d.)

WISE PARENTHOOD is specially suited for Doctors to recommend to enquiring patients. Written in clear non-technical language, it meets the æsthetic difficulties while at the same time giving practical and scientific advice to all those who are interested in the subject.

Descriptive circulars of this and Dr. Stopes's other books can be had on application.

G. P. Putnam's Sons, Ltd., 24, Bedford Street, W.C. 2.

FIG. 4 *Medical Times* 53 (1925): 103

*Married Love*, *Wise Parenthood* was expanded and revised several times.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout her career, Stopes capitalized on the success story of *Married Love*. Although she had rather self-confidently written to the American birth control advocate Margaret Sanger in 1915 that she was just finishing a book on the "realities of sex" and the intimate marriage relation which would "electrify" England, it turned out to be quite difficult to find a publisher. A. C. Fifield finally decided to take it on in 1918. Stopes wrote with satisfaction in the preface to the fourth edition: "At first the publisher started with a modest edition of 2,000, not knowing what sort of reception the book would have. Now that people not only need the book but really *want* it we hope to be able to keep it in print."<sup>21</sup>

Stopes also publicized her own unsuccessful marriage as a personal, even intimate motive for writing *Married Love*, a story that all her biographers have willingly accepted and historians have reiterated ever since. Whether true or not, the generally accepted drama of the tragic autobiographical origins of *Married Love* was either convincing enough or so

<sup>20</sup> Marie Stopes, *Wise Parenthood: A Sequel to "Married Love": A Book for Married People* (London, 1918), p. vi. The first four editions contained only forty-two pages. This was more than doubled in subsequent editions, published until 1952; starting with the fifth edition, the book provided three pages of recommended readings and ten pages of advertisements (Eaton and Warnick, pp. 26–29. Hall, *Hidden Anxieties* [n. 8 above], pp. 7–10).

<sup>21</sup> Stopes, *Married Love*, 4th ed. (London, 1918), p. xiii.

well promoted by Stopes and others that it soon became an unanalyzed narrative pattern, a necessary part of the (hi)story of her book as well as of her whole career.<sup>22</sup> According to this self-fashioned drama, Stopes's own marital problems had been the final and decisive factor in her choosing to write this book. Allegedly entirely inexperienced in sexual theory and practice at the age of thirty-one, she married Reginald Ruggles Gates, a eugenicist and fellow botanist, in 1911. Some years later, worried that she had not yet become pregnant, "she approached the problem as a true scholar and spent six months in the British Museum reading almost every book on sex in English, French, and German."<sup>23</sup> Her reading led her to conclude that her marriage had never been consummated. On these grounds, the marriage was annulled in November 1916, when she was thirty-six. Marie Stopes claimed to have written *Married Love* in order to save other women from her own anguish and the unhappiness she had suffered through a lack of sexual knowledge. "In my first marriage" she wrote, "I paid such a terrible price for sex-ignorance that I feel that knowledge gained at such a cost should be placed at the service of humanity. In this little book average, healthy, mating creatures will find the key to happiness which should be the portion of each. It has already guided some to happiness, and I hope it may save some others years of heartache and blind questioning in the dark."<sup>24</sup>

Ultimately this "little book" occasioned tremendous public response. Soon Stopes's very name developed into a metonym for sex advice, legitimized erotic pleasure, and contraception. "This book is written by one

<sup>22</sup>For example Briant, pp. 66–80; R. Hall, pp. 89–108; Eaton and Warnick, p. 13; Holtzman, "The Pursuit of Married Love" (n. 8 above), p. 39; John Stevenson, *British Society, 1914–45* (Harmondsworth, 1984), p. 154; Lewis Sawin, "Alfred Sutro, Marie Stopes, and her *Vectia*," *Theatre Research International* 10 (1985): 59; Davey (n. 8 above); Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1880*, 2d ed. (London, 1989), pp. 189–90; Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London, 1990), p. 368; Richard A. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1990), p. 178; L. Hall, *Hidden Anxieties*, pp. 7–11; Roy Porter, "Is Foucault Useful for Understanding Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Sexuality?" *Contention* 1 (1991): 70. Also, the most recent publications about Stopes seem to have accepted this tale unquestioningly. See, e.g., Margaret Jackson, *The Real Facts of Life: Feminism and the Politics of Sexuality, 1850–1940* (London, 1994), p. 130; Porter and Hall, pp. 268, 282. However, Rose (pp. 77–82) is somewhat more cautious.

<sup>23</sup>Holtzman, "The Pursuit of Married Love," p. 39. This information is apparently based on Stopes's first biography—by her compliant friend and lover Aylmer Maude—which was virtually dictated by Stopes herself in order to gain public support. Stopes also paid all the costs, including the advertising; see Maude, *The Authorized Life of Marie C. Stopes*, pp. 71–72.

<sup>24</sup>Stopes, *Married Love*, 1st ed., p. xiii.

whose name is now a household word,” one reviewer stated a few years later.<sup>25</sup> People from all social classes wrote to Stopes requesting advice on marital and sexual problems. Like Havelock Ellis (1859–1939) and the Dutch gynecologist Theodore Hendrik van de Velde (1873–1937), she tried to reevaluate female sexuality, particularly for middle-class women, emphasizing the importance of sexual pleasure and satisfaction within marriage. By arguing that women had a right to this satisfaction as sexual beings, she redefined female expectations and added—as Ellen M. Holtzman has put it—“another dimension to women’s life in the home.”<sup>26</sup>

Stopes convinced her correspondents that sex was something they would have to work at if they wanted to enjoy it. She certainly changed attitudes and helped to shape expectations of female capacity for sexual pleasure by giving very concrete physical and psychological advice. To Stopes as an “expert in the technique of married life,” a feminist reviewer noted later, “the sex act between married persons is in itself, and quite apart from the procreative intention, a sanctified and sanctifying process of psychological and physiological value to the persons who perform it.”<sup>27</sup> But by trying to divorce sexuality (as a form of pleasure) from its reproductive effects, and simultaneously preaching sexual fulfillment for both partners, she also created a new pressure, a previously unknown demand to achieve a pleasurable and satisfactory sex life, thus raising standards of performance for men and women. Moreover, Stopes tried to translate her philosophy into direct action. In order to protect the health of women and to control “racial purity” by giving women fertility advice, she opened her first birth control center in 1921, the so-called Mothers’ Clinic, in Holloway, an impoverished working-class district in North London. According to Stopes, eight years later its midwives and nurses had taught ten thousand female patients the use of birth control appliances; by 1937 this number had increased to twenty-six thousand “individual poor women.”<sup>28</sup> Stopes carefully tried to maintain her proj-

<sup>25</sup> John S. Fairbairn, *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology of the British Empire* 34 (1927): 562–65, quotation at 562.

<sup>26</sup> Holtzman, “The Pursuit of Married Love,” p. 42.

<sup>27</sup> M.D.S., “More Plain Speaking,” *Woman’s Leader* (July 20, 1923), p. 196.

<sup>28</sup> The clinic’s service was advertised under the catchy slogan “Joyous and deliberate motherhood—a sure light in our racial darkness.” The words “birth control” appeared superimposed on a lit lantern. See emblem in UCSB/DSS/MSC: II/10. Looking not at the rhetoric and ideals of the birth control movement, however, but instead at its practical impact on working-class women’s lives, Deborah A. Cohen (“Private Lives in Public Spaces: Marie Stopes, the Mothers’ Clinics and the Practice of Contraception,” *History Workshop Journal* 35 [1993]: 95–116) has argued that the policies and practices of the Mothers’ Clinics were by no means consistent with Stopes’s eugenic ideals. In case of doubt, Stopes always attached a higher value to individual women’s health and happiness than to the wel-

ect's popularity by personally answering each letter she received. She soon had to hire a secretary to keep up with the huge correspondence resulting from the amazing success of her book. However, since a statistical study indicated that more than half of the correspondents named the reading of *Married Love* as their initial impetus to write to her, it seems reasonable to look more closely at the actual commodity before considering its influence on individual consumers.<sup>29</sup>

III

What exactly appealed to the vast number of British readers? Most of the letters addressed to Stopes concerned a matter only briefly alluded to on one or two pages of the book's original edition—that of birth control. In later editions, this part was considerably extended. Birth control was such a provocative subject that Stopes answered concerns about it in the majority of her works. She also elaborated the previous hints on contraception more concretely in *Wise Parenthood*, which was published as a practical birth control supplement a few months after *Married Love*. This treatise provided diagrams of the reproductive organs and emphasized female control of fertility through the combined use of a rubber cervical cap and a soluble quinine pessary.<sup>30</sup> A third marital manual, *Radiant Motherhood: A Book for Those Who Are Creating the Future* (1920), con-

---

fare of "the race." For numbers and quotation see Marie Stopes to the town clerk of St. Pancras Town Hall, March 16, 1937, UCSB/DSS/MS: II/10.

<sup>29</sup>Richard A. Soloway, *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877–1930* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1982), p. 213. A survey of three hundred letters written to Stopes from 1918 to 1929 found that 246 of the correspondents gave some indication of their initial impetus to write. In 154 cases (63 percent) this had been the reading of *Married Love*. Christopher Stopes-Roe, "Statistical Appendix," in *Dear Dr. Stopes: Sex in the 1920s*, ed. Ruth Hall (London, 1978), pp. 215–17. Despite a certain methodical weakness, Claire Davey has demonstrated, however, that working-class women at least were much more likely to have heard of Stopes through her articles in the popular weekly newspaper *John Bull* than through her books. See Davey, pp. 335, 343. For comments in correspondence from ordinary readers, see Lesley A. Hall, "Uniting Science and Sensibility: Marie Stopes and the Narratives of Marriages in the 1920s," in *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers, 1889–1939*, ed. Angela Ingram and Daphne Patai (Chapel Hill, NC, 1993), pp. 124–25. She quotes extracts from letters, e.g., "may God prosper your noble work. . . . I felt as though I was having a heart to heart chat with you" or "your sex owes you a deep debt of gratitude for your heroic frankness on the subject."

<sup>30</sup>Stopes, *Wise Parenthood* (n. 20 above), pp. 26–42. Small, widely and cheaply circulated, *A Letter to Working Mothers: On How to Have Healthy Children and Avoid Weakening Pregnancies* (London, 1919; 15th ed. retitled *Practical Birth Control* [London, 1947]) can be regarded as Stopes's direct equivalent written for a working-class audience and its specific requirements in which all references to mutual sexual fulfillment and romantic sex-love were excluded.

**A NEW BOOK BY THE AUTHOR OF**  
**“MARRIED LOVE.”**

**RADIANT**  
**MOTHERHOOD**

*A BOOK FOR THOSE WHO ARE CREATING THE FUTURE.*

By **MARIE CARMICHAEL STOPES,**  
 D.Sc., Ph.D.

6s. net ; by post 6s. 6d.

“A valuable, simple, and safe guide through the perplexities which are in store for most married people, and which, without instruction, they generally have to solve in some way by groping and often at the cost of unhappiness. . . . The book is addressed in reality nearly as largely to husbands as to wives, and its chapters will in many cases provoke the gratitude of both by explaining them to each other.”—*Manchester Guardian.*

**G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS, Ltd., 24, Bedford Street,**  
**London, W.C. 2.**

FIG. 5 *Lancet* (October 30, 1920), p. 2

centrated on prenatal influences on the child and explained the distresses and physical difficulties of the young mother- and father-to-be (fig. 5). But primarily it eulogized the delights of conception, pregnancy, and the resulting “union of three.”<sup>31</sup>

To her reading public, Stopes always presented *Wise Parenthood* as a necessary sequel, rather unwillingly undertaken in response to popular demand for information about birth control augmented by the publication of *Married Love*. Yet she had it completed in 1917, before this “epoch-making” marriage manual was published at all.<sup>32</sup> The same topic was the subject of her first and only work explicitly intended to serve as a textbook for the medical and legal professions, *Contraception* (fig. 6).<sup>33</sup> As I will show below, this text—extensively advertised and widely reviewed—challenged the professionals it addressed and provoked harsh reactions. In epitomizing Stopes’s more systematic (i.e., “scientific”) at-

<sup>31</sup> Marie Stopes, *Radiant Motherhood: A Book for Those Who Are Creating the Future* (London, 1920); cf. in this context George Robb, “The Way of All Flesh: Degeneration, Eugenics, and the Gospel of Free Love,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6 (1996): 589–603.

<sup>32</sup> R. Hall, *Passionate Crusader* (n. 16 above), p. 148; L. Hall, “Impotent Ghosts” (n. 8 above), p. 55.

<sup>33</sup> Stopes, *Contraception* (n. 15 above).

**NECESSARY FOR ALL SERIOUS STUDENTS.**

**Price 12/6 net. Post free 13/3.**

# CONTRACEPTION

(BIRTH CONTROL).

ITS THEORY, HISTORY AND PRACTICE.

A Manual for the Medical and Legal Professions and all Social Workers.

20TH THOUSAND.

By **MARIE CARMICHAEL STOPES, D.Sc., Ph.D.,**  
*Fellow of University College, London.*

Author's Preface.

CONTENTS.

Introduction by Sir William Bayliss, F.R.S.

Introductory Notes by Sir James Barr, M.D., Dr. C. Rolleston,  
Dr. Jane Hawthorne, and "Obscurus."

Chapter	I.	The Problem To-day.
"	II.	Theoretical Desiderata—Satisfactory Contraceptives.
"	III.	Indications for Contraception.
"	IV.	Contraceptives in Use, Classified.
"	V.	Contraceptives in Use, Described and Discussed.
"	VI.	Contraceptives in Use, Described and Discussed (contd).
"	VII.	Contraceptives for Special Cases.
"	VIII.	Some Objections to Contraception Answered.
"	IX.	Early History of Family Limitation.
"	X.	Contraception in the Nineteenth Century.
"	XI.	Contraception in the Twentieth Century.
"	XII.	Contraception and the Law in England, France and America.
"	XIII.	Instruction in Medical Schools.
"	XIV.	Birth Control Clinics. Plates I. to IV.

*The Lancet* says: "Much of the evidence contained in the book is quite unobtainable elsewhere."

*Nature* says: "Dr. Marie Stopes has written a very good book on birth control . . . she compels agreement . . . the principal value of the volume lies in a careful and exhaustive discussion of the methods and technique of contraception. . . . Dr. Stopes' experience is so extensive that her opinions must necessarily carry weight. . . . Some such book as this had to be written, and this is very well written."

*The Medical Times* says: "The book is unique and marks a new era in literature germane on this subject . . . it affords a reasoned, sane and common-sense explanation of scientific birth control."

Sir **WILLIAM BAYLISS** says: "It cannot fail to be of real service."

Dr. **ROLLESTON** says: "I predict a great success for the work, and I wish to record my thanks to the author for her pioneer work in preventive medicine."

This book is the first manual on the subject, and is packed with both helpful and interesting matter and much that is new and noteworthy.

*Order from your Bookseller or direct from the Publishers:*

JUST PUBLISHED.

## "THE FIRST FIVE THOUSAND,"

Being the First Report of the  
First British Birth Control Clinic,

By Dr. **MARIE STOPES.**

Giving unique Statistical, Medical and other data about  
5,000 Birth Control cases, and containing new observations  
of the utmost importance to Medical Practitioners.

Paper, 2s. 6d. net. Post free 2s. 8d.

**JOHN BALE, SONS & DANIELSSON, LTD.**  
83-91 Great Titchfield Street, London, W.1.

tempts to focus on issues of contraception rather than on wider aspects of sexual behavior, *Contraception* continued the direction she had adopted with the publication of *Wise Parenthood*. But what precisely was so unusual about her first best-seller *Married Love*? Why did it produce such an explosive effect? How was the “bombshell” constructed?

Stopes herself later ascribed the overwhelming success of *Married Love* to her ability to anticipate a major social transformation and to wait patiently until the “time was ripe” to intervene publicly.<sup>34</sup> Rather than exploiting changes that had already taken place, her moment came, according to Stopes’s own account of the past, with the historical transition from the “Victorian marriage,” with its often high number of children and the women’s lack of “sound physiological knowledge of the fundamentals of sex,” to the “modern marriage” of postwar Britain. “Though my book *Married Love* was only published sixteen years ago,” she stated in 1935, “this Victorian tradition was then so prevalent that the main ideas in the book crashed into English society like a bombshell. Its explosively contagious main theme—that woman like man has the same physiological reaction, a reciprocal need for enjoyment and benefit from sex union in marriage distinct from the exercise of maternal functions—made Victorian husbands gasp.”<sup>35</sup> Stopes claimed indirectly that her book had actually triggered a movement toward the happy “marriage of to-day” with an improved and balanced sex life as its “central act.”

“Dedicated to young husbands [and by no means to wives!] and all those who are betrothed in love,” *Married Love* was what today would be considered consumer friendly. For its time it was highly explicit, especially in sexual matters and concerning physiological descriptions.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, *Married Love* was easy to read, to the point, and short enough to be finished in one evening. This best-seller mixed styles and genres: Although partially insinuating and tantalizingly oblique, *Married Love* was, on the one hand, a romantic, to some extent even mystical, examination of the emotional and spiritual aspects of love and marital sexuality. On the other hand, it tried to draw practical conclusions from scientific

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 315–17. Stopes used a similar argument concerning *Wise Parenthood* when she stated that time had been “ripe, indeed over-ripe,” for its publication. But here Stopes repeatedly averred in addition that she had only yielded to a public demand for enlightenment, since contraceptive physiology had “cried aloud to be treated scientifically” in view of the “light required by the millions needing to use contraception,” either for individual health reasons or in the “interests of the community” (ibid., p. 318).

<sup>35</sup>Stopes, *Marriage in My Time* (n. 6 above), pp. 40–49. Thus Stopes even spoke of “the essential difference in marriage to-day (in England that is) after the publication of *Married Love* and before it” (p. 64).

<sup>36</sup>Stopes, *Married Love* (n. 6 above); see esp. chap. 5, “Mutual Adjustment,” with its explicit description of male and female sexual organs, an explanation of actual sexual intercourse, and its celebration of simultaneous orgasms.



insights into natural “laws.” In order to describe the essential “physiology of our most profoundly disturbing functions” adequately, the author explained, “simple, direct and scientific language is necessary, though it may surprise those who are accustomed only to the hazy vagueness which has led to so much misapprehension of the truth.” Without giving details *Married Love* also approved of the use of artificial birth control, which was, even within the new marriage advice genre emerging since the late nineteenth century, still considered to be a radical divergence from common literary practice. As one historian has noted, Stopes’s message that sexual fulfillment for both partners was necessary to marriage, independent of reproduction, “clearly struck profound chords in her readers.” *Married Love* contains stories meant as examples, physiological instructions and above all, technical help in explaining what to do to find not only a “*via media* of mutual endurance, but a *via perfecta* of mutual joy” in sexual intercourse.<sup>37</sup> Its main argument is summed up by the author herself toward the end of the book:

Man, through prudery, through the custom of ignoring the woman’s side of marriage and considering his own whim as marriage law, has largely lost the art of stirring a chaste partner to physical love. He therefore deprives her of a glamour, the loss of which he deplures, for he feels a lack not only of romance and beauty, but of something higher which is mystically given as the result of the complete union. He blames his wife’s “coldness” instead of his own want of art. Then he seeks elsewhere for the things she could have given him had he known how to win them. And she, knowing that the shrine has been desecrated, is filled with righteous indignation, though generally as blind as he is to the true cause of what has occurred.<sup>38</sup>

While her final aim and the public justification for writing this book—apart from her own personal motivation—were to serve the state by increasing the joys of marriage and thus adding to the number of happy homes, Stopes drew her means of achieving this sociological goal from a scientific study of nature. Starting from a kind of universal principle with the very first sentence in the first chapter—“Every heart desires a mate”—Stopes believed that pure knowledge could suffice to change

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40, emphasis in original; for hints of birth control, see pp. 88–90; L. Hall, *Hidden Anxieties* (n. 8 above), pp. 66–67. Jackson has recently put forward a very valuable, explicitly feminist interpretation (*The Real Facts of Life* [n. 22 above], pp. 129–58); see also Hynes, (n. 22 above), pp. 366–69. Perhaps overstating the case, Hynes calls *Married Love* a “work of enormous importance in English cultural history” that shaped “post-war imaginations” (pp. 368–69).

<sup>38</sup> Stopes, *Married Love*, p. 104.

human behavior and to turn things for the better.<sup>39</sup> Only from a satisfactory physical relationship would a transcendental oneness, a sum greater than its parts, the key to an enduring happiness and a full life result. Completely (and properly) performed, ideal intercourse consisted of a triple consummation since it symbolized the “spiritual union,” gave “most intense, . . . *mutual* pleasure,” and could originate new life.<sup>40</sup>

The sexual difficulties that frequently arose even in young marriages, Stopes argued, were merely a consequence of male insensitivity. It was pure ignorance that led to “physical union without . . . spiritual results. . . . But about the much more fundamental and vital problems of sex, there is a lack of knowledge so abysmal and so universal that its mists and shadowy darkness have affected even the few who lead us, and who are prosecuting research in these subjects,” she complained.<sup>41</sup> Because they experienced a rather constant level of sexual desire, men seemed not to know of their female partners’ much more fluctuating needs. According to Stopes, this “woman’s ‘contrariness’ ” was an effect of what she called the “Law of Periodicity of Recurrence of desire in women” or—more simply—“sex tides in women.”<sup>42</sup> Although it is quite unclear how sexual desire was actually to be measured, Stopes claimed to have found, “after the most careful inquiries,” a regular wave of “woman’s sexuality” with sexual desire usually occurring in a monthly curve with its height around menstruation, and reaching a smaller peak in the middle of the month.<sup>43</sup> She illustrated this tendency with two charts: “The tops

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi. The harsh rejection of what Stopes thought abnormal is an oft-repeated pattern in her book. Both for those who have “never felt the fundamental yearning to form a part of that trinity which alone is the perfect expression of humanity” and for homosexuals, as well as physically less attractive readers (“Our race has so long neglected the culture of human beauty that a sad proportion of mature men and women are unattractive; but most young people have the elements of beauty, and to them chiefly this book is addressed”), Stopes simply advised them not to read *Married Love*: “He [the reader departed “from the ordinary ranks of mankind”] need not read my book, for it is written about, and it is written for, ordinary men and women, who, feeling themselves incomplete, yearn for a union that will have power not only to make a fuller and richer thing of their own lives, but which will place them in a position to use their sacred trust as creators of lives to come” (pp. 4, 66). Sheila Jeffreys (*The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880–1930* [London, 1985], pp. 115–21) has argued very critically that Stopes’s promotion of an ideal of heterosexual love not only excluded homosexual relationships but was also invariably combined with a stigmatization of lesbianism. I will return to this point in the last section.

<sup>40</sup> Stopes, *Married Love*, p. 51, emphasis in original; see also R. Hall, *Passionate Crusader*, pp. 128–36.

<sup>41</sup> Stopes, *Married Love*, pp. 6, 8.

<sup>42</sup> “Woman’s ‘Contrariness’ ” is the title of chap. 3 (*ibid.*, pp. 25, 32).

<sup>43</sup> Following Stopes, Havelock Ellis (“The Menstrual Curve of Sexual Impulse in Women,” *Medical Review of Reviews* 25 [1919]: 72–77) later suggested two “satisfactory objective criteria of genuine organic sexual impulse,” namely, “(1) the occurrence of erotic

of the wave-crest come with remarkable regularity, so that there are two wave-crests in each twenty-eight-day month. . . . If this is put in its simplest way, one may say that there are fortnightly periods of desire, arranged so that one period comes always just *before* each menstrual flow.”<sup>44</sup>

Stopes felt that society could be changed and rebuilt on a foundation of satisfactory sexuality and renewal of the once instinctive but now lost sexual tenderness. By adhering to these fundamental principles, husband and wife could easily reach a “mutual adjustment” on scientific grounds. A prospectus bluntly advertised the American edition of *Married Love* as “The Book which makes Happy Marriages.”<sup>45</sup> In order to attain this ultimate goal, Stopes was able to devise formulas that seemed to guarantee married love, which then became a synonym for everlasting happiness. When knowledge and love went together in the making of each marriage, Stopes augured, the pair would eventually reach from “the physical foundations of its bodies to the heavens” where its heads would be “crowned with stars.”<sup>46</sup> In the end, sex was not only able to rebuild society through happy marriages but also to unfold spiritual, even deifying powers.

The earthly troubles that kept the couple from reaching these ethereal heights were simply of a practical nature. Erotic fulfillment was learnable and could easily be attained through compliance with some technical formulas. For instance, Stopes drew up as a general rule for the frequency of sexual intercourse: “The mutually best regulation of intercourse in marriage is to have three or four days of repeated unions, followed by about ten days without any unions at all, unless some strong external stimulus has stirred a mutual desire.”<sup>47</sup> Though Stopes was willing to accept the prevailing view that the male sexual urge was “spontaneously insistent, ever ready to wake at the lightest call,” she yet was adamant that it constituted rape if the husband, insisting on his marital “rights,” did not adapt to his wife’s needs. Hence, the “supreme law” for husbands went: “Remember that each act of union must be tenderly

---

dreams, and (2) the occurrence of masturbation in the case of women who adopt that practice.”

<sup>44</sup> See chap. 4, “The Fundamental Pulse” in Stopes, *Married Love*, pp. 26–37, quotation at p. 32. Additional factors such as climate, fatigue, city life, bad feeding, and the phases of the moon were thought to influence the regularity of these curves.

<sup>45</sup> Marie Stopes, *Married Love or Love in Marriage*, abridged edition (New York, 1918); see also n. 19 above.

<sup>46</sup> See UCSB/DSS/MS: V/6; Stopes, *Married Love* (n. 6 above), p. 113. In a similar argument Stopes claimed that (her) recent discoveries of physiology would offer a “key which [might] unlock a chamber of the mystery and admit us to one of the halls of the palace of truth” (p. 108).

<sup>47</sup> Stopes, *Married Love*, p. 43.

wooded for and won, and that no union should ever take place unless the woman also desires it and is made physically ready for it." "Claiming a woman" at times when she could not take "*natural* pleasure in union," Stopes warned, would not only reduce her vitality, but also kill her power of enjoyment when the "love season" returned. And, finally, a rule of thumb for wives read: "Be always escaping. Escape the lower, the trivial, the sordid. So far as possible . . . ensure that you allow your husband to come upon you only when there is delight in the meeting."<sup>48</sup>

In *Married Love*, Stopes offered her readers an idiosyncratic, almost inextricably intertwined blend of different discourses, reflected in a mixture of styles and genres. Ethical utterances were backed up by scientific arguments, and sexual fulfillment was mystically glorified, becoming, in turn, a major component of romanticized love, for vague eugenic reasons. Sex reform was assimilated to a depoliticized individual realm. Only in this fashion could marital sexuality regenerate society. While clearly recognizing the social basis of women's sexual problems in their dependence on men, Stopes's argument lacked any broader political, philosophical, or social framework, apart from her indeterminate spiritualism. Hence, science could provide Stopes with a possible justification. Her originality lay in the rhetorical blend of arguments, the elevated expression of her writings, and the attempted combination of different models of sexuality, rather than in any fresh ideas. While presenting herself as a radical thinker and original scientist, Stopes had in fact derived many of the key elements of her work from a variety of late-Victorian and Edwardian sexual theorists. *Married Love* synthesized a poetical-romantic attitude toward love with a new scientific view of sex, and successfully popularized this flowery amalgam of "poetry" and "science"—precisely what a reviewer expressed by praising it as a "thrilling combination of very explicit information and sentient idealism."<sup>49</sup>

Stopes's task was, in fact, a transformation from one language into another. She tried to fuse the scientific terminology of medical journals with a popular language for household use. Providing a new vocabulary for discussing a subject as sensitive and contested as sexuality, her works combined old and new ways of thinking. "Dr. Marie Stopes," a contemporary observed in 1927, "has indeed almost invented a sex language of her own."<sup>50</sup> Insisting that wives could and should experience sexual pleasure, Stopes gave clear and explicit practical sexual advice. In helping to negotiate those problems of a changing society which tradition could

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 38, 45, 28, 70, emphasis in original.

<sup>49</sup>Holtzman, "Marriage, Sexuality, and Contraception" (n. 8 above), pp. 2, 6–44; Mary Ware Dennett, "The Psychology of Marriage," *Survey* 41 (1918): 50.

<sup>50</sup>Begbie (n. 16 above), p. 10.

no longer diminish, *Married Love* may have achieved its success because it provided practical advice in an easily accessible form that purported, at least, to be based on scientific evidence.

## IV

Reactions to Stopes's work varied widely. On the one hand, reviewers called *Married Love* a "milestone in sex literature" with an idealism of "art, not 'morals'" as well as "one of the most sensible [books] we have met with on the subject," which by "sheer frankness" remained decent, while dealing in the "most intimate way" with "normal sex life."<sup>51</sup> The *Cambridge Magazine* stated that *Married Love* was "probably the most important contribution to the sex problem that has ever been made really accessible to the English public."<sup>52</sup> Only the *British Medical Journal* noticed Stopes's lack of professional qualification for writing such a book, but attested to her compensating qualities: "Though not a medical woman, the author has special qualifications for this task: with high scientific attainments she combines literary skill, sympathetic insight, idealism, and more than common courage."<sup>53</sup> Very few other positive notices of *Married Love* appeared in the medical press, and all discreetly omitted any reference to the passages on birth control.<sup>54</sup>

Other reviewers politically as diverse as the feminist Stella Browne and the *Times Literary Supplement* ventured to "face the facts." Although Browne, a socialist and an active campaigner for birth control and abortion, was satisfied with the "fine vindication" of this crucial subject in *Married Love*, she asked for more research and conclusions "further to the very root of the matter." She felt that Stopes's account of sex processes was both too idealistic (and not sufficiently accurate) and inadequately attuned to women's social constraints. Trying to make Stopes consider the factual suppression of women, Browne primarily attacked Stopes for not admitting the scale of industrial, social, and legislative changes necessary before the majority of her fellow citizens were able even approximately to follow Stopes's suggestions and "develop and re-

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*; see also *Athenaeum* (June 1918), p. 281; *Lancet* (December 28, 1918), p. 886. See, in addition, these contemporary review articles of *Married Love*: *English Review* 27 (1918): 159; A. L. Humphreys, *Book Monthly* (Autumn 1918); H. MacKenna, *Eugenics Review* 10 (1918–19): 236–38; *News of the World* (June 8, 1919); G. Stanley Hall, *Morale, the Supreme Standard of Life and Conduct* (New York, 1920), p. 266; "Clean Sexuality," *Medical Journal of Australia* (June 2, 1923), p. 611; *Quarterly Review of Biology* 7 (1932): 122–23.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted on the last page of *Married Love*.

<sup>53</sup> *British Medical Journal* (May 4, 1918), p. 510.

<sup>54</sup> See, e.g., *Lancet* (December 28, 1918), p. 886; and *Medical Times* 46 (1918): 212.

fine their erotic nature.” Secondly, Browne accused her of overlooking the fact that the “present legally sanctioned patriarchal monogamy” rested on the fundamental subjection of women, implying the ethical “double standard” and prostitution as male “safety-valve.” Thus, the sexes’ mutual ignorance of each other’s needs and nature was exacerbated on the female side by women’s general economic dependence on men and the “tyrannous demand for theoretical ignorance and anatomical virginity in the bride.”<sup>55</sup>

In a more reserved and rather descriptive short notice, the *Times Literary Supplement* acknowledged that *Married Love* considered its subject almost entirely in its physiological and medical aspects, “though Dr. Stopes has something to say, too, on the spiritual side of the bearing towards each other of husband and wife.” Dissociating himself from her far-reaching pretensions that the “discoveries” made in *Married Love* were the outcome of “long and complex investigations,” this reviewer only reluctantly reported Stopes’s scientific claims that she presented the “results of some original research.” The writer tried carefully to be reticent about offering his own opinion and stated cautiously that one might—but did not have to—“recognize the earnestness of her desire to bring knowledge and care based on scientific observation to rule marital intercourse. . . . She is on the side of those who do not give an unqualified opposition to the control of the birth,” he concluded.<sup>56</sup>

While obviously none of the contemporary reviewers could have foreseen the book’s best-selling commercial career, five years later one commentator realized—in a manner similar to the earlier mentioned article in *Hospital and Health Review*—that *Married Love*’s success had not been an accident: “Her extraordinary book, *Married Love*, created a great stir, as it was bound to do.” In order to explain why the text had already reached its tenth edition, selling around 201,000 copies by that time, he emphatically rejected the idea that it had appealed to the “baser feelings of the animal man.” Rather, he wished to see its success attributed both to Stopes’s idealistic, even brave, approach to the topic and the “peculiar mixture of physiological truth and pure human sentiment” she had to offer. No one who had read this little volume with understanding could for one moment adopt such a view. “Its enormous popularity is attributable to the fact that Dr. Stopes has approached in the most courageous manner this tender subject without loss of dignity,

<sup>55</sup>F. W. Stella Browne, *International Journal of Ethics* 29 (1918): 112–13; see also her biography by Sheila Rowbotham, *A New World for Women: Stella Browne, Socialist Feminist* (London, 1977).

<sup>56</sup>*Times Literary Supplement* (April 11, 1918), p. 174. It is remarkable that in later advertising campaigns only the most favorable parts of two single sentences from this review were quoted. Stopes, *Married Love* (n. 6 above), p. xi.

without becoming coarse and without once losing sight of her one objective, the enhancement of the sum of human happiness.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, he emphasized as the book’s greatest strengths its idealism and its dignified celebration of human happiness, precisely those features that Stella Browne had particularly assailed.

Not everyone approved of the tone of her work. Despite the endorsement by the *British Medical Journal*, some opposition came from the medical profession, which objected to Stopes’s lack of specifically medical credentials. With the publication a few months later of *Wise Parenthood*, it became evident how ambivalent the medical profession’s position toward birth control was.<sup>58</sup> While leading physicians had only begun in the last third of the nineteenth century to declare the control of fertility to be an essentially medical matter, the medical profession as a whole had never adopted the public provision of effective forms of contraception as its task. In general, medical attention had centered on the biological rather than the sexual aspects of reproduction, entirely disregarding any strategies of preventive medicine. Moreover, as Angus McLaren has plausibly suggested, the field of individual birth control was, if not completely ignored in practical terms, reluctantly condemned either on moral grounds or for fear of the loss of respectability. Public hostility toward all artificial means of contraception continued well into the twentieth century.<sup>59</sup> British physicians dismissed the subject as “artificial,” “sordid,” and physiologically “harmful.” Besides, as a professor of obstetrics and gynecology declared, repeating a frequently made argument, sex was such a complicated matter that the employment of preventive methods was bound to lead to “abnormal psychological manifestations.”<sup>60</sup> While the medical press in interwar England intensively dis-

<sup>57</sup> “Clean Sexuality” (n. 51 above).

<sup>58</sup> For *Wise Parenthood*, see *Times Literary Supplement* (November 28, 1918), p. 586; C. Killick Millard, “Is Birth Control Immoral? To the Editor of *The Medical Officer*,” *Medical Officer* (December 7, 1918), p. 196; *Medical Times* 46 (1918): 333; *Common Cause* (December 27, 1919), p. 17; *Eugenics Review* 11 (1919–20): 81–82.

<sup>59</sup> For a helpful discussion of the changing attitudes of the British medical profession toward birth control prior to 1914, see esp. Angus McLaren, *Birth Control in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York, 1978), pp. 116–41, and his more recent essay, “The Sexual Politics of Reproduction in Britain,” in *The European Experience of Declining Fertility, 1850–1970: The Quiet Revolution*, ed. John R. Gillis, Louise A. Tilly, and David Levine (Cambridge, MA, 1992), pp. 85–100.

<sup>60</sup> Anne Louise McLroy, “The Harmful Effects of Artificial Contraceptive Methods,” *Practitioner* 111 (1923): 30. See this issue of the general physician’s journal, entirely devoted to birth control, for the prevailing view of the medical profession. Ten years later another special issue on contraception was published, *Practitioner*, vol. 131 (September, 1933). The much more relaxed tone of many of its articles underlines the argument that the medical profession had in the meantime accepted birth control as a respectable subject.

cussed the national and eugenic implications of the declining birthrate, its comments on individual contraception remained ignorant, perfunctory, and deeply suspicious.

Aside from ethical doubts, disapproval and ignorance were equally due to contradictory scientific evidence as well as to the absence of birth control from medical education and training. "The doctor is not familiar with the scientific aspects of the subject, . . . and there is no easily accessible medical literature pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of the various methods of contraception in current use," the *Lancet* reported in 1921. The British Medical Association had excluded any debate over birth control from its meetings and, to a considerable extent, had banned the controversial issue from the pages of the *British Medical Journal*.<sup>61</sup> Possibly inspired by the success of Stopes's books, only in the late 1920s and early 1930s did a few members of the medical profession, such as Isabel Emslie Hutton, Helena Wright, and Edward Griffith, hesitantly begin to author popular marriage manuals.<sup>62</sup> Birth control advocates, including Stopes, drew public attention to the medical profession's resistance to the subject and effectively questioned the condemnations of birth control it offered on ethical grounds and its pretended "innocence of ignorance."<sup>63</sup> Precisely by offering the laity an understanding of contraception, Stopes challenged established medical authority. By making doctors aware of the gap between the increasing public acceptance of birth control and their lack of professional control over it, the public sensation caused by Stopes's books forced them to react. She demonstrated how slow the profession had been in acknowledging a significant social change.

Medical writers' dismissal of Stopes as unqualified was thus only a part

<sup>61</sup> *Lancet* (October 29, 1921), p. 914; Soloway, *Birth Control* (n. 29 above), pp. 256–79; John Peel, "Contraception and the Medical Profession," *Population Studies* 18 (1964): 133–45; Audrey Leathard, *The Fight for Family Planning: The Development of Family Planning Services in Britain, 1921–74* (London, 1980), pp. 2, 22–23.

<sup>62</sup> For example, Isabel Emslie Hutton, *The Hygiene of Marriage* (London, 1923); Michael Fielding [Maurice Newfield], *Parenthood: Design or Accident? A Manual of Birth Control* (London, 1928); Helena Wright, *The Sex Factor in Marriage: A Book for Those Who Are or Are about to Be Married* (London, 1930); Edward F. Griffith, *Modern Marriage and Birth Control* (London, 1935), and *Sex in Everyday Life* (London, 1938). See Barbara Brookes, "Women and Reproduction, 1860–1939," in *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850–1940*, ed. Jane Lewis (New York, 1986), p. 155. Alan Rusbridger's *Concise History of the Sex Manual, 1886–1986* (London, 1986) is quite disappointing despite its promising (but misleading) title. This book constitutes a sex manual itself, merely compiled from historical samples, rather than an analytically oriented history. For a discussion of the rise of the self-help manual, of which *Married Love* is so remarkable an example, see Jackson, *The Real Facts of Life* (n. 22 above), pp. 159–81; and Porter and Hall (n. 14 above), pp. 202–23.

<sup>63</sup> *Lancet* (August 11, 1923), p. 281.



of a larger development of a profession's efforts to claim certain areas as its own, and represents a shift in the extension of medical authority over birth control. Beyond broader differences over general respectability, there were also more technical disputes as to relative effectiveness and physiological safety of different contraceptive methods. An article published in the *Lancet* in July 1922 led to an acrimonious exchange of letters between Stopes and Dr. Norman Haire, himself a pioneering birth control advocate, about the Dutch cap, a female birth control device. He replied to a critical letter by Stopes by emphasizing that she was a nonmedical woman and that he felt "no desire to enter, through your columns [of the *Lancet*] into controversies on medical subjects with non-medical persons."<sup>64</sup> Apparently again referring to Stopes and unnamed others as "non-medical persons, who are, by reason of their lack of medical knowledge, obviously quite incompetent to deal with it," he called upon the medical profession one year later to study birth control adequately: "Only thus may it be rescued from the hands of quacks and charlatans and non-medical 'doctors' who write erotic treatises on birth control conveying misleading information in a highly stimulating form."<sup>65</sup> The *New Witness*, run by the Catholic editor G. K. Chesterton, gave expression to a similar aversion: "The peculiar horror of her book is that it is couched in pseudo-scientific terms, and is addressed to the married woman." Critics attacked the respected and politically committed journalist and author, Arnold Bennett, who had written a one-page introductory note to *Wise Parenthood* emphasizing the advantages of "birth-regulation": "Mr. Arnold Bennett bears an honourable name: he can hope to bear it no longer if he does not at once dissociate himself from Dr. Marie Stopes and her rubber goods. The introduction he has written to her filthy book is a disgrace to him and to his (and our) profession."<sup>66</sup>

Appearing in specialized or sectarian journals, these reproaches and controversies did not necessarily reach the intended popular readership of *Married Love*; nor did they hinder its commercial success as a best-selling product. By contrast, advertisements of Stopes's work repeatedly reprinted parts of the many positive press notices and quotations from review articles, thus establishing a model for later advertising campaigns.<sup>67</sup> These practices help to explain the significance and efficacy of

<sup>64</sup> *Lancet* (July 22, 1922), p. 195–96; (August 19, 1922), p. 419; (September 9, 1922), p. 588.

<sup>65</sup> Norman Haire, "Contraceptive Technique: A Consideration of 1,400 Cases," *Practitioner* 111 (1923): 74, 90; Weeks (n. 22 above), p. 192.

<sup>66</sup> *New Witness* (September 12, 1919).

<sup>67</sup> See, e.g., Stopes, *Married Love* (n. 6 above), p. 117. The *British Medical Journal* was even quoted at length on the front page of the dust jacket of the third edition; Stopes,

the shorthand statement “by the author of *Married Love*,” which was used in advertisements for her later books (see fig. 5). Published in the same year as Stopes’s libel suit against the Catholic doctor Halliday Sutherland, which served to publicize her and her writings and resulted in a considerable increase in the sales of her work, one can understand Stopes’s *Contraception* as an attempt to fill this gap in medical knowledge and to attract the legitimating support of scientists and medical doctors. In challenging an avowed but not complete professional monopoly in the realm of medical science, this textbook provoked in turn an increasing number of antagonistic reproaches from the medical profession.<sup>68</sup>

Ultimately, *Married Love* became such a commercial success not simply because of its accessibility as an object of consumption but also because of its highly professional handling once it had sold a certain number of copies. Advertising campaigns for her later books, as well as advertisements in these books themselves, very often referred to *Married Love*. Thus a consuming, reading public consisting of different audiences was created, not least because of Stopes’s own activities. By writing letters to all kinds of newspapers, magazines, and journals on topics as varied as longevity, the evolution of spiders, hunting activities for children, and sleep advice, Stopes worked constantly to keep herself before the eyes of the public.<sup>69</sup>

## V

After establishing her reputation as a popular nonfiction writer with works such as *Married Love* and *Wise Parenthood*, Stopes published more than a dozen additional books by the mid-1950s, among them *Contraception (Birth Control): Its Theory, History, and Practice*, which first appeared in late June 1923. Although she hoped that “not only experts [might] find it easy to grasp as a whole,” for the book was written “in language as simple as it is consistent with scientific precision,” *Contra-*

---

*Radiant Motherhood*, (n. 31 above), pp. 247–49, and *Wise Parenthood*, 11th ed. (London, 1923), pp. 65–68 (n. 20 above).

<sup>68</sup>Halliday G. Sutherland had accused Stopes of taking advantage of the poor’s ignorance. In his book *Birth Control: A Statement of Christian Doctrine against the Neo-Malthusians* (London, 1922) he had made comments about “a doctor of German Philosophy (Munich),” who had opened a clinic in the midst of a London slum in order to expose poor women to “experiments.” See the following issues of the *Times* (1923): (February 22, 23, 24, 28; March 1, 2; June 26, 27; July 21) and (1924): (May 31; October 24, 28; November 22). As the only published transcript of the Stopes-Sutherland libel action, 1923–24, cf. Muriel Box, ed., *The Trial of Marie Stopes* (London, 1967); see also “A Book Trial That Brought about a Social Revolution,” *Bookseller* 3208 (1967): 2572–75.

<sup>69</sup>See, e.g., the *Times* (September 19, 1932), p. 8, and (January 8, 1934), p. 8.

*ception* was her first and most “scientifically” staged textbook written explicitly for the medical and legal professions. By writing this book, Stopes hoped to answer criticisms made by the medical men and, in so doing, to fashion herself as an expert. Again, she claimed in the preface only to have given way rather reluctantly to the “request of some distinguished medical men” as well as “repeated and insistent demands from medical and scientific people all over the world.”<sup>70</sup> Like *Married Love*, the volume came replete with letters and forewords by eminent contemporary experts, though this time all but one of them were medical authorities: the late professor Sir William Bayliss, M.A., D.SC., F.R.S., wrote a long introduction; and Sir James Barr, M.D., L.L.D., F.R.C.P., &c.; Christopher Rolleston, M.A., M.D.OXON., M.R.C.P.LOND., D.P.H.CAMB.; and Dr. Jane Hawthorne; as well as a barrister-at-law under the pseudonym of Obscurus, M.B., D.P.H., added shorter introductory notes.<sup>71</sup> Finally, all her academic achievements were carefully listed on the title page, followed by a single allusion to Stopes’s former books: “Author of *Married Love*.”

A comparison of *Married Love* and *Contraception* proves enlightening. Due to the increased necessity of displaying her expertise to the scientific audience for whom *Contraception* was allegedly written, Stopes applied different narrative strategies, followed different rhetorical approaches, and used her “evidence” stories in different ways in order to convince her readership. An analysis of the ways in which Stopes ambitiously planned and actually constructed the book for success will reveal some of the principles at work in the making of a best-selling product. Here too, the form and promotion of this manual, including circulars as well as extended advertising campaigns, turns out to be at least as significant as its actual content.

Although all of her former works had been published by G. P. Putnam, for *Contraception*, Stopes sought a more specialized and traditional publishing company. While several established medical publishing houses, such as Oxford Medical Publications or H. K. Lewis & Co., simply returned the manuscript without explanation,<sup>72</sup> publisher J. Churchill replied to her bluntly and honestly. According to Churchill, the topic of Stopes’s books was just not respectable enough for his publishing house.

<sup>70</sup>Stopes, *Contraception* (n. 15 above), pp. vii–viii.

<sup>71</sup>This impressive list apparently did not miss its target. As one of the numerous—and in this case, rather intimidated—reviewers wrote: “The book is backed by such leaders in science as Sir Wm. Bayliss, Sir James Barr, Dr. C. Rolleston, and Dr. Jane Hawthorne, so it is not for us to criticise it.” *Nursing Times* 27 (1931): 974. Hawthorne was also attached to Stopes’s first birth-control clinic as a visiting specialist. *Lancet* (August 11, 1923), p. 281, made the same point; cf. letter, May 17, 1923, UCSB/DSS/MS: II/6.

<sup>72</sup>Letters dated May 4, 22, 1923, UCSB/DSS/MS: II/5 and I/12, respectively.

“The matter you deal with is not only controversial,” he frankly answered, “but is . . . of such a nature that it would be unsuitable for a special publishing house like ours to give its name to the book unless it was prepared to support its propaganda and defend its policy. As we do not see our way to do this, we feel we cannot publish your book.”<sup>73</sup> Apparently more willing to withstand the anticipated commotion, John Bale, Sons & Danielsson in London finally accepted the manuscript for publication. *Contraception* appeared on June 27, 1923, 441 pages in length (fig. 7). In 1931, an enlarged third edition was again taken over by G. P. Putnam’s Sons. The book saw eight editions by 1952. Although no figures for its total circulation are available, *Contraception* seems to have been quite financially successful for a book of its kind: in the first four years alone, forty thousand copies were sold.<sup>74</sup>

Some critics used the relative success of *Contraception* to dismiss it as fashionable and undermine its scientific pretensions. In the mind of contemporaries such as John S. Fairbairn, the obstetric physician at the London St. Thomas Hospital, expertise and popularity were mutually exclusive categories. Fairbairn reviewed the second edition in the *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* four years after the book’s original publication, calling *Contraception* “primarily a piece of propagand work, in which the subjects of medical interest occupy a very lowly position.” One of Stopes’s sharpest critics, he drew the conclusion from the book’s high number of reprints and relatively large sales that *Contraception* was clearly more suitable for the general public (and indeed not for a medical, legal or in some other way scientific audience), having chiefly found its demand there. “The very best seller among medical books,” he wrote, denigrating the book’s commercial success, “could never reach such a scale, and it is difficult to believe, even with barristers and solicitors thrown in, that so frequent reprinting would be necessary unless the book had a general appeal.” Thus, the selectivity of the market was no proof of the book’s general quality. On the contrary, high sales were regarded as associated with another, less scientific category of books.

<sup>73</sup>J. and A. Churchill to Stopes, May 8, 1923, UCSB/DSS/MSC: II/1.

<sup>74</sup>Published in May 1934, the fourth revised and enlarged edition completed 66,000 copies. *Contraception* also sold very well in India, Australia, and New Zealand; in the United States, however, the book was less popular, even though Stopes took on a literary agent to promote her writings. Similar to *Married Love*, sale of *Contraception* was permitted only after a federal judgment in July 1931. See *New York Times* (June 14, 1931), p. 29, (July 18, 1931), p. 16; *New York Herald Tribune* (July 18, 1931), p. 7; and *Standard Union* (July 18, 1931). See esp. letter from John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, March 5, 1924, and correspondence between George Bedborough, Stopes, and Putnam’s New York, August–October 1931, UCSB/DSS/MSC: I/5, I/6, II/10, II/13; Eaton and Warnick (n. 6 above), pp. 33–34.

**JUST PUBLISHED.**  
**A NEW AND ENLARGED EDITION**

with an additional plate, at **15/-** net; post free  $\begin{cases} \text{inland, } 15/9. \\ \text{abroad } 16/6. \end{cases}$

# CONTRACEPTION

## ITS THEORY, HISTORY AND PRACTICE.

A Manual for the Medical and Legal Professions and all Social Workers.

By **MARIE CARMICHAEL STOPES, D.Sc.,**

*Fellow of University College, London.*

**CONTENTS.**

<p>Author's Preface.</p> <p>Introduction by Sir William Bayliss, F.R.S.</p> <p>Introductory Notes by Sir James Barr, M.D.,          Dr. C. Rolleston, Dr. Jane Hawthorne, and          "Obscurus."</p> <p>Chapter I. The Problem To-day.</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">" II. Theoretical Desiderata — Satisfac-          tory Contraceptives.</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">" III. Indications for Contraception.</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">" IV. Contraceptives in Use, Classified.</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">" V. Contraceptives in Use, Described          and Discussed.</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">" VI. Contraceptives in Use, Described          and Discussed (cont.).</p>	<p>Chapter VII. Contraceptives for Special Cases.</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">" VIII. Some Objections to Contracep-          tions answered.</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">" IX. Early History of Family Limita-          tion.</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">" X. Contraception in the Nineteenth          Century.</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">" XI. Contraception in the Twentieth          Century.</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">" XII. Contraception and the Law in          England, France and America.</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">" XIII. Instruction in Medical Schools.</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">" XIV. Birth Control Clinics.          Plates I. to IV.</p>
---	---

**A few press opinions of the first edition of this world-famous book :**

- " Dr. Stopes sets out with precision and no little literary grace the problem of contraception. . . . Much of the evidence contained in the book is quite unobtainable elsewhere."—*The Lancet*.
- " The book is valuable and should be read by all interested in racial welfare."—*The Medical Review*.
- " Some such book as this had to be written, and this is very well written."—SIR ARCHIBALD BIRD in *Nature*.
- " This problem will undoubtedly occupy a more prominent position in the future, and to those who wish to study it we can recommend this volume."—*Journal of State Medicine*.
- " This highly important question cannot be studied completely and dispassionately without reference to her distinctly remarkable book."—*The Hospital and Health Review*.
- " The book is unique and marks a new era in literature germane to this subject."—*The Medical Times*.
- " Nurses and midwives who work among the poor should be able to give advice upon this topic when called upon to do so, and for this purpose they will find Dr. Stopes's work invaluable."—*The Nursing Mirror*.
- " The book is supremely important, and its author is one of the most important women of our time, for, almost single-handed, she is fighting a crusade which, successful or the reverse, cannot fail to have a momentous effect on our civilisation."—*The Scottish Nation*.
- " This book will meet with opposition only from those who desire to suppress the facts."—Prof. CARR-SAUNDERS in *The Nation and Athenaeum*.
- " From a medical point of view there can be little doubt that there are cases in which the prevention of child-bearing in married women is called for and in which it would be difficult and indeed undesirable to attain this object without the use of one of the methods here described. The simplicity of that advised by Dr. Stopes and its probable efficiency commend its adoption when medical opinion is in favour of the avoidance of pregnancy. It, as Dr. Stopes believes, the adoption of such a method would prevent the frequent production of abortion, very considerable benefit would ensue to the health of women. . . . There can be no doubt as to her sincerity of purpose and the labour involved in the compilation of the book. It contains much information not procurable in any other volume and may be recommended for perusal by members of the medical profession."—*Medical Journal of Australia*.

*Order from your Bookseller or direct from the Publishers :*

**JOHN BALE, SONS & DANIELSSON, Ltd., 83-91, Great Titchfield St., W.1.**

FIG. 7 *Lancet* (June 18, 1927)

According to this reviewer, science had to be elitist. Experts were not popular.<sup>75</sup>

In writing *Contraception*, Stopes adopted an unusually restrained and relatively sober style. *Contraception* possessed all the distinguishing external features of a “scientific” textbook: the above-mentioned introductory notes, an extended scholarly apparatus, four plates showing diverse pictures of the original Mothers’ Clinic and illustrations of various birth control devices, and a detailed index. Stopes tried to treat her topic as comprehensively as possible in fourteen systematically organized chapters. Notwithstanding the mutually exclusive nature of her different target groups for this book, Stopes apparently aimed quite high: on the one hand, she wanted to gather together “all that is valuable of available human knowledge” on birth control for expert use, while on the other hand she intended to serve practical purposes and provide easily applicable knowledge to a lay audience.<sup>76</sup> Aside from a broad introductory reflection about the problem’s relevance “to-day” and a second chapter entitled “Theoretical Desiderata—Satisfactory Contraceptives,” the book contained medical “indications” for birth control, extensive descriptions of existing contraceptive methods, preformulated answers to possible objections to birth control,<sup>77</sup> a history of family planning from antiquity to the twentieth century in three chapters, and short descriptions of the legal position of birth control in different countries, as well as two final chapters dealing with instruction in medical schools and birth control clinics. Yet at the core of *Contraception* lay a classified list of thirty different methods of birth control, sometimes even provided with illustrative cases and comments about their approvability in terms of physiological effects and social values. By citing cases, naming general rules, and quoting extensively from respected authorities in the specialty like August Forel, Havelock Ellis, and A. M. Carr-Saunders, as well as Sigmund Freud (and, not surprisingly, often herself), Stopes sought to place the book (if not herself) within a certain methodological frame; thus, numberless references and protracted quotations were intended to guarantee its scientific credibility.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>75</sup>Fairbairn (n. 25 above), p. 563.

<sup>76</sup>Stopes, *Contraception* (n. 15 above), p. vii.

<sup>77</sup>These “prominent statements masquerading as ‘arguments’” were classified under the categories “pseudo-scientific”; “Contraception ‘is not natural’”; “national”; “aesthetic”; “legal”; “ethical and religious objections”; see *ibid.*, chap. 8, “Some Objections to Contraception Answered,” pp. 201–41.

<sup>78</sup>With the obvious exception of “Obscurus,” Stopes also quoted all the contemporary experts in her book who had contributed introductory notes, thus reinforcing not only their authority but also Stopes’s own (for these eminent figures had, after all, written an introduction to *Contraception*).

Quoting numerous cases of laymen who had written to her asking for contraceptive advice, Stopes explicitly attacked medical doctors for their ignorance and their refusal to disseminate the professional knowledge they did have. If it was the “medical man’s business to tame and control the stork,” Stopes repeatedly accused the medical profession of failing to carry out their job adequately, since they were unwilling and unable to dispense contraceptive knowledge to their patients. As to the reasons for this reluctance, Stopes suspected the “repressive leadership” of a certain number of members of the “old school,” a particular “antagonism of the Roman Catholic practitioners” as well as a general lack of specific training in medical schools as the main culprits. Therefore, Stopes lamented, the medical profession operated on an outdated assumption, namely that the medical practitioner was still a “doctor of disease,” whereas preventive medicine had not yet raised its “edifice on the firm rock of a thorough understanding” of the requirements of “normal health.”<sup>79</sup> If the prime *de facto* object of the medical profession was the health of the community, a full knowledge of contraception should be one of the doctor’s most useful tools. Only by controlling the conception of its members, she argued, could a population meet its “real needs;” if “modern and humane” civilization failed to do so, it was bound to sink into “barbaric cruelty to individuals.” Fortunately, science had come to the rescue of humanity: “What our progenitors achieved crudely and clumsily, often painfully, we, aided by modern scientific knowledge, can and should achieve painlessly and precisely.”<sup>80</sup>

Although it was obvious that the proper use of contraception was the practitioner’s concern (and in the public’s very interest) as a fundamental health measure, because a large proportion of female ill health was directly caused by an excessive number of pregnancies in rapid succession, and by pregnancies under less than ideal conditions, medical men failed to fulfill their self-declared role if they refused to serve the growing demand for knowledge of contraception.<sup>81</sup> According to Stopes, all information that was publicly available could be traced back to two books “in

<sup>79</sup>Stopes, *Contraception*, pp. 24, 11, 58, 326, and esp. pp. 367–77, quotation at p. 373. Stopes made the same argument at the beginning of *Contraception* stating that the medical practitioner, “too long trained as a doctor of disease,” was only about to realize that “his prime function [was] the preserver of health” (p. 7).

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 4, 9. One reviewer later compared the modernity of science to the modernity of birth control: “Just as science harnesses and controls electrical waves so that they have become subject to the will of man, enabling him to bridge, as far as speech and sight are concerned, the illimitable miles between continent and continent, so Dr. Stopes would harness and control man’s—and woman’s—emotions so that the senses may be gratified by pleasures undreamed of by those whose passions have been unschooled”; see *Sunday Times* (September 8, 1929).

<sup>81</sup>Stopes, *Contraception*, pp. 7, 4.

general circulation,” namely “the very simply worded” *Married Love* and a “first small scientific text” on that subject, *Wise Parenthood*, which was, compared to *Contraception*, “of course, only a preliminary sketch.” Again, if it earlier had been her self-set goal to awaken the “great public . . . to the need for instruction in normal healthy sex procedure,” Stopes now claimed to have set out to “establish a true Faculty of Preventive Medicine” under a new categorical imperative: “Conceptions shall be potentially healthy and favourable, or shall not occur.”<sup>82</sup>

Stopes’s interest in birth control grew in part out of her concern with eugenics and had a specific ideological purpose.<sup>83</sup> She concluded *Contraception* similar to the way she had opened *Married Love*. While she wanted to serve the state in her first book, the nation was now used as a justifying principle, without any differentiation between these two terms. Contraception was “in many ways” the “connecting link between health and disease,” Stopes vaguely asserted, with a strong eugenic undertone; only when it was widely used by “diseased persons” could birth control become “the great preventive measure to arrest the spread of disease and degeneracy throughout the nation.”<sup>84</sup> For sex (as depicted in *Married Love*) to regenerate society, birth control was a crucial, but hitherto missing tool in the doctor’s arsenal that was powerful enough to help medicine reach its true destination: the welfare of the “race.” For sex to mediate between couples and the state, science, through birth control, would bridge the gap between barbarism and civilization.

## VI

Many publications refused to print advertisements for *Contraception*. They included not only some of the most established British medical and legal publications like the *Practitioner*, the *British Medical Journal*, and the *Law Times* but also newspapers written for a more general audience, such as the *Guardian*, the *Observer*, the *Morning Post*, *Illustrated London News*, and the *Times Literary Supplement*; journals including the *Hibbert Journal*, *Country Life*, *Empire Review*, and *Daily Graphic*; and provincial

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 372, 315, 6, 318, 375.

<sup>83</sup> For this aspect of Stopes’s writings, see Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration* (n. 22 above), chap. 8, and most recently his contribution, *Marie Stopes, Eugenics, and the English Birth Control Movement*, ed. Robert A. Peel (Galton Lecture, 1996), (London, 1997), pp. 49–76; cf. also Stephen Trombley, *The Right to Reproduce: A History of Coercive Sterilization* (London, 1988), esp. pp. 81–87, although Trombley discusses Stopes’s personal relationships rather than her position toward eugenics and coercive sterilization of the “unfit.”

<sup>84</sup> Stopes, *Contraception* (n. 15 above), p. 396.



newspapers like the *Yorkshire Post*.<sup>85</sup> One editor, making an innuendo about the nature of her topic, accused Stopes of having “approached her subject in the spirit of advocacy rather than in that of pure science,” and declared that he did not think it right “to permit the propagation of doctrines concerning some of the most vital human functions which were ill-founded medically and hysterical in their presentation.” The *Law Times* put it very bluntly, too. From its point of view, Stopes simply belonged to the laity. At least one newspaper, the *Times* of London, maintained this general ban on advertising her books and pamphlets until as late as 1952.<sup>86</sup>

Nonetheless, approximately two hundred advertisements for *Contraception* were published in more than fifty different magazines, journals, and newspapers between June 1923 and December 1924. They appeared in a diverse range of organs, including the *Daily Telegraph*, *Saturday Review*, the *Spectator*, and the *Woman's Leader*, and also more professional ones such as the *Lancet*, *Medical Press*, *Nature*, and *Medical Officer*.<sup>87</sup> Two additional advertising campaigns were repeated in 1927: early that year, a number of advertisements appeared exclusively in different medical magazines. The next campaign, featuring a huge number of widespread advertisements, was undertaken for the second edition of the book later in 1927.<sup>88</sup>

While advertisements for Stopes's books in 1920 had announced

<sup>85</sup> See the extensive correspondence between Stopes, John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, and the different journals, June 22, 1923–July 6, 1927, UCSB/DSS/MSC: I/16. Only very seldom were the respective advertisement departments willing to give reasons for their decisions to reject the publication of advertisements for *Contraception*. The advertisement manager of the *Illustrated London News*, however, referred to his journal's “very large number of what may be described as ‘Victorians’ among our subscribers,” whom he did not want to shock. The *Observer* had actually received complaints from some of its readers for publishing an advertisement for a book dealing with birth control; see letters March 13 and August 27, 1924, UCSB/DSS/MSC: I/16.

<sup>86</sup> Letters from Commander O. Locker-Lampson, M.P., conductor of the *Empire Review*, to J. E. Berridge, December 12, 1924; *Law Times* to John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, June 27, 1923; and from Braby and Waller, Stopes's solicitors, to Stopes, July 10, 1923, UCSB/DSS/MSC: I/16 and I/8; “A ban is lifted,” *Evening Standard* (August 14, 1952); cf. in this context also the slim pamphlet by Jack Coldrick, *Dr. Marie Stopes and Press Censorship of Birth-Control: The Story of the Catholic Campaign against Newspaper Advertising in Ireland and Britain* (Belfast, 1992), esp. pp. 7–8, 11.

<sup>87</sup> For eighty-six advertisements in fifteen different papers, a total of £403. 18s. 6d. was spent between July and September 1924; John Bale, Sons & Danielsson to Stopes, July 11, 1924, UCSB/DSS/MSC: I/16. Numerous samples of advertisements can be found in UCSB/DSS/MSC: IV/10 and 11.

<sup>88</sup> This time the publisher tried to extend the number of papers from fifteen to at least twenty; Stopes to John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, December 21, 1926; John Bale to Stopes, June 10, 1927, UCSB/DSS/MSC: II/9 and I/16; for the years 1925 and 1926 I have only found occasional advertisements, but they continued to be printed until at least 1931.

the arrival of “A NEW BOOK BY THE AUTHOR OF ‘MARRIED LOVE,’” confident that the title *Married Love* would carry more name recognition than Stopes’s own name, this formula had changed radically only three years later: printed in large bold capital letters, the title “CONTRACEPTION” was seen as sufficient to attract the potential buyer’s attention (see figs. 5, 6, and 7).<sup>89</sup> These unillustrated advertisements tried to reflect the book’s scientific, that is, serious subject more precisely, printing its full table of contents in addition to complimentary quotations from various review articles. Four different versions were employed, varying only slightly from one to the other in the selected quotations according to the character of the journal in which they appeared. Thus, a special version, published mainly in journals written for a medical audience, quoted as expert testimonials only reviews that had also originally appeared in medical journals like the *Lancet* and the *Medical Times*. Under the bold headline “necessary for all serious students,” *Contraception* was extolled as the “first manual on the subject . . . packed with both helpful and interesting matter and much that is new and noteworthy” (figs. 6, 7). Moreover, the reputation and commercial success of Stopes’s books in general was not only used by her publishing company to draw the public to their other products but to the readers of the *Spectator*, *Contraception* was even suggested as a “choice Xmas gift.”<sup>90</sup>

Correspondence between Stopes and her publishers indicates that not only did Stopes control the extremely professional handling and planning of these campaigns but that she had also personally approved their actual text and layout. According to her, the simple advertisements had to be most economical and useful. Printing the table of contents would suggest the scope of the book, she continued, and be attractive at the same time.<sup>91</sup> Stopes even had a say in the pricing of the book. Despite the huge advertising campaigns and her evident hopes of reaching high numbers of sales, Stopes opted for “pricing the book at 12s. 6d. rather than 15s. because I think we may possibly sell our edition with less ad-

<sup>89</sup> *Lancet* (October 30, 1920), p. 2.

<sup>90</sup> See examples of the different types in *Woman’s Leader* (July 6, 1923), p. 183; *Lancet* (October 6, 1923), p. 24; *Nursing Mirror and Midwives’ Journal* (October 20, 1923), p. 51; *Medical Press and Circular* (September 10, 1924); *East London Advertiser* (September 20, 1924); *Medical Times* 53 (1925): 42; *Spectator* (December 19, 1925), p. 1150. Numerous samples of these advertisements can be found in UCSB/DSS/MSC: IV/10 and 11.

<sup>91</sup> Stopes described her procedure and intentions very precisely (letter to John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, June 9, 1923, UCSB/DSS/MSC: II/9): “You will note . . . that the line dividing the sheet in half makes a double column of the advertisement, and I think on one side we could very well print our contents table as it should give scope to the book and should be attractive. I wrote the quotations and the little note I have added.” She had even drawn up a prospectus; see also John Bale, Sons & Danielsson to Stopes, July 4, 1924, and June 15, 1927, UCSB/DSS/MSC: I/16.

vertising and I am not out to make money with this particular book so much as to get it widely into the hands of thoughtful people."<sup>92</sup>

Decisive in these advertisements was the use of expert authority, expressed through the quoted testimonials from physicians and noted scientific journals. Adding "a few press opinions . . . of this world-famous book," in addition to her own academic credentials, Stopes tried to join these acknowledged experts (see fig. 7). As Lori Anne Loeb has demonstrated, testimonials in advertisements as "the very source of the selling message" had become a very common element in British advertisement as early as 1870; their popularity even increased as supplements to the illustrated display advertisements first appeared ten years later. At the end of the nineteenth century approximately a third of all advertisements for patent medicines and food contained a number of testimonials from experts.<sup>93</sup>

Exploiting this common model of expert testimonials enabled Stopes to provide herself with considerable prestige. In the light of these advertisements, every party involved already was or became transformed into an expert: the actual medical authorities whose professional prestige was supposed to signify rationality, credibility, and scientific trustworthiness; Stopes herself, who asked for their support with the evident aim of putting herself on a par with them; finally, the consumer, who could rise from the status of serious student to the rank of expert by buying (and reading) the book. These advertisements relied on exactly the same authority of the medical profession that Stopes challenged. They evoked the experts' authority and signaled that expertise was not only transferable but also attainable to the consumer through the right purchase decision.

Obviously the reactions to *Contraception* varied more widely than the testimonials chosen by the author to appear in advertisements. If *Married Love* had already been subject to strong controversy and was vehemently contested, reactions to *Contraception* varied even more widely and were far more extreme and forceful than those of five years before. With opinions much more elaborately and firmly articulated, attitudes

<sup>92</sup>Stopes to John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, June 9, 1923, UCSB/DSS/MSC: II/9.

<sup>93</sup>Lori Anne Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (Oxford, 1994), esp. pp. 74–79, 98; on the history of advertising in general see T. J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880–1930," in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880–1930*, ed. Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears (New York, 1983), pp. 1–38, and his more recent *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York, 1994); cf. in this context also Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914* (Stanford, CA, 1990), pp. 187–93.

toward birth control had apparently hardened on all sides. While one reviewer garlanded Stopes as “the first philosopher of contraception,” despite factual mistakes and inaccuracies, and another declared her “one of the most important women of our time,” strong opposition came especially from the medical profession, itself deeply split on the question of birth control.<sup>94</sup>

When *Contraception* was published in June 1923, partially due to the Sutherland libel trial and her ensuing constant media presence, Stopes had become so well-known a figure in English society that it hardly seems surprising that this work was reviewed approximately three times more often than *Married Love*.<sup>95</sup> In defiance (or because) of Stopes’s popularity and her concern with what the *Scottish Nation* believed to be the “toughest question modern society has to face,” namely the “proper place in which sex is to be put,” some periodicals like the *British Medical Journal* not only refused to print her advertisements but decided to ignore the book completely at the time of its publication.<sup>96</sup> In response, Stopes tried repeatedly to draw attention to herself by writing letters to the editors touting the virtues of *Contraception*. She was successful in at least one case and the *Lancet* printed a short review of the book’s third edition.<sup>97</sup> In addition to the increased quantity of reactions to *Contraception*, a qualitative shift also became observable. Above all, parts of the medical profession, its intended target, had finally realized the seri-

<sup>94</sup>K., “Dr. Marie Stopes’ Masterpiece” (n. 10 above); M.B., “The Science of Birth Control,” *Scottish Nation* (August 7, 1923), p. 8. Somewhat paradoxically and not exceptionally persuasively, Laurie Taylor (“The Unfinished Sexual Revolution [First Marie Stopes Memorial Lecture],” *Journal of Biosocial Science* 3 [1971]: 473–92) has tried to reestablish such a notion by putting Stopes on a level with figures like D. H. Lawrence, Wilhelm Reich, and Sigmund Freud, averring that *Married Love* had to be considered as the “key to Marie’s philosophy” whose “theoretical significance” had been overlooked.

<sup>95</sup>This estimation could naturally be merely a consequence of my incomplete search. Partly with the help of the archival material, I was still able to locate fifty-five review articles for *Contraception* in contrast to only nineteen for *Married Love*; see esp. press cuttings in UCSB/DSS/MS: IV/12 as well as the unfinished collection of reviews put together by Stopes herself in a booklet contained in this folder; additionally, see the long list of newspapers, in a letter from Stopes to Alexander M. Waller, one of her solicitors, February 5, 1932, UCSB/DSS/MS: II/10.

<sup>96</sup>M.B. (n. 94 above); John Bale, Sons & Danielsson to Stopes, June 15, 1927, UCSB/DSS/MS: I/16; however, the *British Medical Journal* published a short note in 1941. This point will be developed at the end of the section.

<sup>97</sup>See, e.g., Stopes’s letters in *Westminster Gazette* (September 1, 1923), p. 5; *Nature* 2872 (1924): 719; *Lancet* (January 29, 1927), p. 259; *British Medical Journal* (May 23, 1931), p. 920; *Lancet* (August 15, 1931), p. 375. Stopes was also brazen enough to write to van de Velde and question forthrightly why he had not quoted her work more often in one of his recent publications. Van de Velde answered in a polite but firm way that he simply did not agree with her on all points (Theodore Hendrik van de Velde to Marie Stopes, in German, July 5, 1933, UCSB/DSS/MS: II/7).

ousness of her enterprise and began to fight bitterly against the unwelcome intruder in their professional territory.<sup>98</sup>

It was precisely that question—Stopes's relation (and that of her books) to the medical profession as well as their relation to birth control that was discussed and questioned by a majority of the review articles, especially but not exclusively in the medical press. Several journals made it clear from the beginning that "Dr. Marie C. Stopes who is a doctor of science and philosophy" was "not a medical graduate" and therefore "without the fold of medicine." Calling this a "deficiency in its author," critic L. P. Garrod found it strange that what he considered to be the first exposition of the subject of birth control should have been written by anyone outside the medical profession. Likewise, the *Indian Medical Gazette*, apparently surprised, stated that "curiously enough, Dr. Stopes is neither a doctor nor a lawyer."<sup>99</sup>

The *Medical Press* judged *Contraception* to be "unscientific," "irrelevant," "diffuse," and "cumbered with numerous repetitions." Stopes's method of giving personal asseverations instead of scientific reasoning was even compared by the *Medical Press* to the behavior of the Bellman, a figure in Lewis Carroll's nonsense epic *The Hunting of the Snark*: "Less

<sup>98</sup>In addition to the review articles already mentioned in the text, cf. esp. M.D.S. (n. 27 above); *Medical Times* 51 (1923): 115; "Birth-Right and Birth-Wrong: Fit and Unfit," *Pall Mall Gazette* (August 2, 1923), p. 14; A. M. Carr-Saunders, "Population and Its Restriction," *Nation and Athenaeum* (August 4, 1923), p. 579; *Lancet* (August 11, 1923), p. 281; *College of Nursing Bulletin* 11 (1923): 8–9; *Nursing Times* 2 (1923): 888; *Nursing Mirror and Midwives' Journal* (October 20, 1923), p. 51; *Democrat: The Organ of Sane and Constitutional Trade Unionism* (December 22, 1923); *Journal of State Medicine* 32 (1924): 298; G. Archdall Reid, "The Technique of Contraception," *Nature* 114 (1924): 601–2; *Nation and Athenaeum* (October 8, 1927), p. 34; *Lancet* (October 22, 1927), p. 871; C. P. B., *Eugenics Review* 19 (1927–28): 329; *Quarterly Review of Biology* 3 (1928): 454; *Medical Times* 59 (1931): 120; T. Bowen Partington, "A Book Which Everyone Should Read," *Health and Strength* (August 29, 1931), p. 273; *Nature*, vol. 129 (1932); L.C.H., *Birmingham Medical Review* 7 (1932): 165–69; *Medical World* (November 14, 1941), pp. 274–76. For a harsh point-by-point critique from a contemporary Catholic theological perspective, cf. in particular Henry Davis (*Birth Control: The Fallacies of Dr. M. Stopes* [London, 1928], pp. 6, 15), who attempted to prove both the "inconsistent and irrational" character of Stopes's argument for birth control ("constructive onanism," according to Davis) as put forward in *Contraception*.

<sup>99</sup>Sec, e.g., *Challenge* 2 (1923): 358; *Medical Journal of Australia* (January 31, 1925), p. 113; *Child* 16 (April 1926): 344; and *Medical World* (May 6, 1932), p. 194. L. P. Garrod, "Eugenics and Birth Control," *Westminster Gazette* (September 26, 1923), p. 10. *Indian Medical Gazette* (March 1924), p. 155. The *Glasgow Herald Tribune* (August 23, 1923) even expected that some of its readers might regret that this subject had not been taken up "by a capable writer with medical experience and qualification and without prejudice," but they argued, seeking some compensating advantages, that Stopes, after all, had "efficient biological training" and was—last but not least—herself a "married woman," and thus an expert not by profession but by gender.

modest than Lewis Carroll's character, whose claim was, 'What I tell you three times is true,' Dr. Stopes seems to think that a single forcible declaration of a proposition is equivalent to its proof." While attacking the work and mocking its author, the *Press's* editors nonetheless acknowledged that *Contraception* would seriously challenge the medical profession and its professional attitude toward birth control. "Medical men are frequently consulted as to the most efficacious and safe mechanical means of preventing conception, and while some decline to concern themselves in the matter, others think that such advice falls within their duties," they stated self-critically. Even if Stopes's book obviously could not meet their professional standards, *Contraception* at least had the positive effect of demonstrating the necessity of answering such queries.<sup>100</sup>

Only the previously mentioned physician John S. Fairbairn gave further thought to the effects of Stopes's lack of medical training for him and his colleagues. Raising a "grave objection," Fairbairn accused Stopes of having "borrowed knowledge . . . without practical experience." He ironically alluded to her formal education, when he stated: "Apparently, her specialty is palæontology, which is, perhaps, as good a foundation as any other on which to build schemes for the advancement of humanity in future geological epochs, but scarcely sufficient to afford an adequate perspective of the immediate effects of the restriction of conception in the two sexes."<sup>101</sup> As did the *Medical Press*, Fairbairn strongly regretted that British family practitioners had been compelled to "fall back on the books of the type of the one now before us, i.e. written by enthusiasts on birth-restriction, who . . . are, therefore, partisans." But ultimately, he felt, the medical profession itself was to blame. Allegedly shy of taking up birth control because of polemical discussions of "its theological, ethical and social aspects" and only superficially concerned with the methods to be advocated as the most hygienic and effective in preventing pregnancy, the medical profession had been ill-prepared when the "economic stress of the post-war period" forced the subject on the "attention of the family practitioner."<sup>102</sup> In other words, Stopes had focused on a neglected but increasingly significant niche. As Frank Mort has shown, the field of sex was not only constructed outside of politics, but was left equally unexploited by the medical profession. This reticence had permitted Stopes to become a publicly recognized authority and her clinic the principal center for birth control information and instruction in England, albeit for a short time only. The mere fact that scholars like

<sup>100</sup> "The Prevention of Conception," *Medical Press and Circular* 168 (1924): 98–99.

<sup>101</sup> Fairbairn (n. 25 above), pp. 562–65, quotation at p. 563.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

Fairbairn (angrily) noticed this abdication and discussed it made for change.<sup>103</sup>

If a professional audience had been Stopes's main target group, and if *Contraception* was to be measured by their standards, as many review articles argued, then it definitely failed, since it was "lacking in scientific precision and impartiality," written from a "propagandist standpoint" with over one-third of the book "devoted to polemics," and its subject was "far too near Mrs Stopes's heart to allow her to write anything so inhuman as a manual."<sup>104</sup> Writing in the *Medical Women's Federation Newsletter*, the critic Margaret N. C. Jackson had to admit that Stopes's books held "a position unique" in Great Britain but found this in itself a "regrettable fact," inasmuch as it had been "left to a member of the laity to write a text-book" on contraception, which belonged after all "essentially to the realm of Public Health and Preventive Medicine." According to Jackson, the book was bound not to come up to professional standards precisely because Stopes had also been at pains to make it readable to the lay public.<sup>105</sup>

The *Scottish Nation* only partly agreed. The editors found the book's description as "a manual for the legal and medical professions" completely inadequate. With the help of a dictionary to resolve some of its "technicalities," *Contraception* was "as much to be understood [*sic*] of the people as . . . , say, *Married Love*."<sup>106</sup> But if it was in fact written for a broader public, why did it have this textbook-like character? Calling it a "courageous attempt to fill the gap" caused by "haziness" of the general practitioners in this matter, the *Challenge* suggested that the professional tone had been merely "dragged in to warn the reader that he would encounter some frank medical details in its pages." Still, Stopes was, in spite of, or perhaps because of her versatility, not regarded as the "most suitable" person to write such a handbook.<sup>107</sup>

Finally, one reviewer, writing under the less than original pseudonym "Medicus," saw practical reasons for tailoring *Contraception* to the med-

<sup>103</sup> Frank Mort (*Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830* [London, 1987], pp. 199–203) has presented a structurally very similar "power vacuum" argument concerning sex education and state policy. Only the absence of state intervention and its hardly encouraging role in the modernization of sex education, he has demonstrated, meant a promising opportunity for individual authorities and self-founded institutions of volunteers like Stopes.

<sup>104</sup> Douglas White, *Eugenics Review* 15 (1923–24): 613–15, at 615; John Rickman, *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 5 (1924): 240–42, at 241.

<sup>105</sup> Margaret N. C. Jackson, *Medical Women's Federation Newsletter* (November 1931), pp. 58–60.

<sup>106</sup> *Scottish Nation* (August 7, 1923), p. 8.

<sup>107</sup> *Challenge* (1923): 358.

ical profession, and thus accepting that its effect might be rather indirect and its sales smaller. In his mind, this strategy could at least assure that the sale of *Contraception* would be undertaken only by reputable booksellers and not given a prominent place in “certain shop windows of a kind chiefly to be found in the region of Leicester Square and Cambridge Circus,” like the author’s other books.<sup>108</sup> Likewise, a clear distinction was often drawn between the book’s effects for the medical profession, trained to deal with such dangerous and possibly detrimental information, and ignorant and innocent laymen. Because they feared the dissemination of the information contained in this book, many journals such as the *Referee* declared in relief that *Contraception* was written in a “language quite beyond the comprehension of any mind to which it could possibly do harm.” The *Medical Journal of Australia*, for instance, agreed that “the broadcasting of such information to the general public would, however, certainly be undesirable and would be likely to do much more harm than good.” Also another critic, the eugenicist and neo-Malthusian Ernest W. MacBride, professor of zoology at the Imperial College of Science, worried that “the normal reader must experience a shock in finding these intimate matters discussed in such detail and in such plain language by a woman.”<sup>109</sup>

Only a handful of commentators tried to compare *Contraception* to Stopes’s earlier writings. One was George Rees, who noted a difference in style between *Contraception* and Stopes’s previous, more popular works. Whereas *Married Love* was written in a “highly emotive way” with an evident tendency to “romanticize physical relationships, and to surround an act of relative insignificance with all the rosy mists of Cloud Cuckoo Land,” *Contraception* was written “crisply and concisely, with a wealth of footnotes giving the sources of her information.”<sup>110</sup> A single critic, the anonymous editor of the *South African Medical Record*, comprehended not only the full significance of the struggle over medical au-

<sup>108</sup> Medicus, “Eugenics,” *Weekly Westminster Gazette* (September 29, 1923), p. 19. A slightly shortened version of this review article had appeared three days earlier in the *Westminster Gazette* (September 26, 1923), p. 10, under the title “Eugenics and Birth Control.” Here, the author’s name was indicated as L. P. Garrod.

<sup>109</sup> *Referee* (July 13, 1924); *Medical Journal of Australia* (January 31, 1925), p. 114; Ernest W. MacBride, “Biology and Birth-Control,” *Nature* 120 (1927): 646–48. With regard to this aspect of the reception of *Contraception*, see also the review articles “Scientific Birth Control,” *Pioneer* (August 16, 1931), and *Sun* (August 30, 1931), respectively. Evidently afraid of the public’s potentially harmful curiosity, the *Indian Medical Gazette* (March 1924), p. 155, wrote, “The book contains such a mass of information that it will be of considerable value to doctors; it will, however, prove an unsafe guide to the layman and it is to be feared that laymen will constitute the vast majority of its readers.”

<sup>110</sup> Rees (n. 7 above); see also the correspondence between Rees and Stopes, UCSB/DSS/MS: II/6.



thority but also the importance of Stopes's skillful efforts to commodify her works and herself. "The authoress, it should be noted, is not a medical practitioner, although the lay press and the cable writers all seem to think so" he wrote, repeating a frequently mentioned point. Addressing even the advanced business strategies and extensive advertising campaigns, he attacked Stopes with ironic hostility. According to him, the fact that she was "a very superior person" came out in all her books, and especially in her advertisements for them, and rendered the reading thereof a "little trying." Decrying Stopes as a "woman of one idea" which she would "beat out so thinly" that he confidently looked forward to "its furnishing the material for at least a dozen more books in addition to the three she has already written," he suspected avarice and self-aggrandizement as her main motives: "As her books are amongst the best of sellers, perhaps this thin beating out has at least its satisfactory side for the authoress."<sup>111</sup>

When the *British Medical Journal* eventually gave up its policy of silence and published a short note on *Contraception* in 1941, the book's controversial character had completely vanished. Pityingly smiling at Stopes's attitude toward the subject by describing it as the "pioneer's enthusiasm" that was "still shining" in the preface to the recently published fifth edition, the journal summarized the book's central message in a single ironic formula. According to Stopes, peace could only be founded on contraceptive birth control, which had to be regarded as "the only means of ensuring that love shall take control for every infant born."<sup>112</sup> The *Journal* doubted the value of recounting past controversies. They stated that *Contraception* was unfortunately not only completely outdated on its own terms but also that the medical profession's interests had entirely changed since the book's original publication eighteen years earlier. Now that a once heavily disputed subject had been successfully medicalized and, with the establishment of the National Birth Control Council in 1930 as the first institutional step toward creating a national birth control system, the medical profession and the state had moved closer to each other; thus, securing the profession's impact on this significant field, medical doctors turned their efforts to new goals like the "possibilities of plastic repair operations."<sup>113</sup>

<sup>111</sup> *South African Medical Record* (December 22, 1923).

<sup>112</sup> *British Medical Journal* (November 29, 1941), p. 772.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* By the late 1930s, not only within the medical profession but also in the birth control and eugenics movements, Stopes's books were regarded as entirely outdated, although they sold well until the early 1950s; cf. in this context Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration* (n. 22 above), pp. 203–15; and for a discussion of professional boundaries and scientific expertise, Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago, 1988).

Through her effective planning and design, Stopes's efforts to establish her expert status turned out to be so successful in the broader public that she found herself the object of commercial abuse. Just as she had used the expertise of others to promote herself and create her own reputation, others began to trade on her hard-won fame. Stopes was certainly not accepted within the medical profession, but her name was apparently popular and meaningful enough to be used as an expert testimonial for purely commercial purposes. She tried to control the meanings of her commodities but inevitably failed: her notoriety was such that several unscrupulous patent medicine manufacturers began to market "Dr. Stopes's Female Pills" or advertised similar abortifacients of dubious efficacy, to her great disgust, with the slogan "as recommended by Dr. Stopes."

In late 1932, unauthorized advertisements for her books were published even in the respected and well-known *Harpers' Magazine*. The reasons for this are not completely evident, but it is illuminating to see how bitterly Stopes complained about the abuse of her expertise. She asked the Society of Authors for an immediate injunction to stop them. According to her, the form of the advertisements was "degrading and vulgar," and they had "misled people in this country into thinking my books were in the hands of this notorious 'mail order' pornographic firm."<sup>114</sup> Worried that this would undermine the sales of her works as well as her insistent bid for respectability, Stopes wrote, "The Head of a Government Department, for instance, mentioned to me that he noticed my books were in the hands of cheap jades. The injury to me in this country is so very serious that damages must be obtained regardless whether any [books] have been sold or not. Though selling copies in this printed form causes me financial injury, the injury to my reputation by the advertisement is even more serious."<sup>115</sup>

## VII

In a huge advertisement appearing in the May 1931 issue of the *Birth Control News*, *Married Love*, *Wise Parenthood*, *Contraception*, and other "Sociological works by Dr. Marie Stopes" were for the first time celebrated as the "*Married Love Series*," suggesting that it would be best to possess all of them together. In an example of British understatement

<sup>114</sup> See the correspondence between Stopes and D. Kilham Roberts of the Society of Authors, May 27, June 1, December 16, 1932, UCSB/DSS/MSC: XXVII.

<sup>115</sup> Stopes to Roberts, June 1, 1932. Even as late as 1950, a man called "Stokes" published advertisements for a book with the subtitle *Married Love*; Stopes to Roberts, March 22, 1950, UCSB/DSS/MSC: XXVII.

at its best, Stopes's writings were not only called "the most important contributions to Sex Knowledge ever published," but, according to this campaign, they had also "been endorsed by most eminent Doctors" and had been "praised and recommended in every quarter of the Press." Such professional marketing strategies, which tried to raise her books to the status of valuable objects that could be collected by a devoted consumer, and the skillful creation of publicly acknowledged expertise as means to greater sales, call the prevailing assessment of Marie Stopes into question.<sup>116</sup>

Stopes has often naively been depicted as a heroic martyr, a "passionate crusader" whose altruistic fight for population control via the health of the individual marked a milestone in the history of sex reform, especially by liberating women sexually, that is, enabling them to control their own fertility and experience sex as pleasure. However, as Sheila Jeffreys and others have persuasively demonstrated, Stopes's feminist progressiveness had its definite conservative limits.<sup>117</sup> In an attempt to link traditional values with modern methods of birth control, she not only could not avoid the contradictions inherent in her sexological model itself but also remained strictly opposed to all forms of female sexual behavior considered inadequate, aberrant, or detrimental. If it was vital for women to experience pleasurable, reproductive heterosexuality within marriage, all deviant conduct such as abortion, homosexuality, masturbation or premarital sex was to be repudiated because it decreased the woman's ability to achieve a "real union." Thus, readers (and consumers) of *Married Love* were still supposed to be married, and *Contraception* made it perfectly clear from the beginning that this fact had to be accepted as an "axiom" before contraceptives could be intelligently discussed.<sup>118</sup> Likewise, coitus interruptus and abortion were vehemently disapproved as physiologically and psychologically harmful and—in the latter case—illegal.

Stopes was eager to give the study of birth control a veneer of science. When she had allegedly overcome the sexual (in)experience of her first marriage by a turn to science in her search for answers, Stopes did so because "truth" seemed attainable only through the scientific method. A practical problem of private life was thus transformed into an issue

<sup>116</sup> *Birth Control News* 10 (1931): ii.

<sup>117</sup> See esp. Jeffreys (n. 39 above), pp. 119–21, 157–58; Mort (n. 103 above), pp. 189–93; Margaret Jackson, "Sexual Liberation or Social Control?" *Women's Studies International Forum* 6 (1983): 1–17; cf. also Jane Lewis, "The Ideology and Politics of Birth Control in Inter-war England," *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 2 (1979): 33–48; and *Natural Order: Historical Studies of Scientific Culture*, ed. Barry Barnes and Steven Shapin (Beverly Hills, CA, 1979).

<sup>118</sup> Stopes, *Contraception* (n. 15 above), pp. 12–23, 55, 69–79.

of scholarship. Sharing with contemporary scientists and sexologists a crudely positivistic view of scientific investigation as essentially value-free, enlightening, and objective, she appeared to have supposed that everyday tasks could be performed more rationally and efficiently, and would correspondingly rise in status, if only a scientific methodology were applied to them. An investigation of sex passed off as “scientific” therefore made it a more respectable topic for public discourse—which was of particular significance when opinions toward birth control depended so fundamentally on general views of sex, gender roles, and morality. This approach consequently legitimized Stopes’s work and simultaneously provided it with a higher claim to truth.

Additionally, the medical profession’s vitriolic attacks made Stopes all the more determined to make her work as both sex reformer and birth controller appear in a “scientific” light. Thus her shift to a more physiological examination and a more narrowly reproductive model of birth control in *Contraception* was not only (as, e.g., feminist Margaret Jackson has recently tried to argue) a consequence both of Stopes’s “pre-occupation with issues relating to reproduction” and of a “determination to beat her opponents at their ‘scientific’ game”<sup>119</sup> but also a strategic necessity to survive economically and personally in a heavily disputed market through consciously employed techniques of salesmanship. The publication of *Mother England* in 1929 shows that science could serve as a means for solving socially induced problems, and that its legitimizing power could provide welcome assistance in commercialization.

Regardless of the different audiences she addressed and her changing analytical approaches to her subjects, some key elements of Stopes’s rhetorical strategy stayed constant from her first bestseller through to *Mother England*. Here, as in *Married Love*, authority was invoked both through individual experience and scientific expertise. Seeking public support from previously silent voices of the working classes, the publication of *Mother England* was Stopes’s ultimate response to her diminishing status as a best-selling author. As this work shows, rather than gaining acceptance as an expert within the medical profession, Stopes remained a populist, her works limited to the realm of best-sellers. Yet only by casting herself as a professional was she able to maintain her popular market. At the core of Stopes’s success, finally, lay a highly paradoxical best-seller-expertise relationship: while her self-fashioned expertise constituted a *conditio sine qua non* for the commodification of her writings, it was precisely the increasingly commercialized character of her works that obstructed Stopes’s own professionalization.

Despite all her attempts to promote herself as a coolly rational author-

<sup>119</sup>Jackson, *The Real Facts of Life* (n. 22 above), p. 149.

ity, Stopes, who had once described herself as a “pioneer and a prophet,” never gave up a mystical faith in higher powers and the welfare of the race. All her self-constructed scientific professionalism had its spiritual-eugenic justification. At the very end of her “contemporary history,” Stopes ventured to look into the future. Merging her conservative feminism, eugenic mysticism, and persistent demands for sexual self-realization, Stopes finally raised her voice to a dramatic exclamation. In a prophet’s querulous and accusing tone, Marie Stopes implored “Mother England”: “When will your slavery to ignorance and corruption cease? When will the chains forged upon you by the perversity of priests and politicians be struck from your aching limbs and you be free to obtain the knowledge of how to bear in health and joy the beautiful and happy scions of an Imperial Race that might even yet flower from our ancient stock?”<sup>120</sup> Mutatis mutandis, self-determined sex became, after all, the key not only to never-ending happiness but also to the individual liberty and personal freedoms of a prospering people. For Stopes, knowledge was indeed power—and could be sold.

<sup>120</sup> Stopes, ed., *Mother England* (n. 1 above), p. 191.