

ENGLISH MIDWIVES

THEIR

HISTORY AND PROSPECTS

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P R E F A C E

To arouse an interest in the midwives of this country—to show what misery may result from their ignorance—and to gain sympathy, advice, and assistance in endeavouring to raise them to a more refined and intellectual position, has induced the author to present this little volume to English readers.

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MRS CELLIER ON THE PILLORY.

(After a drawing in the British Museum.)

See p. 71.

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CHAPTER I.

SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

VERY little is known of the early history of the English *Mid-wif*, or "with-woman."* It is certain, however, that she was a woman of inferior education. Her opportunities of obtaining written or oral instruction in midwifery were very few, and consequently nearly the whole of her information must have been gained by experience often, it is to be feared, at the expense of the poor women whom she sought to succour. No book in the vulgar tongue had yet been published upon the subject; and in cases of difficulty, relics,

* The Spanish and Portuguese word *comadre*, or Latin *cum-mater*, is exactly analogous to the English word "midwife."

charms, and incantations were the methods employed to overcome them. Henry* says of the women amongst the ancient Britons that when a birth was attended with any difficulty they put certain girdles made for that purpose about the women in labour. These girdles, which were believed to facilitate the birth of heroes, are reckoned in the poems of Ossian among the treasures of kings. Such girdles were kept with care till very lately in many families in the Highlands of Scotland. They were impressed with several mystic figures, and the ceremony of binding them about the woman's waist was accompanied with words and gestures, which showed the custom to have been of great antiquity, and to have come originally from the Druids.

In 'Pierce the Ploughman's Crede' the friars are blamed because they

"Maken wymmen to wenen,
That the lace of our ladye smok lighteth hem of children."

Among the articles of a visitation in 1559 the following inquiry is made: "Whether you knowe anye that doe use charmes, sorcery, enchaunt-

* 'History of Great Britain,' vol. i, p. 459.

ments, invocations, circles, witchcrafts, south-sayings, or any like crafts or imaginations invented by the Devyl, and specially in the tyme of women's travyle."

In John Bale's 'Comedye concernynge thre Lawes,' A. D. 1538, "Idolatry" is made to speak as follows :—

"Yea, but now ych am a she,
And a good mydwyfe perde ;
Yonge chyldren can I charme,
With whysperynge and whysshynge,
With crossynge and with kyssynge,
With blasynge and with blessynge,
That sprites do them no harme."

One of the injunctions at the visitation of Bishop Bonner (1554) was the following: "A mydwyfe shal not use or exercise any witchcraftes, charmes, sorcerie, invocations, or praiers, other than suche as be allowable and may stand with the lawes and ordinances of the Catholike Church."

In the articles to be inquired into in the province of Canterbury in the sixteenth century, we find the following questions were asked relating to midwives :—"Whether any use charms or unlawful prayers, or invocations, in Latin or

otherwise, and namely, midwives in the time of woman's travail with child?"* Also, "Whether parsons, vicars, or curates be diligent in teaching the midwives how to christen children in time of necessity according to the canons of the church or no?"†

In another diocese we find the question asked by the bishop:—"Do any undertake the office of midwife without licence?"‡

From the foregoing quotations it is evident that the church at this early period recognised the importance of the office of midwife. In urgent cases she was frequently called upon to baptize the newly-born child. As early as the seventh century this was permitted, for we find in 'Liber Pœnitentialis' of Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury—"Mulier baptizare non præsumat, nisi cogenti necessitate maxima."§ Many entries are to be found in parish registers; one example may interest the reader:—"St Mary's, Lichfield, Oct. 12, 1591. Margaret, dr. of Walter Henningham de Pypehall, baptized by

* Grindal Rem. Park Soc., Sec. 174-58.

† 'Documentary Annals,' by Ed. Cardwell, D.D., vol. i, p. 171.

‡ 'N. and Q.,' 1st series, vol. iii, p. 29.

§ 'Monumenta Ecclesiastica.' "De reliquiis sanctorum vel ritu sacerdotum et diaconorum laicorum que in ecclesia," xlvi.

the mydwyfe, and, as yet not broughte to ye churche to be there examined and testified by them that were present.”*

In some registers ancient injunctions to the clergy by the Archbishop of York are found as follows:—“Item. All curates must openly in the church teach and instruct the mydwiefes of the very words and form of baptisme to thentents that they may use them perfectly well and none oder.”†

In these days it was generally believed that baptism was necessary to salvation, and as it was often impossible for a weakly or dying child to be taken to the priest or he to come to it before its death, there was no alternative than to allow the midwife to baptise. The conveyance of a delicate child along miles of bad roads, through cold and storm, would have frequently proved fatal. It was often as much as the midwife could do to reach the labouring woman; perhaps on a pillion at the back of the messenger, after travelling for hours through dark, narrow, packhorse roads, or knee-deep passes which could scarcely be called roads. To return with her frail, dying

* Burn's 'History of Parish Registers.'

† Ibid, p. 81.

burden, perhaps to find the priest from home, was more than could be expected. What then was to be done at night? The Maitresse Sage-femme, Madame Coudray, says:—"Il y a ordinairement du danger à porter les enfans au baptême pendant la nuit, surtout dans les paroisses de la campagne; les mauvais chemins, les fossés, les planches, les sautoirs, les glaces, les mauvais temps, les rencontres des chiens, &c., tous ces inconvéniens, dont on peut se parer le jour, ne permettent pas qu'on y expose la nuit un dépot si précieux; un faux pas de celui ou celle qui porte l'enfant, peut lui faire perdre la vie sans baptême."*

The practice of baptising by the midwife was continued in England till the beginning of the seventeenth century. Bishop Burnet gives the following account of its discontinuance:—"The necessity of the sacrament (baptism) and the invalidity of ecclesiastical functions, when performed by persons who were not episcopally ordained, were entertained by many. This struck even at the baptism by midwives in the Church of Rome, which was practised and connived at here in England, till it was objected to in the

* 'Abrégé de l'Art des Accouchemens.'

conference held at Hampton Court soon after King James the First's accession to the crown, and baptism was not till then limited to persons in orders."*

This statement is corroborated by the fact that in the oath taken by the midwife in the sixteenth century she swears that she will use, in the ministration of the sacrament of baptism, the apt and accustomed words of the same sacrament; but in the seventeenth century the oath runs as follows: "You shall not be privy, or consent, that any priest, or other party, shall of your knowledge or sufferance baptise any child by any mass, Latin service, or prayers, than such as are appointed by the laws of the Church of England," &c. Both

* 'History of his Own Time,' vol. vi. See the ninth section of the third book of the 'Apostolical Institutions':—"Quod non oportet mulieres baptizare, esse enim impium et a doctrinâ Christi alienum." See also 'Collin's Ecclesiastical History,' vol. vi, p. 550. Among the articles for the regulation of the clergy agreed to by Convocation, and afterwards subscribed by both Houses in 1576, was this:—"Twelfthly. That private baptism, in case of necessity, is only to be ministered by a lawful minister or deacon called to be present for that purpose, and by none others. All other persons shall be inhibited to intermeddle with the ministering of baptism privately, it being no part of their vocation." This earlier inhibition seems not to have been enforced in the case of midwives.

Burnet* and Burnes† believed that this exercise of the office of baptising by midwives was the beginning of their being licensed by the bishops. Mrs Cellier‡ says that Bishop Bonner was the first who granted these licences, and that the form of the first licence was drawn up by him. It is certain that in the time of Elizabeth these licences were being granted, for Strype§ writes: "There is one thing more I shall observe under this year (1567)—namely, a license the Archbishop of Canterbury granted to Eleoner Pead to be a midwife, with the oath she took, whereby it may be perceived what were the disorderly practices of midwives in those days—as laying supposititious children in place of the true natural ones, using sorceries and enchantments, hurting the child, or destroying it, or cutting or pulling off the head, or dismembering it; baptising the infant new born, in case of necessity, with odd and profane words, and using sweet water or water perfumed. But behold the oath this woman took. 'I, Eleoner Pead, admitted to the

* 'History of the Reformation.'

† 'Ecclesiastical Law,' article "Midwives."

‡ To Dr. ——. An answer to his queries, &c., p. 6.

§ 'Strype's Annals,' vol. i, part ii, chapter 50.

office and occupation of a midwife, will faithfully and diligently exercise the said office according to such cunning and knowledge as God hath given me, and that I will be ready to help and aid as well poor as rich women being in labour and travail of child, and will always be ready both to poor and rich in exercising and executing of my said office. Also I will not permit or suffer that any woman being in labour or travail shall name any other to be the father of her child, than only he who is the right and true father thereof; and that I will not suffer any other body's child to be set, brought, or laid before any woman delivered of child in the place of her natural child, so far forth as I can know and understand. Also I will not use any kind of sorcery or incantation in the time of the travail of any woman; and that I will not destroy the child born of any woman, nor cut, nor pull off the head thereof, or otherwise dismember or hurt the same, or suffer it to be hurt or dismembered by any manner of way or means. Also that at the ministration of the sacrament of baptism in the time of necessity, I will use apt and accustomed words of the same sacrament—that is to say, these words following, or the like in effect: *I christen thee in the name*

of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and none other profane words. And that in such time of necessity, in baptising any infant born, and pouring water upon the head of the said infant, I will use pure and clear water, and not any rose or damask water, or water made of any confection or mixture; and that I will certify the curate of the parish church of every such baptising."

We must leave the subject of midwives' licences for the present. Further information respecting them will be given in a future chapter.

In the middle of the sixteenth century it would appear that English women became dissatisfied with their midwives, alive to their ignorance and impressed with the necessity of educating them. But their education was no easy task, for there were no female midwifery practitioners capable of undertaking it. It was also difficult to overcome the prejudices of the ignorant, who, from a false modesty, objected to the printing in the mother tongue of midwifery details.* Men,

* "Many think that it is not meete ne fitting such matters to be intreated of so plainly in our mother and vulgar language, to the dishonour (as they say) of womanhood and the derision of

from whom the desired help was destined ultimately to come, were deterred from undertaking the business of midwifery from the fear of being looked upon as magicians,* or as almost attempting the virtue and honour of the female sex. "A certaine studious and diligent clerke," whose name was Richard Jonas,† however, in 1540, "at the request and desire of diverse honest and sad matrons, being of his acquaintance, did translate out of Latine into English a great part of the booke 'De Partu Hominis'—that is to say, of the Birth of Mankynde." This translation of Rhodion's work was immediately after revised from "top to toe," and published by Thomas Raynald under the title of 'The Woman's Booke.' He speaks, in succeeding editions, of the success of his work as follows: "There be since the first setting forth of this booke, right

their own secrets, by the detection and discovering whereof, men it reading or hearing, shall be moved thereby, the more to abhorre and loath the company of women, every boy and knave reading them as openly as the tales of 'Robin Hood.'" 'The Birth of Mankynde.' Prologue.

* In Hamburg, in 1521, one Veites was condemned for this offence to the flames.

† The manuscript copy of this work presented to Catherine, Queen of Henry VIII, still exists.

many honourable ladies, and other worshipful gentlewomen, which have not disdained the oftener by occasion of this booke, to frequent and haunt women in their labours, carrying with them this booke in their hands, and causing such part of it as doth chiefly concern the same purpose to be read before the midwife and the rest of the women there being present, whereby oft-times, they all have beene put in remembrance of that wherewith the labouring woman hath beene greatly comforted and alleviated of her throngs and travail; whose laudable example and doings would God that many proud midwives would ensue and follow.”*

This work of Rhodion was translated into nearly every European language, and during the century following its publication was almost the sole book from which midwives gained any knowledge of their art. Its influence upon English midwifery must have been most beneficial, for Jonas doubtless spoke the truth when he said of the midwives of his day that, “As there might be many right, expert, diligent, wise, circumspect, and tender, about such busi-

* ‘The Birth of Mankynde.’ Prologue.

nesse as appertaineth to their office ; so be there again many woefull, indiscreete, unreasonable, churlish, and through whose rudenesse, and rashnesse onely, I doubt not but that a great number of women in their labour speede worse then needed otherwise."

It is deplorable to think of the universal ignorance which existed at this time in those who practised midwifery, for if Rhodion, whose book is full of the grossest blunders, was the wisest professor of the art, what must have been the benighted condition of those whom he professed to teach. When we think of the fomentations, bathings, fumigations, anointments, suppositories, pessaries, and the constant and cruel manipulations, which poor women had then to undergo in cases of natural labour, and the still more frightful mutilations which they had to suffer when any complication retarding the birth of the child took place, we cannot but regret that this most important branch of the healing art had not been earlier taken up and studied by such master minds as those which pursued it so energetically, and so immensely improved it, in the succeeding century.

Old Andrew Boorde, in his 'Brevyary of

Health,* writing in the latter part of the sixteenth century, alludes to the miseries which may result from an "unexpert mydwife," and adds: "In my tyme, as well here in Englonde as in other regions, and of olde antiquitie, every mydwife shulde be presented with honest women of great gravitee to the Byshop, and that they shulde testify for her that they do present, shulde be a sadde woman, wyse and discrete, havynge experience, and worthy to have the office of a mydwife. Then the Byshoppe, with the consent of a doctor of physick, ought to examine her, and to instructe her in that thyng that she is ignorant; and thus proved and admitted, is a laudable thyng; for and this were used in Englonde there shulde not halfe so many women myscary, nor so many chyldren perish in every place in Englonde as there be. The Byshop ought to loke on this matter." This passage is remarkable, inasmuch as it contains the first expression in England of a conviction often reiterated, and now and again vehemently urged—namely, *that it is necessary to give instruction to midwives, and a guarantee of their skill to the public.*

* 'The Extravagantes,' chap. 51.

The names of a few of our early English midwives have been preserved.

MARGARET COBBE.

This Royal midwife had a salary of £10 per annum granted her by the Crown on April 15th, 1469. She attended Elizabeth Woodville, Queen of Edward IV, when she was delivered of Edward V in the gloomy sanctuary of Westminster. This took place on Nov. 1st, 1470, and Margaret Cobbe still held her office in 1473, for we find in the Rolls of Parliament the following:—"Provided alwey, that this Acte or any other Acte made or to be made in this present Parliament, extend not nor in any wise be perjudiciall to Margery Cobbe late wyf of John Cobbe, beyng midwyf to oure best beloved wyf, Elizabeth Queen of England, unto or for any graunte by us by our letters patentes beryng date the 15th day of Aprill, the 9th yere of oure reigne, made to the seid John and Margery, of £10 by yere, duryng the lyf of the said Margery."—13 Edward IV.

ALICE MASSY.

This was another Royal midwife. We learn

from the privy purse expenses of Elizabeth of York, Queen of Henry VII, that in March, 1503, Alice Massy received her salary of £10 as Queen's midwife.

ELIZABETH GAYNSFORDE.

The following curious history relating to this midwife is to be found entered in the Consistorial Acts of the diocese of Rochester. Midwives, as has been before stated, were from time to time questioned as to the manner in which they performed the ceremony of baptism. It was at one of these examinations that this dialogue took place. "Anno 1523, Oct. 14.—Eliz. Gaynsforde, obstetrix, examinata dicit in vim juramenti sui sub hac formâ verborum. I, the aforesaid Elizabeth, seeing the child of Thomas Everey, late born, in jeopardy of life, by the authority of my office, then beyng midwyfe, did christen the same child under this manner. In the name of the Fader, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, I christen thee Denys; effundend meram aquam super caput infantul. Interrogata erat, whether the childe was born and delivered from the wyfe of the said Thomas; whereto she answereth and sayth, that the childe was not born, for she saw

nothing of the childe but the hedde, and for perell the childe was in, and in that time of nede, she christened as is aforesaid, and caste water with her hand on the childe's hede; after which the childe was born, and was had to the church, where the prieste gave to it that chrystenden that it lakkyd, and the child is yet alyf."*

JOHANE HAMMULDEN.

"Here's the midwife's name to 't, one Mistress Taleporter."

Winter's Tale, Act iv, Scene 3.

This midwife rendered herself notorious by divulging a remark, made by a woman she had delivered, relating to the conjugal proceedings of Henry VIII; and so jealous was the King of any discussion upon these matters, that her information led to an investigation before a quorum of justices at Reading.† The depositions were taken before Sir Walter Stonor, at Watlington, in Oxfordshire, on the 14th of June, 26 Henry VIII., when one John Dawson said that "Oon Johane Hammulden, wyff unto Walter Hammulden, of Watlyngton afore said, in the presens of the said

* 'Archæologia,' London, vol. xi. p. 124.

† Sir Henry Ellis's Original Letters. Third Series. Letter 236.

John Dawson, Willm. Goode, constable of the said town of Watlynton, Thomas Dawson, and John Awood, said that she was sent for to oon Burgyn's wyff, in Watlynton, when she was in labor with chyld, which was abowte Whittsontyde was a twelvemonth: And the said Burgyn's wyff said to the said Johane Hammulden that for her honestie and her connyng that she hadd, she might be mydwyff unto the Quene of Inglond yf hitt wer Quene Kateryn; and yf hitt wer Quene Anne she was to goode to be her mydwyff, for she was a hoore and a herlott of her lyvyng." Mrs Hammulden maintained before the justices that Mrs Burgyn had spoken these words, and added further, "that upon her faythe she wolde never have uttryd the words had not the said Burgyn's wyff said uppon a tyme that she wolde burne the said Johane Hammulden tayle, and doo her other displeasure." Mrs Burgyn denied that she had ever spoken such words, but reported that "Oon Dollfyn's wyff had said that hitt was never merry in Inglond sythyns there was iii Quenes in hitt. And then the said Johane Hammulden sayd there wolde be ffewer shortly, which words the said Johane Hammulden denyith." These depositions were sent up to Thomas Cromwell, asking

what was to be done with the prisoners, "for they remayne in the Constable's warde."

JANE SCARISBRYCKE.

She was a "Papist midwife in West Derby," and received a licence to practise in the diocese of Chester from Bishop Chadderton in 1578. He required of her that she should not refuse to attend "Any woman laboring of childe, being married and professing the reformed faith, whether the wife of a minister or otherwise," on pain of not having her licence renewed the following year.*

Among the interrogatories and demands of the people or parishioners, and their conversation to be required and known by the parsons, vicars, and curates, given in the later writings of Bishop Hooper is the following:—"xii item, whether any midwife refuse to come to any woman labouring of child for religion's sake, or because she is wife unto a minister of the church that hath married and doth marry both by God's law and the king's.†"

Some idea of the presents given by sponsors to midwives at christenings during this century may

* The Derby Household Books, Chetham Soc.

† Parker Society, Cam., 1852, p. 141.

be gathered from the privy purse expenses of Henry VIII and of the Princess Mary. In 1530 we find the former granting to the "norse (nurse) and midwif of my Ladye of Worcestre, by way of rewarde, £4; and in 1532, to the norice and the mydwif of Sir Nicholas Harvy cheilde £3 6s. 8d." The entries relating to the gifts of the Princess Mary to midwives are very numerous, the sums varying, according to the rank of the parents, from five to fifteen shillings. In 1537 we find she "payed for a bonnet and a frountlet, and the same given to Maistre's mydwife, 28s." Queen Elizabeth, in 1562, gave, at the christening of "Atkinson the scrivener his childe," to the nurse and midwife £4. In 1565 she gave at the christening of the child of the Lady Cecilia of Sweden a gratuity of £20; but at the christenings of all her other godchildren the amount of the present this queen gave to the nurse and midwife was £5.*

Sometimes midwives received presents of jewellery and plate; and they also obtained gifts of money from others who were present at the baptism of the infant besides sponsors, for Pepys

* Accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber.

writes in his journal, after having been to a christening—"I did give the midwife 10s."

Some curious entries relating to the fees of an ordinary midwife may be found in the Steward's accounts of the Shuttleworths, &c., in the county of Lancaster :*—"Spente by Will'm Woode and Cooke, wiffe and twoe horses, when they wente for the midwiffe of Wigan, being a day and a night away, 4s. Spente by Richard Stones when he brought the Wigan wiffe home, and a night away, 22d. ; to the midwiffe, 12d." Then again we find at page 198 :—"Given to the midwiffe which helped cowe that could not calve, 2s. 6d."

Smyth mentions a midwife who was fetched in 1558 from Cheddar, in Somersetshire, to London to attend a lady in her confinement, and received at her departure 6s. 8d.†

* Chetham Soc., p. 184.

† Berkeley MSS.

CHAPTER II.

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

EARLY in this century a surgeon practising in London, Peter Chamberlen, the first of several generations of distinguished men-midwives, observing the incapacity of the women professing midwifery with whom he came in contact, was moved in his conscience to represent to King James I in 1616 the following humane and reasonable proposition: "*That some order may be settled by the State for the instruction and civil government of midwives.*"* Had this proposal been carried out at that time, England would have been in the van of the movement which has been going on in Europe since Peter Chamberlen's days, instead of in the rear; our midwives would have been for more than two centuries properly instructed and controlled, and we should have been saved the humiliation of being pointed at by our continental neighbours as a nation

* A Voice in Rhama.

which does not care so much for the lives of its mothers as to induce it to secure for them efficient help in their times of jeopardy.

In the first year of the 17th century Peter Chamberlen had a son, who was destined to grow up and obtain such an extended reputation as almost to eclipse and hide from our view the useful work accomplished by his father. "Ere nineteen summers" he graduated as doctor of medicine at Padua, and afterwards at Oxford and Cambridge. He became a Fellow of the College of Physicians in 1628, and was Physician-in-Ordinary to three Kings and Queens of England and to some foreign Princes. "Fame begot me envy," he says, "and secret enemies, which mightily increased when my father added to me the knowledge of deliveries and cures of women. They cunningly allow me a transcendency in the particular of deliveries that they may the more securely deny me my due in physick, as if the one were privitive or destructive of the other." His midwifery practice must have been very extensive; for he says, "The burthen of all the midwives in and about London lay only on my shoulders," and his opportunities of ascertaining the amount of knowledge possessed by these

women must have been equally great. We know the opinion he formed from the lamentation which he made that "Ignorant women, whom either extreme povertie hath necessitated, or hard-heartedness presumed, or the game of Venus intruded into the calling of midwifery (to have the issues of life and death of two or three at one time in their hands, beside the consequence of health and strength of the whole nation) should neither be sufficiently instructed in doing good, nor restrained from doing evil." With these thoughts it is not surprising that he should have attempted, in 1633, to provide for the instruction and government of midwives—a task which, we have seen, his father had seventeen years before failed to accomplish.

In 1646 he wrote a celebrated little book entitled 'A Voice in Rhama, or the Crie of Women and Children echoed forth in the Compassions of Peter Chamberlen.' In this he deplores that his scheme has not been carried out, and pours forth, in his own eccentric but eloquent manner, all the ardent and conflicting feelings with which he was filled.*

* "Dr Chamberlen was extensively engaged in the practice of midwifery, and at one time attempted, in direct opposition to

“Blood (which pollutes a land and cries aloud to Heaven) runs yet fresh from the innocent veins of women and children for want of some charitable Samaritaines to bind up the wounds which ignorance and disorder amongst some uncontroled femal-arbiters of life and death and others daily make. The conscience whereof, as formerly it moved my pious father to represent it to King James, so hath it me to move it since unto the king my master, who (by mediation of that true-hearted honour of nobilitie, the Earl of Pembroke and Mountgomery) read the petition, and vouchsafed a gracious reference; and it received the test and approbation of those two learned columnes of our facultie, Sr Theodore de Mayerne and Sr Matthew Lister. The benefit being computed (over and above the bettering of health and strength to parents and children) to the saving of above three thousand lives a year in and about London, beside the rest of England, and all other parts where the same order might have been propagated. A design (I thought) so the wishes of the College of Physicians, to obtain from the Crown authority to organise the female practitioners in that department into a company, with himself at their head as president and examiner.”—Dr Munk’s ‘Roll of the College of Physicians,’ vol. i, p. 181.

full of pietie that no man would—so full of innocencie that no man could—so full of importance and general concernment that no man durst have opposed. What discredit had it been for a profession which lies under common disgrace and contempt to attain to the gravity and honour of order and government? What burden had it been for a calling which requires knowledge to be made more knowing and full of experience? What losse had it been to increase the number of living, which cannot but be an increase of employment to all sorts of trades and professions whatsoever—yea, to the very grave-maker, had he but patience to suspend his harvest till the young grew up to increase and multiply (not untimely, but) more and larger graves? My duty is to do good for evil, and to enthrone each member of our Facultie in the true orb it ought to shine in, were they as willing to accept as I to offer my endeavours. For (alas!) it is too grievous to think what a deluge of blood lies on their graves or consciences since these *thirty years* that my father attempted this charitie, and thirteen years since I, in his example, revived it. Why may not the State resent a proposition of public good from me as from another? And if

from me, then this proposition I do yet recommend that some order may be settled by the State for the instruction and civil government of midwives. Shall want of president be here objected? Yet this hath president in some foreign examples. The objection infers thus much: Because there was never any order for instructing and governing midwives, therefore there never must be; because multitudes have perished, therefore they still must perish; because our forefathers have provided no remedie, nor knew any, therefore we must provide none, though we know it. It may be, when bishops are restored again, their ordinaries will come in to plead their care. Of what? Truly, that none shall do good without their leave; that none shall have leave but such as will take their oath and pay money; that taking this oath and paying their money, with the testimonie of two or three gossips, any may have leave to be ignorant, if not as cruel as themselves; and that none shall have the priviledge to be so certainly forsworn as these who swear impossibilities. But of instruction or order amongst the midwives not one word. The mighty God of compassions blesse this public information to his glory. Amen."

The life of Dr Peter Chamberlen has yet to be written. When it is, it will be seen that he was a man of great talent and wide celebrity, energetic and eccentric, but at the same time highly practical. During the time he practised in London he made several proposals for the public good; that of establishing baths shared the same fate as the one we have now been considering. He was far in advance of the time in which he lived, and consequently experienced the usual fate of being misunderstood and abused by those who should have encouraged and assisted him. English midwives, however, should always remember that the two Peter Chamberlens were their first champions; and that to them they owe the first proposal made to place them in a position which would have been satisfactory to themselves and advantageous to the public.

Thus another half century passed and still no original work on midwifery, written by an English hand, appeared.

In 1637 Rueff's book, 'De Conceptu et Generatione Hominis,' was translated into English anonymously. The prejudice against printing this class of works in the mother tongue, complained of by writers in the preceding century, was

not yet extinguished. We find in the preface to 'The Expert Midwife,' which was the title given to this translation, the following sensible remarks : —“ Some (nicely precise) say it is unfit that such matters as these should be published in a vulgar tongue, for young heads to pry into. True, but the danger being great and manifold, whether is it better that millions should perish for want of help and knowledge, or that such means, which though lawful in themselves, yet may by some be abused, should be had and used? But young and raw heads, idle serving men, prophane fiddlers, scoffers, jesters, rogues; avaunt, pack hence! I neither meant it to you, neither is it fit for you.” This, the first and most absurd of the many retarding influences which have obstructed the development and improvement of the art of midwifery, was soon, however, destined to disappear like a thin, unsubstantial mist before the strong bright intellects which were about to arise and dispel it for ever.

The history of midwives during the fifty years we are now considering would scarcely be complete were we not to mention the existence of a remarkable document entitled, “The Midwives' just complaint, and divers other wel-affected

gentlewomen both in city and country, shewing to the whole Christian world the just cause of their long-sufferings in these distracted times for want of trading, and their great fear of the continuance of it." Which said complaint was tendered to the House on Tuesday, September 22nd, 1646.* It is too long to print in these pages, but the following extracts will give the reader an idea of its character :—“ Humbly shewing, That whereas many miseries doe attend upon civill war, &c. We were formerly well paid and highly respected in our parishes for our great skil and midnight industry ; but now our art doth fail us, and little gettings have we in this age, barren of all natural joyes, and only fruitful in bloody calamities. We desire, therefore, for the better propagation of our owne benefit, and the general good of all women, wives may no longer spare their husbands to be devoured by the sword. We have with much horror and astonishment heard of Kenton Bataille, the Batailles at Newbury, the Battle of Marston-more, the Battle of Naseby, wherein many worthy members and men of great ability were lost to the number of many thousands, which doth make us humbly to complain

* London : printed for T.S. 1646.

that blood may not hereafter be shed in such manner, for many men, hopeful to have begot a race of soldiers, were there killed on a sudden, before they had performed anything to the benefit of midwives." This not very decently worded complaint may be found in a collection of pamphlets presented to the British Museum by George III.

ALICE DENNIS.

This royal midwife attended Anne of Denmark, Queen of James I, when she was confined with the Princess Mary in 1605, for we find by writ dated May 28th the following order: "To Alice Dennis, midwife, the sum of £100 for her pains and attendance upon the Queen, as of his Highness' free gift and reward, without account, imprest, or other charge to be set on her for the same." A short time before her confinement the King and Queen were at Newmarket, and Sir Dudley Carlton writes to Mr Winwood: * "Here is much ado about the Queen's lying down, and great suit made for offices of carrying the white staff, holding the back of the chair, door-keeping, cradle-rocking, and such-like gossips' tricks."

* 'Winwood Memorials,' vol. ii, p. 56.

Soon after this they were at Whitehall, and Samuel Calvert writes to Winwood: "The King and Queen are all now at Court; the Queen expects delivery within a month. There is great preparation of nurses, midwives, rockers, and other officers, to the number of forty or more." For her confinement the Queen retired to Greenwich, and Calvert again writes to Winwood: "The Queen expects her delivery every hour, and prayers are dayly said everywhere for her safety. There is great preparation for the christening chamber, and costly furniture provided for performance of other ceremonies." These must indeed have been carried out on a magnificent scale, for we find amongst his Majesty's extraordinary disbursements, "The Queen's child-bed and other necessary provisions for that time £52,542."* Upon the same day Winwood receives another letter from John Packer, who says: "The Queen is not yet delivered, but is come to the end of her reckoning. The midwives are here attending, but she will not speak with any of them till she hath need of their help, neither will she yet signify which of them she will employ until the easyness or hard-

* 'Truth brought to Light,' &c. 1652.

ness of her travaile doth urge her to it." We have seen that Alice Dennis was the one at length selected.

How much better off was this Queen than Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I, who, when delivered in this same palace of Prince Charles James in 1628, "Had neither physician nor other professional aid near her; and when her terrified attendants brought the good old woman who usually officiated at Greenwich, that functionary, overcome by the idea of the exalted rank of her patient, swooned away with fear the moment she approached the Queen, and was obliged to be carried out of the royal chamber."*

By writ of Privy Seal, dated August 6th, it appears that Alice Dennis was present and officiated at the birth of the Princess Sophia. The order for her payment is dated September 3rd, 1606. "To Alice Dennis, Midwife to the Queen, the sum of £100."

MARGARET MERCER.

By writ dated December 10th, 1613, this midwife was ordered to repair to Heidelberg, there to

* Strickland's 'Queens of England,' vol. iv, p. 182.

attend the delivery of "His Majesty's dearest daughter the Princess Electress Palatine," and by order dated January, 1616, she was paid the sum of £84 4s "in full payment and discharge of the charge of her said journey, and six other persons attending and accompanying her from London to Heidelberg and back again, appearing by her bill of particulars, subscribed and allowed by us according to the tenour of the said Privy Seal."

CHAPTER III.

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY (*continued*).

At length a period arrived in the history of English midwifery which all who are interested in this branch of medical practice must look upon with unfeigned pleasure and pride. Harvey, the simple and trusting servant of Nature—Harvey, honoured by king and country, and justly considered by English physicians as their proudest ornament, practised at this time as a man-midwife, and wrote upon ovology, obstetricry, and gynæcology with so much originality and force that his instructions and observations may still be read with advantage and interest.

Obstetricians of both sexes may well exult in the fact that the immortal Harvey was the first to rescue English midwifery from its age of darkness. Is it not characteristic of his great master-mind that he should have chosen to earn a living by practising the branch of his

profession which at that time was most despised? It was a grand, broad intellect which could at the same time teach the profoundest physicians and the most ignorant midwives, without a feeling of pride in the former or of condescension in the latter. To Harvey Nature was paramount; and, whether it were in the king's chamber or the peasant's cottage, her works were to him equally noble and interesting. The obstetrical writings of this father of English midwifery were translated into our own language, in 1653, by his faithful and admiring friend Sir George Ent; and their beneficial influence upon the practice of this country can scarcely be over-estimated. He did not content himself with serving up in a new form the traditions of the ancients, but sought and obtained new information from the immediate study of Nature. "About the secrets of Nature," his translator says, "it was his choice to consult Nature herself." The influence of his method is distinctly traceable in the writings of Dr Percival Willughby, a distinguished man-midwife, who was a contemporary and friend of Harvey.* In his 'Country Mid-

* "There came into my house at Darby my honoured good friend Dr Harvey" (1642). 'Opusculum.'

wife's *Opusculum*,' Willughby acknowledges how much he is indebted to his honoured good friend Dr Harvey in the following well-deserved eulogy: "I know none but Dr Harvey's directions and method, the which I wish all midwives to observe and follow, and oft to read over and over again; and in so doing they will better observe and understand and remember the sayings and doings of that most worthy, good, and learned Doctor, whose memory ought to be had for ever in great esteem with midwives and child-bearing women."

Dr Harvey denounces the meddlesome midwifery of his time, and rebukes "The younger, more giddy, and officious midwives, who mightily bestirre themselves and provoke the expulsive faculty, and who, persuading poor women to their three-legged stool before the time, do weary them out and bring them in danger of their lives."

In the 'Country Midwife's *Opusculum*'* may

* The writer possesses the two MS. copies of it mentioned by Dr. Denman in his "Introduction to Midwifery." One belonged, a short time since, to the late Mr Blenkinsop, of Warwick, who printed 100 copies of it. The work had never before been published in England, but was translated and printed at Leyden in 1764, with the title 'Voedkundige anmerkingen.' A still earlier

be found graphic descriptions of the midwife of this period. Dr Willughby practised as a man-midwife both in Derby and London. He was the son of Sir Percival Willughby of Wollaton, and his writings prove him to have been a skilful, kind, and honest gentleman. He finds the same fault with midwives as Harvey. They were too officious, and would not sufficiently trust to the workings of Nature. He speaks of "high and lofty, conceited midwives, yt will leave nothing unattempted to save their credits and cloak their ignorances;" of their using "pothooks, packneedles, silver spoons, thatchers' hooks, and knives, to show their imagined skills." He tells of a midwife who, in Threadneedle Street, caused several women perforce to hold her patient by the middle whilst that she with others pulled the child by the limbs one way, and the women her body the other way; of another who had her patient tossed in a blanket, "hoping yt this violent motion would force the child out of her body;" also of a patient he was called to, whom he found "very pale and faint having a dying countenance, and her midwife not attending her

and less complete MS. than the two mentioned is in the British Museum, Sloan MSS., 529, 'De Puerperio Tractatus.'

work, but pulling her by the nose to keep life in her.”

If such terrible doings as these were common, and all writers of this period concur in saying that they were, we cannot wonder at the effort which was made at this time to improve the education of midwives. The natural process of labour was rendered frightful by the incessant and violent interferences of these ignorant women. Willughby tells us of a woman who had been so cruelly tortured by her midwife that she determined never more to employ one; “and ever since the woman, so soon as she perceiveth her labour approaching, shee causeth a fire to be made in her chamber, and her husband bringeth her into the chamber, and after the taking of their leaves one of ye other, hee, with her desire and consent, locketh her in the roome, and cometh no more unto her until she knocketh, which is the signe of her delivery to him and such women as bee in the house.” Dr Willughby was sincerely interested in the improvement of midwives, and never lost the opportunity of impressing upon them the necessity and advantage of leaving cases of natural labour to the safe conduct of “the invisible midwife, Dame Nature.”

He says : " I desire that all midwives may gain a good repute, and have a happy success in all their undertakings ; and that their knowledge, charity, patience, with tender compassion, may manifest their worths among their women, and give their women just cause to love, honour, and to esteem them. The midwife's duty in a natural birth is no more but to attend and wait on Nature, and to receive the child, and (if need require) to help to fetch the after-birth, and her best care will be to see that the woman and child be fittingly and decently ordered with necessary conveniences. And let midwives know that they be Nature's servants. Let them always remember that gentle proceedings (with moderate warm keeping, and having their endeavours dulcified with sweet words) will best ease and relieve and soonest deliver their labouring women." What a blessing for English women that such a benign teacher existed at this early period !

Dr William Sermon, another distinguished physician and man-midwife of this period, also wrote a book,* his motive for doing which he describes as follows :—" The serious consideration

* 'The Ladies' Companion, or the English Midwife.' London. 1671.

of the intolerable misery that many women are daily incident to, occasioned chiefly by breeding and bringing forth children ; and the want of help in such deplorable conditions, by reason of the unskilfulness of some which pretend the art of midwifery, &c., yet not in the least acquainted with the various diseases which frequently afflict the female sex in such times, hath been one principal motive to me at this time to undertake the publication of this treatise." His first chapter is upon "the antiquity of midwives and what manner of women they ought to be." He says, "Amongst those that have practised physic there are many that have applied themselves most of all to deliver women ; and that they might be distinguished from others, they were frequently called cunning women, or otherwise caused themselves to be so called ; for women are of such a disposition (especially in these days) that they desire to excel men, or at least would seem to go beyond them ; whereby it may be easily known that there have been some women that have practised physic, and others that were employed in the delivery of women. And these last took upon them three things. The first was to make (there be too many of that trade now) and to joyn

the husband and wife; likewise to pass their judgment whether they were fit and capable, or else unable, and so insufficient to have issue or beget children.* The second was, to be present at the delivery of women, which work was committed to none but such that have had children. (As Plato saith) one cannot be so apt and skilful in exercising a work not known, as they which have had the perfect knowledge and experience thereof: neither did the said midwives attempt this art till they were past childbearing, because Diana (patroness of women in childbed) was barren: and also a woman that beareth children is over-much troubled, so they are more unfit to labour in such a great worke. The third was to diagnose pregnancy, virginity, &c." He thus describes what manner of women midwives ought to be. "As concerning their persons, they must be neither too young nor too old, but of an indifferent age, between both; well composed, not being subject to diseases, nor deformed in any part of their body; comely and neat in their

* "In times past before women came to the marriage bed, they were first searched by the midwife; and those onely which she alowed of as fruitful, were admitted." 'The Sick Woman's Private Looking-glasse.' By Dr Sadler, of Norwich. London. 1636. See also N. Rocheus, 'De Morbis Mul.,' cap. 20.

apparell ; their hands small and fingers long, not thick, but clean, their nails pared very close ; they ought to be very chearfull, pleasant, and of a good discourse ; strong, not idle, but accustomed to exercise, that they may be the more able (if need require) to watch, &c. Touching their deportment, they must be mild, gentle, courteous, sober chast, and patient ; not quarrelsome nor chollick ; neither must they be covetous, nor report anything whatsoever they hear or see in secret, in the person or house of whom they deliver ; for, as one saith, it is not fit to commit her into the hands of rash and drunken women, that is in travel of her first child. As concerning their minds, they must be wise and discreet ; able to flatter and speak many fair words, to no other end but only to deceive the apprehensive women, which is a commendable decepte, and allowed, when it is done, for the good of the person in distress."

Dr Sermon makes the same complaint of midwives as Harvey and Willughby. "Some," he says, "there are (not wanting in ignorance), being over-hasty to busie themselves in matters they know not, destroy poor women, by tearing the membrane with their nails, and so let forth

the water (at least) to the great danger and hurt not only of the woman, but of the child, which remains dry, the water being sent forth before the time appointed, and sometimes before the child is well turned, which hath been the death of many women and children too." The impatience of midwives seems to have been their greatest fault, for he says again, in chap. 23—"Above all things, let not the midwife presume to force the woman to labour before her due time."

What a contrast to the conscientious writers already alluded to was that clever, canting charlatan, Nicholas Culpeper, "student in physic and astrologie," who about this time published a 'Directory for Midwives,' whom he addresses thus:—Worthy Matrons,—You are of the number of those whom my soul loveth, and of whom I make daily mention in my prayrs. If you please to make experience of my rules, they are very plain and easie enough, neither are they so many that they will burden your brain, nor so few that they will be insufficient for your necessity. If you make use of them, you will find your work easie, you need not call for the help of a man-midwife, which is a disparagement, not only to yourselves, but also to your profession."

What gross flattery is here, and what mischievous advice. His book, despicable then* as it is now, is, as one might expect, barren of all useful information, and his intention in writing it must have been to obtain practice from the midwives in return for his fulsome adulation. The following is his dedication: "To the Midwives of England Nich. Culpeper wisheth success in their office in this world, and a crown of glory in that to come."

Before closing this chapter, let us consider for a moment what manner of men these were who undertook to enlighten midwives, and to raise their art from the depths of superstition and ignorance in which it lay.

Nicholas Culpeper did nothing for the improvement of midwifery, and need not be further noticed.

Dr Peter Chamberlen was a Doctor of Medicine of Padua, Oxford, and Cambridge; a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of London;

* "The Directory for Midwives' is the most desperately deficient. Except he (Culpeper) writ it for necessity, he could certainly have never been so sinful to have exposed it to the light." 'The Compleat Midwife's Practice,' enlarged. London. 1659.

and Physician in Ordinary to three Kings and Queens of England.

Dr William Harvey was a Doctor of Medicine of Padua, Cambridge, and Oxford; a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of London; Physician Extraordinary to James I; and Physician in Ordinary to Charles I.

Dr Percival Willughby was a son of Sir Percival Willughby, of Wollaton, and grandson of Sir Francis, so famous in the time of Queen Elizabeth. He married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Francis Coke, of Trusley. He was a B.A. of Oxford, and an Extra-Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians of London.

Dr William Sermon was a Doctor of Medicine, and one of the Physicians in Ordinary to Charles II.

Independently of their genius and learning, it will be observed that these self-constituted instructors of midwives were men of high social and medical position. Had they considered the study and practice of midwifery beneath their dignity, how disastrous would it have been to English mothers, and who can say how much longer the dark ages of midwifery would have continued in this country.

CHAPTER IV.

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY (*continued*).

MRS JANE SHARP.

THE first English midwife who attempted to enlighten her sister practitioners, by publishing a book upon midwifery, was Mrs Jane Sharp, of London. She dedicated her work to Lady Ellenour Talbutt; and it was published by Simon Miller, at the Star, at the west end of St Paul's, in 1671, under the title of 'The Midwives Book, or the whole art of Midwifery discovered; directing child-bearing women how to behave themselves.' Mrs Jane Sharp describes herself as "a practitioner in the art of midwifery above thirty years." She begins her volume with an address to the midwives of England:—

"Sisters,—I have often sate down sad in consideration of the many miseries women endure in the hands of unskilful midwives; many professing the art (without any skill in anatomy,

which is the principal part effectually necessary for a midwife) merely for lucre's sake. I have been at great cost in translations for all books, either French, Dutch, or Italian, of the kind. All which I offer with my own experience; humbly begging Almighty God to aid you in this great work; and am your affectionate friend,

“JANE SHARP.”

After this follows an introduction upon the necessity and usefulness of the art of midwifery.

“The art of midwifery,” she says, “is doubtless one of the most useful and necessary of all arts for the being and well-being of mankind, and therefore it is extremely requisite that a midwife be both fearing God and faithful, and exceeding well experienced in that profession. Her fidelity should find not only a reward here from man, but God hath given a special example of it in Exod. i. in the midwives of Israel, who were so faithful to their trust that the command of a king could not make them depart from it—viz. :—‘But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men-children alive. Therefore God dealt well with the midwives; and because they feared God he made them houses.’

“As for their knowledge, it must be twofold, speculative and practical. She that wants the knowledge of speculation is like to one that is blind, or wants her sight; she that wants the practice is like one that is lame, and wants her legs. The lame may see, but they cannot walk; the blind may walk, but they cannot see. Such is the condition of those midwives that are not well versed in both these. Some perhaps may think that then it is not proper for women to be of this profession, because they cannot attain so rarely to the knowledge of things as men may, who are bred up in universities, schools of learning, or serve their apprenticeships for that end and purpose, where anatomy lectures being frequently read, the situation of the parts both of men and women, and other things of great consequence, are often made plain to them. But that objection is easily answered by the former example of the midwives among the Israelites; for though we women cannot deny that men in some things may come to a greater perfection of knowledge than women ordinarily can, by reason of the former helps that women want, yet the Holy Scriptures hath recorded midwives to the perpetual honour of the female sex. There being

not so much as one word concerning *men-midwives* mentioned there that we can find, it being the natural propriety of women to be much-seeing in that art; and though nature be not alone sufficient to the perfection of it, yet farther knowledge may be gained by a long and diligent practice, and be communicated to others by our own sex. I cannot deny the honour due to able physicians and chyrurgions, when occasion is; yet we find even that amongst the Indians, and all barbarous people, where there is no men of learning, the women are sufficient to perform this duty; and even in our own nation, that we need go no further, the poor country people, where there are none but women to assist (unless it be those that are exceedingly poor, and in a starving condition, and then they have more need of meat than midwives), the women are fruitful, and as safe and well delivered, if not much more fruitful, and better commonly in childbed, than the greatest ladies of the land.

“It is not hard words that perform the work, as if none understood the art that cannot understand Greek. Words are but the shell that we oftentimes break our teeth with them to come at the kernel—I mean our brains to know what is

the meaning of them ; but to have the same in our mother tongue would save us a great deal of needless labour. It is commendable for men to employ their spare time in some things of deeper speculation than is required of the female sex ; but the art of midwifery chiefly concerns us, which even the best learned men will grant, yielding something of their own to us when they are forced to borrow from us the very name they practise by, and to call themselves man-midwives.

“But to avoid long preambles in a matter so clear and evident, I shall proceed to set down such rules and method concerning this art as I think needful, and that as plainly and briefly as I possibly can, and with as much modesty in words as the matter will bear ; and because it is commonly maintained that the masculine gender is more worthy than the feminine, though perhaps where men have need of us they will yield the priority to us, that I may not forsake the ordinary method, I shall begin with men, and treat last of my own sex, so as to be understood by the meanest capacity, desiring the courteous reader to use as much modesty in the perusal of it as I have endeavoured to do in the writing of it, considering that such an art as this cannot be set forth but

that young men and maids will have much just cause to blush sometimes, and be ashamed of their own follies, as I wish they may if they shall chance to read it, that they may not convert that into evil that is really intended for a general good."

Mrs Sharp's work is a 12mo of 418 pages, in six books. Each book contains chapters varying in number from six to eighteen. A few extracts from it will show some of the peculiarities of her practice.

"The eagle-stone held near the privy parts will draw forth the child as the loadstone draws iron, but be sure, so soon as the child and after-burthen are come away, that you hold the stone no longer, for fear of danger.*—p. 198.

"It will be profitable, when a woman hath had

* The following passage, translated from Saxon by the Rev. O. Cockayne, in his 'Leechdoms, &c., of Early England,' shows that at a very early period products of the vegetable kingdom were supposed to possess this miraculous power:—"In order that a wife may quickly bring forth, take seed of coriander eleven grains or thirteen, knit them with a thread on a clean linen cloth; let then a person take them who is a person of maidenhood, a boy or a maiden, and hold them at the left thigh, near the natura, and so soon as all the parturition be done, remove away the leechdom, lest part of the inwards follow thereafter."—Vol. i, p. 219.

a sore travel, to wrap her back with a sheepskin, newly flead off, and let her lig in it; and to lay a hareskin, rub'd over with hare's blood newly prepared, to her belly."

Mrs Sharp was a believer and expert in astrology. Speaking of tables for calculating the influence of the planets upon the birth, she says, "I have found no table concerning this business have any truth in it; wherefore I have drawn forth one exactly, which you may rely upon," which extraordinary production may be found at page 149.

A fourth edition of this book, printed after Mrs Sharp's death, contains the following address from the publisher to the reader:—

"The constant and unwearied industry of this ingenious and well-skilled midwife, Mrs Jane Sharp, together with her great experience of anatomy and physick, by the many years of her practice in the art of midwifery, hath sufficiently recommended her labours, and made them more than ordinary useful, and much desired by all that either knew her person and experienced her artful skill, or ever read this book, which of late by its *scarceness* hath been so much enquired after, will, I question not, be so much valued, and esteemed

by all as to have many after impressions.—I am your well-wisher, J. R.”

This edition is embellished with a frontispiece divided into three parts. The first represents a woman in bed after delivery, the midwife sitting beside her and offering a basin with a spoon in it. A woman is standing before the fire warming a towel; another is attending the baby in a cradle. The second part is a christening procession, the midwife walking in front with the child; ladies and gentlemen, arm-in-arm, follow, the former with fans in their hands. The third delineates a christening feast; the party is sitting round a table having bottles and glasses upon it, the parson in bands and gown being the most prominent figure.

No mention is made of Mrs Jane Sharp in the biographies of Sue or Delacoux, nor is her book much quoted. Willughby, however, severely criticises her method of treating arm-presentations, although he approves of her medical treatment of menorrhagia and convulsions.

MISS WILLUGHBY.

One of Percivall Willughby's two daughters was

instructed by her father in the art of midwifery, and if the account he gives of her be not too partial, we must conclude that she, under his able tuition, became an accomplished midwife. Some idea of the difficulties she had to encounter in obtaining her knowledge may be gathered from the following observation written by her father in 1655: "I was sent for from Stafford to come to a lady beyond Congerton. Her midwife had kept her several days in labour. I took my daughter with mee. Wee travelled all night, and wee were wetted with much rain to our skins. Wee came by break of day to the place. But this lady was dead, undelivered, before our coming."

Soon after this Miss Willughby removed with her father to London, for in 1658 we find her attending a Mrs Wolaston, a watchmaker's wife, by the Old Exchange, in "Threedneedle Street, who had had much tugging and struggling usage" from her midwife in previous labours. Mrs Wolaston had a happy and speedy delivery, so much so indeed that "shee began to grieve and complain (not imagining the child was born), and to say, 'Now I shall fall into my old paines and sufferings, and perceive that it will be no better with mee.' My daughter smiling (says Wil-

lughby), asked her what shee meant, and whether shee had two children, for one was born. She scarcely believed it, until that shee heard the child to cry. The after-birth being fetched, and shee laid in her bed, shee took my daughter by the hand, and said to her, 'Surely you have art in these fingers, otherwise so quickly and happily I should not have been delivered.'"

In this same year we find Miss Willughby attending a lady in her confinement during which an interesting scene took place. It is thus described by her father:—"In Middlesex, anno 1658, my daughter, with my assistance, delivered Sir Tennebs Evanks lady* of a living daughter. All the morning my daughter was much troubled, and told me that shee feared that ye birth would come by ye buttocks. About seven o'clock that night labour approached. At my daughter's request, unknown to the lady, I crept into the chamber upon my hands and knees, and returned, and it was not perceived by ye lady. My daughter followed mee, and I being deceived through hast to go away, said that it was ye head, but shee affirmed the contrary; however, if it should prove

* This lady is described in the Sloan MS. as "wife to one of Oliver's creatures."

ye buttocks, that shee knew how to deliver her. Her husband's great Oliverian power, with some rash expressions that he uttered, flowing too unhandsomely from his mouth, dismayed my daughter.* She could not be quieted until I crept privately again the second time into ye chamber, and then I found her words true. I willed her to bring down a foot, the which shee soon did, but being much disquieted with fear of ensuing danger, shee prayed mee to carry on the rest of the work."

At this period the man-midwife was not employed in ordinary cases, his assistance being only sought when instrumental interference became necessary. A strong and deeply-rooted prejudice existed against the male practitioner in midwifery; and the midwives themselves, although they were glad enough to have his assistance when in difficulties, were, on all other occasions, more violent than any other class in denouncing him. In the instructions of a famous and dying midwife to her daughter,† a case is related in which she consented

* From the Sloan MS. we learn that the unhandsome words were these, "What luck had he to be deluded by children and fools."

† 'The Compleat Midwife's Practice.' 1659.

that a chirurgeon should be called in, provided that the patient might not see him, being fearful lest she should die with apprehension and shame. In this instance the midwife persuaded her patient to slide down towards the foot of the bed, and darkened the room on that side where the man-midwife was to come. She would have him perform his work as Willughby did, unknown to the lady, "So that it be concealed from the woman all her life long; nor that she see the chirurgeon any more."

Little more is known of Miss Willughby except that both she and her sister were married, the one to Mr Hart, and the other (the younger) to Mr Burton, of Derby.

MRS WILLUGHBY.

Dr Willughby describes this lady as "a good kinswoman of mine (Mrs Willughby) that was a long experimented midwife, of much practice, and of good repute with women, dwelling in Westminster and London." In speaking of the proper method of delivering a woman of twins, he says: "This good woman assured mee that shee had laid severall women of twins, and that shee never

forced the second birth by breaking of the waters, and that shee had left these women for six houres or longer, and after her comming again that then shee had delivered them safely of the second child." This plan of treatment, it may be added, however, he did not approve of.

In Willughby's writings the names of many of the midwives with whom he came in contact are to be found. "Goodwife Spencer," "Midwife Heywood," and "Midwife Gretton," all of Derby. "Margaret Kempe, midwife at Abbot's Bramley;" "Ann Bradford, at Walton, midwife;" "Mrs Shaw, midwife, of Stafford;" "Felice Hollinghurst, midwife at Rudgeley in Staffordshire;" "Elizabeth Walthur, of Stafford, a butcher's wife;" "Elizabeth Korkin," who must have practised in London or its neighbourhood, for by her "strugling, halings, and enforcements," she so injured a woman that she had to be taken to St Thomas's Hospital in the year 1659; and one Mrs Shaw, of whom he writes as follows: "There was a scandalous report in London with which an old midwife was spotted; that through a mistake, instead of the after-birth shee pulled away the womb, of which the woman died. But I will not bee so injurious to old midwives as to

give credence to such unworthy reports. Although I know assuredly that some of them do not (as they should) understand their practice and dayly undertakings." In the Sloan MS., after relating the doings of two ignorant midwives, he adds, reiterating the sentiments of Andrew Boord and the two Peter Chamberlens, "I could heartily wish yt some publick good order might be made for ye better educating of all, especially ye younger midwives, for ye helping and saving of mothers and their children. When ye meanest of ye women, not knowing how otherwise to live, for the getting of a shilling or two to sustain their necessities, become ignorant midwives, their travailing women suffer tortures. It would be better to make such midwives nursekeepers, rather than (such as they would be called) midwives."

MRS LABANY.*

This Royal midwife attended Mary of Modena, Queen of James II, when she was delivered, on June 10th, 1687, of James Francis Edward, afterwards called the Pretender. Dr Hugh

* Or De Labadie. 'Stricklands' Queens,' Bohn's Edition, vol. v, p. 46.

Chamberlen was to have been present, but, happening to be away seeing a patient at Chatham, he did not return in time. The Prince was by many believed to be a supposititious child; and Mrs Labany was accused of having brought the infant into the bed, some said out of a warming-pan, and others through a door at the back of the bed. Dr Chamberlen, however, in his letter to the Princess Sophia,* showed the absurdity of this hypothesis. However much Mrs Labany may have been blamed for her supposed treachery to the nation, she received from the King, at the hands of Sidney Lord Godolphin, the enormous fee of 500 guineas†—a sum more than sufficient to recompense her for her skill and compensate her for any pecuniary losses she may have sustained through her character being misrepresented.

MRS WILKINS.

This name must be added to the list of Royal midwives; for the Report of the Historical Commission, part i, p. 44, says that among Lord

* 'Sloan MS.,' 4107, p. 150.

† 'Secret Services of Charles II and James II,' p. 198.

Mostyn's collection of news-letters, &c. from 1673 to 1692, is a notice "of the birth of the Prince of Wales (son of James II), and a fee of 500 guineas to Mrs Wilkins, the midwife." It will be observed that this is the same sum as that granted to Mrs Labany. It was not unusual for several midwives to be in attendance, and it would seem that the same fee was granted to all, whether they were actively employed or not.

CHAPTER V.

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY (*continued*).

ELIZABETH CELLIER.

THIS celebrated midwife won for herself a place in English history. She was the owner of the tub from which the "meal-tub plot" obtained its name; and for the part she took in this obscure political movement she was, on the 30th of April, 1680, arraigned before Lord Chief Justice Scroggs for high treason.* It was then stated that "Elizabeth Cellier and other false traitors at the parish of St Clement Danes advisedly, devilishly, maliciously, and traitorously assembled, united, and gathered themselves together, and then and there devilishly, advisedly, maliciously, cunningly, and traitorously consulted and agreed to bring the said Lord the King to death and final destruction, and to depose and deprive

* 'State Trials, 32 Charles II.'

him of his crown and government, and so introduce and establish the Romish religion in this kingdom." To this charge she pleaded "Not guilty," and during the trial defended herself most ably. The principal witness against her was Dangerfield, whom she proved to be an unpardoned criminal, and consequently incapable of giving trustworthy evidence. Her conduct at this trial is thus alluded to in some lines entitled 'To the praise of Mrs Cellier, the Popish midwife :'*

" You taught the judges to interpret laws ;
 Shewed Seargeant Maynard how to plead a cause ;
 You turned and wound, and rogued 'em at your will :
 'Twas trial, not of life or death, but skill."

The jury returned a verdict of " Not guilty ;" and afterwards applied, as was customary, to Mrs Cellier for a guinea apiece. She wrote to the foreman declining to pay them, and making the following characteristic offer :—" Pray, Sir, accept of and give my most humble service to yourself and all the worthy gentlemen of your pannel, and yours and their several ladies ; and if you and they please, I will with no less fidelity serve

* British Museum, C. 20, f.

them in their deliveries than you have done me with justice in mine."

Elated by her success, Mrs Cellier published a book entitled 'Malice Defeated, or a Brief Relation of the Accusation and Deliverance of Elizabeth Cellier, wherein the proceedings both before and during her Confinement are particularly related, and the Mystery of the 'Meal-tub' fully discovered; together with an Abstract of her Arraignment and Tryal, written by herself for the satisfaction of all lovers of undisguised truth. London, printed for Elizabeth Cellier, and are to be sold at her house in Arundel Street, near St Clement's Church. 1686.* She begins this remarkable work with a short personal history: "I hope it will not seem strange to any honest and loyal person, of what way of religion soever, that I, being born and bred up under Protestant parents, should now openly profess myself of another Church." She next describes her life in prison, and declares that whilst there she heard people being tortured, and that she knew a great many other things, and could say much more "when His Majesty makes it as safe to speak the truth, as it is to do the contrary."

* It was believed by some that Gadbury wrote this book. See 'Weekly Paquet,' Friday, April 22nd, 1681.

For the statements made in this work she was again arrested and tried for libel. The charge to the jury ran as follows: "You gentleman that are sworn,—Elizabeth Cellier stands indited by the name of E. C., wife of Peter Cellier, of the Parish of St Clement's Danes, in the County of Midelesex, Gent.; for that she, being of the Popish religion, not having the fear of God before her eyes, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil, falsely and maliciously endeavouring and intending Our Sovereign Lord King Charles II, that now is, and the Government of this Kingdom of England by law established, to bring to hatred and contempt &c., did falsely, maliciously and seditiously write and publish a scandalous libel intituled 'Malice Defeated,' &c."

Mrs Cellier was not so happy in her defence during this trial. Pleading for mercy, she said she was only a weak woman, and that she had lost her father and brother both in a day for the King. The truth of this latter statement was, however, called in question by a writer in the 'Anti-Roman Pacquet,'* who says—"We could

* Friday October 29th, 1680: Cellier's 'The Popish Midwife, her Pedigree.'

not but laugh when in her late blessed libel she shammed the world with a story of her families loyalty, father and brother, slain in his late Majesty's service, &c. ; whereas we are assured that her native name was Marshal, and her father a brazier (not to dishonour the lady's lineage with the more vulgar name of tinker) in Canterbury, and her brother yet living at Maidstone ; neither of them masters of any more loyalty than their neighbours. This brazen pedigree is suitable to her complexion." At length the trial was brought to a close by the question from the Clerk of the Crown, "How say you—is Elizabeth Cellier guilty of the writing, printing, and publishing of the libel for which she stands indited, or not guilty?" Foreman: "Guilty" (at which there was a great shout); and the verdict was recorded.

This trial took place at the Old Bailey on the 11th and 13th of September, 1680, and on the latter day the Recorder gave his judgment thus:—"Mrs Cellier, the Court doth think fit for example's sake that a fine of one thousand pounds be put upon you; that you be committed in execution till that thousand pounds be paid; and because a pecuniary mulct is not a sufficient

recompense to justice which you have offended, the Court doth likewise pronounce against you that you be put on the pillory three several days in three several public places. In the first place, in regard her braided ware received its first impression and vent at her own house, it is thought fit that she stand (as near her own house as conveniently can be) between the hours of twelve and one for an hour's space at the May-pole in the Strand on the most notorious day. I think there is a market near that place; let it be on that day. At another time that she stand at Covent-garden on a publick day the like space of time. A third time that she stand at Charing-cross on the most publick day for the space of an hour. And, in the next place, that she find sureties for her good behaviour during her life. And in every place where she shall stand on the pillory some parcels of her books shall, in her own view, be burnt by the hands of the common hangman, and a paper of the cause to be put upon the pillory." Then the Court charged the sheriff that he take care in every place for a sufficient guard that the peace may be kept, and she was returned to the gaol.

When the time arrived for Mrs Cellier to be

placed in the pillory, she feigned sickness, having provided herself with an emetic to assist her in producing suitable symptoms; but as it was expected that she would use some artifice to thwart the execution of her sentence, the precaution had been taken of telling her that her appearance in public would take place the day before the time actually decided upon; and so, as Prance says, "she took her physick a day too soon." Finding herself beaten at her own weapons (which could not have been an easy task if it be true that "her two cardinal virtues were ambitious impudence and a prodigious knack of counterfeiting"), she devised a still more elaborate scheme whereby she might stay the hands of the law, the history of which is thus related by Prance:—"Understanding that she was to stand in good earnest on the morrow, being Saturday, she used another artifice, declaring herself with child. This appeared improbable in a person of her reverend years (fifty odd). Captain R— sending her up word that she must prepare to go forth to the

* 'Mr Prance's Answer to Mrs Cellier's Libel, &c.; to which is added the Adventures of the Bloody Bladder: a tragi-comical farce, acted with much applause at Newgate by the said Mme Cellier, on Saturday, September 18th. Faithfully related by an eye- and ear-witness.' 1680.

wooden engine, she, in dying tone, replied that she was not able to stir out of bed. Whereupon he ordered three or four honest women to go up and dress her. They accordingly, with much ado, accoutred her; but then she would not stir a foot, so two men very gingerly brought her down, and would have seated her in a chair, but she tumbled herself all along the floor, and roared out, 'Oh, my back! Hold my back; hold my sides. I am in labour; call some women. For modesty's sake let the men be gone. Use not a woman in my condition more barbarously than heathens, more savagely than Turks and Indians,' &c. At last, after a world of groanings and a thousand bewitching wry faces, an able physician and several discreet women were sent for. They searched her so narrowly that they discovered the whole cheat, and found that the good lady was no more with bearn than the town-bull, but only having over night privately gotten a bladder of blood had used her skill in creating the necessary symptoms, and, preparing certain clots of it, had put them in her body," &c. This incident is frequently referred to in the broadsides of the times:—

“ And Madame Cellier there she stood
With a bladder that was filled with blood.”*

“ Tho’ she who midwives’ trade well understood,
Miscarried with her bladder cram’d with blood.”†

This latter device having failed, Mrs Cellier passed through her trying ordeal on the 11th of September, 1680. A writer says: “The sentence was executed upon her in the presence of thousands of spectators, who (besides whole volleys of curses spent on her), had it not been for a board that she held in her hand to defend herself with, had certainly brained her before she was taken down; but being by a strong guard at last delivered from the fury of the rabble, she was carried back to prison.”‡ In a broadside published on Dec. 20th§ may be seen a picture of Mme Cellier seated in front of the pillory near the May-pole which appears behind in the Strand, and with a fire burning near. Many men, armed with long staves, stand about the scaffold. She holds a large shield in her hands, and is dressed entirely

* The Solemn Mock Procession, November 17th, 1680.

† ‘Commentation on the late wonderful discovery of the new Popish Plot,’ 1680.

‡ ‘The Anti-Roman Pacquet,’ Friday, October 29th.

§ ‘The Popish Damnable Plot,’ &c.

in black, with a widow's hood on her head. "A satire upon Mme Cellier's standing in the pillory by a person of quality" is preserved in the British Museum.* The character of it may be gathered from the following lines:—

"Poor Cellier, you had better brought to bed
Anything, than to have a plot in triumph led,
And thus to be received into the world's arms
By dirt and stones, and other warlike arms."

Five days after she appeared again upon the pillory, as we learn from the following notice in a newspaper of that time:—"On the 23rd instant our renowned championess, Cellier, disgraced the pillory at Charing-cross."

Unfortunately for Mrs Cellier her biography has been written by her enemies. We must therefore give her the benefit of every doubt, and view with suspicion every imputation against her character. Her early history has already been alluded to, in which she is said to have been the daughter of a tinker in Canterbury. Dangerfield,† her former friend, but afterwards bitter enemy, says: "The ever memorable Mme Cellier (that

* 'The Devil Pursued; or, the Right Saddle laid upon the Right Mare.'

† Answer to 'Malice Defeated.' 1680.

notorious midwife that has brought abundance more lies than ever she did children into the world) was twenty years since wife of a certain merchant of this city. She received into her house an Italian and his negro servant, and fell in love with both, and was delivered soon after of a tawny-faced boy, to the great amazement of all beholders. Her husband, overcome with grief, went to Leghorn, where he ended his days. About twelve years since she lived at Holbourn, and afterwards at Westminster, where she met a second husband, as she says, 'hearing the first was dead,' and by him she had divers children. He also left Mrs Cellier and went to Barbadoes, where he died. She then removed to the City of London, where she set up and professed the craft of midwifery, and also contrived to insinuate herself into the affections of one Mr Cellier, a French merchant, and by degrees prevailed with him to marry her. Some time after this she removed to Arundel-street, where she exercised her skill, and so improved her husband's business as to produce a plentiful livelihood."

The writer of this scrap of biography was introduced to Mrs Cellier by one Mrs White, a midwife whom she had rescued, like himself, out

of prison by paying her fees. He was employed by Mrs Cellier ostensibly in collecting her husband's debts, but in reality as a political agent. A characteristic incident which occurred during their friendship relating to the proposed assassination of Lord Shaftesbury, is mentioned by Mansell.* Lady Powis and Mrs Cellier were together when Dangerfield informed them that he could not assassinate Lord Shaftesbury. Lady Powis, annoyed, called him "cow-hearted fellow," and said she would do it herself. Mrs Cellier answered, "No, madam, that shall never be, for I will make the world know that our sex are braver than they of the masculine; and myself will go and do the work." She went, but Lord Shaftesbury, suspecting mischief, "kept a strict eye upon her, and observing her to be fumbling about her petticoat or pockets, gently laid his hands upon hers, and pleasantly drolled with her until she left." She, however, returned again, as if with fresh resolve, but he laid his hands on hers as before, and "dasht her out of countenance." In the Luttrell collection in the British Museum is a picture of "Seleir Popish Midwife," holding a dagger behind her back, intended to

* 'Narrative of the late Popish Intrigue.'

represent the part she acted in this affair.* The incident is also referred to in the satire before mentioned :—

“But who would think it from the woman fine,
A thing whom Nature itself has made divine,
That she should act such horrid barbarous things,
As to design to stab statesmen, and to murder kings.”

To use up all the available materials, and to give a full history of Elizabeth Cellier, would involve entering into the minutest details of the mysterious “Meal-tub plot.” But as it is more particularly as a midwife we are interested in her, this short sketch of her political life must suffice. Without it it would be impossible to obtain a comprehensive view of her character. She was a fearless, ingenious, unscrupulous, and energetic woman, similar in reputation to Dame Ursula Suddlechop.† In testimony of her political eminence we may quote the following lines written by an inimical satirical Protestant poet:—

“Thus have you seen Pope Joan by far outdone,
Nay, from hee-Popes she has the mitre won ;
’Tis hers by merrit, who dares argue less,
When this Pope dies she shall be prelate Bess.”

* ‘A Tale of the Tubbs, or Rome’s Masterpiece Defeated, November, 1679, vol. iii, 137.

† ‘Fortunes of Nigel,’ chap. viii.

After the turmoil and vexations of an unsuccessful political life Elizabeth Cellier turned her attention exclusively to the profession of her adoption and bestowed all the energies of her vigorous mind upon a project, somewhat similar to Peter Chamberlen's, whereby all the midwives in London were to be united in one college. In June, 1687, she addressed her proposal to James II in a folio MS. of nine pages, found afterwards among the King's papers. It bore the following title—"A scheme for the foundation of a Royal hospital and raising a revenue of five or six thousand pounds a year, by and for the maintenance of a corporation of skilful midwives, and such foundlings or exposed children as shall be admitted therein." Omitting the parts relating to the foundlings this extraordinary document reads thus:—

"To the King's most excellent Majesty, the humble proposal of Elizabeth Cellier, sheweth, that within the space of twenty years last past, above six thousand women have died in childbed for want of due skill and care in those women who practice the art of midwifery; to remedy which it is humbly proposed that your Majesty will be graciously pleased, by your Royal

authority, to unite the whole number of skilful midwives, now practising within the limits of the weekly bills of mortality, into a corporation under the government of a certain number of the most able and matron-like women among them, subject to the visitation of such person or persons as your Majesty shall appoint; and such rules for their good government, instruction, direction, and administration, as are hereunto annexed. That such number so admitted shall not exceed a thousand at one time; that every woman so admitted as a skilful midwife may be obliged to pay for her admittance the sum of five pounds, and the like sum annually by quarterly payments for and towards the pious and charitable uses hereafter mentioned. That all women, so admitted into the thousand, shall be capable of being chosen matrons or assistants to the government. That such midwives as are found capable of the employment and cannot be admitted into the first thousand, shall be of the second thousand, paying for their admittance the sum of fifty shillings, and fifty shillings a year by quarterly payments, towards the pious and charitable uses hereafter mentioned; and out of those the first thousand are to be supplied as they die out."

The first year's income was to be devoted to the building of a foundling hospital; and the annual income from the midwives to the maintenance of the children. One fifth of the charity collected in the parishes within the limits of the weekly bills of mortality was to be annexed for ever, and leave granted to put a chest to receive alms in every church and chapel. The proposer then continues :

“ That such hospital may be allowed to establish twelve lesser convenient houses in twelve of the greatest parishes, each to be governed by one of the twelve matrons, assistants to the corporation of midwives, which houses may be for the taking in, delivery, and month's maintenance, at a price certain of any woman that any of the parishes, within the limits aforesaid, shall by the overseers of the poor place in them, such women being to be subject, with the children born of them, to the future care of that parish, whose overseers place them there to be delivered, notwithstanding such house shall not happen to stand within the proper parish. All and every of the twelve houses to be members of and dependent on the Royal hospital.

“ That for the better providing sure ways and

means for the instructing all present and future midwives who shall be admitted into the said corporation, fit care ought to be taken to induce that person who shall be found most able in the art, and most fit for that employment, to instruct them in the most perfect rules of skill by reading lectures and discoursing to them. .

“That on the lecture days or other times appointed for that purpose, such midwife, in whose practice any extraordinary occurrence shall happen, shall report the same to the governess, and such of her assistants as shall then happen to be present, and they to be free in his or their instructions.

“And it is humbly proposed in the first years, before the charge of the said hospital can be great, that out of the unusual duties arising from the licensed midwives, the sum of — may be paid to the *proposer* to enable her to provide for her children, that nothing may divert her from employing all her industry for the good of those poor exposed children. And that all admittance money which shall be paid after the first thousands are settled shall be divided between the governess and the man midwife or director of the house for the time being by even and equal

proportions. That upon admitting any woman to be deputy to any midwife, the sum of thirty shillings shall be paid, and the like sum annually by quarterly payments, twenty shillings whereof shall be as a fee to the governess and ten shillings to her secretary, besides their necessary lodging and other conveniences in the said hospital.

“That after this first settlement no married woman be admitted to be either governess, secretary, or any of the twelve principal assistants to the government; and that no married person of either sex shall be suffered to inhabit within the said hospital, to avoid such inconveniences as may arise as the children grew to maturity; and that as soon as any of them be found to be fit and capable of such employment, the governess, governors, treasurer, registrar, and all other officers of the house shall be chosen as they become capable thereof, and have entered themselves to continue members of the said society during their natural lives; and if any of these persons do marry afterwards, then to clear their accounts and depart the house by being expelled the society.

“That a woman sufficiently skilled in writing and accounts be appointed secretary to the

governess and company of midwives, to be present at all controversies about the art of midwifery, to register all the extraordinary accidents happening in the practice, which all licensed midwives are from time to time to report to this society; that the female secretary be reckoned an assistant to the government next to the governess, and capable of succeeding in her stead, if chosen thereunto by the governess in her lifetime, with the approbation of His Majesty, his heirs, and successors.

“That the principal physician or man midwife, examine all extraordinary accidents, and once a month at least read a publick lecture to the whole society of licensed midwives, who are all obliged to be present at it, if not employed in their practice; and he shall deliver a copy of such reading, to be entered into the books to be kept for that purpose, a copy of which will be made out to any person demanding the same for such reasonable fee as shall be appointed by the government, and shall be free for any licensed midwife at all convenient times to have recourse to the said book, and to read any part of the same *gratis*.

“That no men shall be present at such publick

lectures on any pretence whatsoever, except such able doctors or surgeons, as shall enter themselves students in the same art, and pay for such their admittance ten pounds, and ten pounds a year, five pounds to the house and the other five to be divided equally between the governess and the chief doctor or surgeon that shall be director of the house for the time being. That all physicians and surgeons so admitted students and practitioners in the art of midwifery shall be of council with the principal man midwife, and be capable of succeeding him, by election of governess, her secretary, twelve assistants, and the twenty-four lower assistants, or the major part of them all; elections to be made by balloting, the governess three balls and the secretary two balls.

“That further rules for the establishment and foundation of the said community or hospital, and for visiting the same; and such penalties imposed on such as practise without a licence from the corporation as to your Majesty’s wisdom shall seem meet.

“To which all is humbly submitted.”

In answer to some queries addressed to Mrs Cellier by a doctor concerning her scheme, she

wrote a pamphlet,* from which it would seem that for a time, at least, her proposal attracted considerable attention, and that it received from the King direct encouragement, for she says: "In September last our gracious Sovereign (Jas. II) was pleased to promise to unite the midwives into a Corporation by his Royal Charter."

It is not known what the queries were which Dr — addressed to Mrs Cellier, but it is evident from the tone of her reply that they were of such a character as to raise her ire. She writes: "We desire you not to concern yourselves until we desire your company, which we will certainly do as often as we have occasion for your advice in anything we do not understand, or which doth not appertain to our practice. I hope, Doctor, these considerations will deter any of you from pretending to teach us midwifery, which ought to be kept a secret amongst women as much as possible."

The slightest glance at Mrs Cellier's scheme is sufficient to show its impracticability. Within the area of the bills of mortality, at the date of her proposal, the number of births per annum

* In answer to Dr — queries concerning the College of Midwives, 1687.

was under 15,000. To attend these she would have provided a staff of 2,000 midwives, or seven and a half cases of labour to each midwife; and out of the profits resulting from this amount of practice, each was to pay yearly five pounds or fifty shillings according to her class.

It is also too evident that although the financial arrangements as far as concerned the midwives were most unsatisfactory, those relating to Elizabeth Cellier, the proposer and governess were quite the contrary. In short, the scheme, though not totally devoid of merit, was mainly a monopoly and mostly for her own benefit.

In taking our leave of Mrs Cellier, we cannot but feel that we are parting with a most extraordinary woman. One who narrowly escaped being as useful and good as she was remarkable. Unfortunately her impetuosity and want of control ruined her happiness and marred her success. She had the energy of the wind, with its erratic courses, wilful ways and mischief working power. Had it only been properly directed she might have done for midwifery in England what Justine Siegemundine did in Germany, and Madame Boivin in France. At this

distance of time, however, we cannot tell what temptations she had to encounter, nor what difficulties to overcome. Let, then, the tongue of censure be dumb. The writer will answer for his own sex that no man will judge her harshly; let women for whom she wrote the following special apology accept it kindly ere we pass on: "And as to my own sex, I hope they will pardon the errors of my story as well as the bold attempts of mine that occasioned it."

CHAPTER VI.

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

WHAT a revolution did midwifery experience during this century. What a storm was brooding when the thought flashed like lightning through the mind of Peter Chamberlen—the midwifery forceps! And what thunder, what tumultuous thunder, was destined to follow! The reverberations of it may be distinctly heard even now. The instrument once invented became the imperishable symbol and weapon under and with which all the battles of the approaching revolution were to be fought and won. While the storm is brewing let us, according to promise, again return to the consideration of the licenses of midwives granted by Bishops.

The history of their origin is somewhat obscure. Dr Robert Thompson writing upon the subject says,* “The Q being proposed how ye licensing

* ‘Tanner MS, 104, fol 280,’ Bod. Lib., Oxford.

of midwives came to bee in ye ordinary, upon disquisition, I raise this conjecture concerning ye ground of ye custome, wch gives ye church yt jurisdiction for I can find no positive law or constitution.

“First then in ye L. 1. §. D. de extraord. cogn. I find them mentioned inter audia liberalia where after ye Emperor has given ye Præses provincæ power of judging ye Phisitians fees he concludes, Sed ut obstetrice audiat quæ utiq. medicinam exhibere videtur cui alias in ob. vi, l. i; deduces from Hyging yt ye office amongst ye Ancients was solely exercised by men so yt many women verecundiæ ductæ perished rather than they would accept of ye masculine help in that time of danger. And this brought in ye mulieres medicas which wee often read of in ye law and ancient autors. But how all this while came ye church to take cognizance of them? Resp. that in ye law above cited ye office of ye Phisitian was reckoned inter Res religiosas. So yt in what concern'd him ye præses could extraordinarie cognoscere which was not allow'd of in other arts and sciences from whence a man may easily collect somewhat of ye origin. But omitting antiquity, if ye case were worth arguing L.

whether ye stat. concerning Phisitians would not beare an extensive construction as to this, &c. For they Practise in London Dioc. There was once a project of ye Phisitians of London for theyre being lycensed by them, but it took no effect, for ye result (if I remember) from Kr and Consell was, that they should be licensed by none other but ye Bishops, &c., as they had formerly time out of minde. This is easy to bee shown yt ye church had ye jurisdiction before ye stat. of H. ye 8 for Physitians vid. Extr. de magistris c. 2 and seq. constit. No. 77.”

The project of the “Physitians” of London here referred to is probably the same as that suggested by Dr Peter Chamberlen, and which has been mentioned in a previous chapter, the only point of dissemblance being that the cause of failure in the former was ecclesiastical and in the latter medical opposition. The exact date at which Bishops ceased to grant these licenses is not known, but some we know were received by midwives as late as the middle of the eighteenth century, the only break in the exercise of this episcopal office of which we have any knowledge being that mentioned by Elizabeth Cellier* as

* Answer to Dr — queries, &c.

having taken place during the last century. She says, "Nor did Bishops pretend to licence midwives till Bishop Bonner's time, who drew up the form of the first licence, which continued in full force till 1642, and then the Physicians and Chirurgions contending about it, it was adjudged a chirurgical operation, and the midwives were licenced at Chirurgions Hall, but not till they had passed three examinations before six skilful midwives and as many chirurgions expert in the art of midwifery. Thus it continued until the Act of Uniformity passed (1662), which sent the midwives back to Doctors' Commons where they pay their money (take an oath which it was impossible for them to keep), and return home as skilful as they went hither."*

The form of oath administered to a midwife before obtaining her license in this century was as follows:—It differs, as will be observed, from that of the sixteenth century, and before the Bishop or his Chancellor administered it the midwife had to be recommended by matrons who had experienced her skill, and had to bring a

* Search in the account books of the Barber and Surgeon's Company of this date has failed to verify this statement. Unfortunately the minute books for this period cannot be found.

certificate from the parish minister certifying as to her life and conversation, and that she was a member of the Church of England.

Midwife's Oath.

“ You shall swear, first, that you shall be diligent and faithful and ready to help every woman labouring with child as well the poor as the rich ; and that in time of necessity you shall not forsake the poor woman to go to the rich. :

“ Item. You shall neither cause nor suffer any woman to name or put any other father to the child, but only him which is the very true father thereof indeed.

“ Item. You shall not suffer any woman to pretend, feign, or surmise herself to be delivered of a child who is not indeed ; neither to claim any other woman's child for her own.

“ Item. You shall not suffer any woman's child to be murdered, maimed, or otherwise hurt, as much as you may ; and so often as you shall perceive any peril or jeopardy either in the woman or in the child, in any such wise as you shall be in doubt what shall chance thereof, you shall thenceforth in due time send for other midwives

and expert women in that faculty, and use their advice and council in that behalf.

“Item. You shall not in any wise use or exercise any manner of witchcraft, charm or sorcery, invocation or other prayers that may stand with God’s laws and the King’s.

“Item. You shall not give any counsel or minister any herb, medicine, or potion, or any other thing, to any woman being with child whereby she should destroy or cast out that she goeth withal before her time.

“Item. You shall not enforce any woman being with child by any pain or by any ungodly ways or means to give you any more for your pains or labour in bringing her to bed, than they would otherwise do.

“Item. You shall not consent, agree, give, or keep counsel that any woman be delivered secretly of that which she goeth with, but in the presence of two or three lights ready.

“Item. You shall be secret and not open in any matter appertaining to your office in the presence of any man, unless necessity, or great urgent cause do constrain you so to do.

“Item. If any child be dead-born, you yourself shall see it buried in such secret place as

neither hog nor dog nor any other beast may come unto it; and in such sort done as it be not found nor perceived, as much as you may; and that you shall not suffer any such child to be cast into the jaques or any other inconvenient place.

“Item. If you shall know any midwife using or doing anything contrary to any of the permisses, or in any otherwise than shall be seemly or convenient, you shall forthwith detect, open, or show the same to me or my Chancellor for the time being.

“Item. You shall use yourself in honest behaviour unto the woman, being lawfully admitted to the room and office of a midwife in all things accordingly.

“Item. That you shall truly present to myself, or my Chancellor, all such women as you shall know from time to time to occupy and exercise the room of a midwife within my aforesaid diocese and jurisdiction of _____, without any licence and admission.

“Item. You shall not make or assign any deputy or deputies to exercise or occupy under you in your absence the office or room of a midwife, but such as you shall perfectly know to be of right honest and discreet behaviour, and

also apt, able, and having sufficient knowledge and experience to exercise the said room and office.

“Item. You shall not be privy or consent that any priest, or other party, shall in your absence, or in your company, or of your knowledge or sufferance baptize any child by any mass, Latin service, or prayers, than such as are appointed by the laws of the Church of England; neither shall you consent that any child, born by any woman who shall be delivered by you, shall be carried away without being baptized in the parish by the ordinary minister, where the child is born, unless it be in case of necessity baptized privately according to the Book of Common Prayer; but you shall forthwith, upon understanding thereof, either give knowledge to me the said Bishop, or my Chancellor for the time being.

“All which articles and charge you shall faithfully observe and keep, so help you God, and by the contents of the Book.”

After taking this oath, and paying fees amounting to about eighteen shillings, a license was granted to the midwife, of which the following is an example:—

Midwife's License.

“ Joseph, by Divine Permission, Bishop of Rochester, To our well-beloved in Christ Elizabeth Chapman of the parish of Saint Warburg, otherwise Hoo, in the County of Kent, and our Diocese of Rochester, send Greeting in our Lord everlasting: Whereas We understand by good testimony and credible certificates that you the said Elizabeth Chapman are apt and able, cunning and expert, to use and exercise the office, business, and function of a Midwife, We therefore by virtue of Our Power Ordinary and Episcopal, Do admit and give you power to use and exercise the said office, business, and function of a Midwife in and through our Diocese and Jurisdiction of Rochester, with the best care and diligence you may or can in this behalf, indifferently both to poor and rich, as also to perform and accomplish all things about the same, according to your oath thereupon given you upon the Holy Evangelists, as far as God will give you Grace and enable you. In witness whereof we have caused the Seal of our Chancéllor to be affixed to these presents this Twenty-first day of July

in the year of our Lord, One thousand seven hundred and thirty-eight, and in the seventh year of our Translation."

Licenses used to be granted by Bishops to physicians, surgeons, apothecaries, and midwives, and they were doubtless, generally speaking, very useful in enabling the not over well-educated country people of those days to choose between capable practitioners and pretentious charlatans. The licenses to the midwives, however, seem not to have been much esteemed by those who had the best opportunities of testing their value. Peter Chamberlen and Elizabeth Cellier have already spoken of them disparagingly. Dr Bracken writes in the same strain,* "I wonder that there is not (for the preservation of the lives of many of his Majesty's subjects) a law to have a jury appointed, with the assistance of an able and honest man midwife, to inquire into the circumstances of the case of children born dead, maimed, or distorted; but so far from this, that the law is such at present, that a woman who can only procure the hands of a few good-natured ladies or justices of the peace to recommend her to the Bishop or Ordinary, shall have a licence to

* 'The Midwife's Companion.' London, 1737.

practise, although neither those who recommended nor the Bishop himself know anything of the matter.”

According to Sterne, who well knew about the practice of midwives, and the way in which they obtained their licenses, this assertion of Bracken appears not to be strictly correct. In the following description of the old lady who officiated on the 5th November, 1718, at the birth of Tristram Shandy, it will be observed that before obtaining her license she was “instructed in some of the plain principles of the business.”*

“In the same village where my father and mother dwelt, dwelt also a thin, upright, motherly, notable, good old soul of a midwife, who, with the help of a little plain good sense, and some years full employment in her business, in which she had all along trusted little to her own efforts, and a great deal to those of Dame Nature, had acquired, in her way, no small degree of reputation in the world—by which word *world*, need I in this place inform your worship that I would be understood to mean no more of it than a small circle described upon the circle of the great world, of four English miles diameter, or there-

* ‘Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy,’ chap. vii.

abouts, of which the cottage where the good old woman lived is supposed to be the centre? She had been left, it seems, a widow in great distress, with three or four small children, in her forty-seventh year; and as she was at that time a person of decent carriage, grave deportment, moreover a woman of few words, and withal an object of compassion, whose distress and silence under it call out the louder for a friendly lift, the wife of the parson of the parish was touched with pity; and, often having lamented an inconvenience to which her husband's flock had for many years been exposed, inasmuch as there was no such thing as a midwife, of any kind or degree, to be got at, let the case have been ever so urgent, within six or seven long miles riding, which said seven long miles, in dark nights and dismal roads, the country thereabouts being nothing but a deep clay, was almost equal to fourteen; and that in effect was sometimes next to having no midwife at all. It came into her head that it would be doing as seasonable a kindness to the whole parish as to the poor creature herself, to get her a little instructed in some of the plain principles of the business, in order to set her up in it. As no woman thereabouts was better

qualified to execute the plan she had formed than herself, the gentlewoman very charitably undertook it; and having great influence over the female part of the parish she found no difficulty in effecting it to the utmost of her wishes. In truth, the parson joined his interest with his wife's in the whole affair, and in order to do things as they should be, and give the poor soul as good a title by law to practise as his wife had given by institution, he cheerfully paid the fees for the ordinary's license himself, amounting on the whole to the sum of eighteen shillings and fourpence; so that betwixt them both the good woman was fully invested in the real and corporal possession of her office, together with all its rights, members, and appurtenances whatsoever."

The balance of evidence we must admit, however, is upon the side of those who thought the Bishop's license to midwives an insufficient guarantee of their skill. A general impression had arisen that some more satisfactory test was necessary. It would seem that women too frequently began to practise midwifery more for the purpose of earning a livelihood than from any special aptitude they possessed for the art.

Generally speaking the country midwives had no further education than that which they were able to obtain by experience or gather from the pages of an antiquated and often delusive book. In London, Willughby tells us, the young midwives were trained for seven years under the old midwives before they were allowed to practise for themselves. He, however, says—"When ye meanest of ye women not knowing how otherwise to live, for the getting of a shilling or two to sustain their necessities, become ignorant midwives, their travailing women suffer tortures. It would be better to make such midwives nurse-keepers, rather than (such as they would be called) midwives." Robert Barret, brother of Surgeons' Hall, also writes,* "In these days there are many women that take upon 'em the knowledge and practice of midwifery barely upon the privilege of their age; as if a woman were more expert in that art for her dotage or old age." Even Mrs Nihell, a professed midwife and authoress, of whom we shall have more to say presently, and who was scarcely capable of admitting the possibility of such a thing as feminine incapacity, says, "It were to be wished

* 'A Companion for Midwives.' 1699.

for the sake of the good that would redound from it, to the preservation of the human species, both in parent and child, that those who are entrusted with the public welfare, would establish the same regulation in the British dominions (as was enforced in Holland in 1747) to expel and exclude from the art all the ignorant pretenders of either sex, who are, in fact, worse than the Herods of society. The cruelty of Herod extended to no more than the infants, not to the mothers; that of such pretenders to both.”*

Mrs Sarah Stone, a midwife of large experience, whose biography will next claim our attention, also joins in deploring the ignorance of country midwives. She gives many examples of their evil practices. The following will suffice:—
“I was sent for to Curry-Mallet, to a tanner’s wife, about eleven o’clock at night, it being very bad weather, and bad roads as ever were rode, so that before I got there the child was born. I did not go up stairs directly to see the mother and child. The woman saying all was well, I thought proper to dry my cloaths, being very wet and tired (for ’twas eight long miles). When I had dry’d and recover’d myself I went up stairs,

* ‘Treatise on the Art of Midwifery,’ 1760.

and to my great surprize saw the child with one eye out, and the whole face much injured, having no skin left on it, and the upper lip tore quite hollow from the jaw-bone, was extremely swell'd, so that the child could make no use of it. I put some warm water and sugar in the child's mouth, with a small spoon, and resting it upon the tongue the poor infant sucked it down. I asked the midwife, how the child's face came to be so miserably hurt? She told me the mother fell down two days before she was in travail, and, as she thought, hurt the child, for she was sure she was born right. I told her I was sensible the child came head foremost, but the face presented to the birth; and the damage the child received was from her fingers. She could not make any defence for herself. I found her extremely ignorant."

It is distressing to think how much unnecessary suffering these ignorant women produced, and what mutilations and losses of valuable lives they caused. The books of midwifery writers are up to this period, so full of these heartrending tales that all the good, kind, and useful work, which the early English midwives undoubtedly accomplished, seems lost to view behind the dark

and terrible pictures of their ignorant and cruel deeds. Let us welcome then the "indecent men midwives," the "cruel instruments," and all the other bugbears which raised that storm in England, so boisterous while it lasted, but which left the midwifery atmosphere of this country clear of the hideous clouds which had so long hung with threatening gloom before the eyes of our foremothers.

Among the Sloan MSS. (4034, p. 65) is a sheet of ordinary letter paper written upon on one side and endorsed. "Proposals for the benefit of children-bearing women." The exact date of it is unknown, but it must have been near the middle of the eighteenth century. It is remarkable, inasmuch as it contains the first proposal for the establishment of a dispensary for the diseases of pregnant women. The following is a copy of it :

"Amongst the many charitable establishments and contributions of this country, it is strange that the relief of child-bearing women has not been thought of, great numbers of whom suffer during their pregnancy for want of proper advice, and during their labour by midwives ignorant and uninstructed in their profession.

“To remedy these evils and as an exemplary foundation of such a charity, it is humbly proposed, for the benefit of child-bearing women, in the parishes of St Martin’s and St James’s—

“That a physician of known skill and experience in the diseases of pregnant women and practice of deliveries, be appointed to serve the poor and oblig’d to give attendance at his house at such stated days and hours to all the poor of the said parish, and to be ready when call’d upon to lay such as are in hard labour.

“That he shall be oblig’d many times of the year to read lectures to midwives, or such who intend to follow that profession in order by the structure of the parts, anatomical preparations, or such other methods as he shall think fit to instruct them in their profession. That those lectures shall be publickly advertised and none admitted but women.

“That this laudable custom (together with a dispensary of medicines fitted for their respective cases) has been long since introduced by the wise magistracy of Amsterdam to the great relief of the poor, the publick emolument, and their own great honour. The proposer humbly presumes, it would be agreeable to the character of her

present Majesty to lay the first foundation of such a charitable establishment."

Unfortunately the name of the proposer is not appended to the manuscript. The first "Dispensary for Female Patients" was established in Leicester Street, under the patronage of Her Royal Highness the Duchess of York. Dr Rees, who published 'Observations on Diseases of the Uterus,' was one of its physicians.

CHAPTER VII.

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (*continued*).

MRS SARAH STONE.

MRS STONE, whose maiden name was Holmes, commenced practice in Bridgewater in the second year of the eighteenth century. She very soon after removed to Taunton "a place where there was no man-midwife."* Dr Allen, a friend of hers, says that she exercised her art when very young with great applause and success, having been taught by the famous Mrs Holmes, her mother, the best midwife that ever he knew. Mrs Stone, speaking of her early training and instruction, says "I have seen several women opened, and it is not improper for all of the profession to see dis-

* Men midwives were very scarce at this time. A medical man, writing to his friend in 1737, says, "I begin to think I mist it much in not settling in Leicester, instead of Manchester, when I consider you had not a man midwife within ten miles of Leicester town." 'N. and Q.,' II series, vol. x, p. 144.

sections, and read anatomy as I have done; but had I inspected into them all my life and not been instructed in midwifery by my mother, and deputy to her, full six years, it would have signified but little; nor should I have dared to have undertaken such a profession lest any life should have been lost through my ignorance. In my humble opinion it is necessary that midwives should employ three years at least with some ingenious woman in practising this art. For, if seven years must be served to learn a trade I think three years as little as possible to be instructed in an art where life depends." She also adds, "The disorders of teeming women do not belong to midwives, but they ought to commit themselves to the care of a physician; a midwife's business being only to be well instructed in her profession.

Mrs Stone was a woman of great energy and courage, but unfortunately did not possess a sufficiently strong constitution to enable her to pursue her arduous calling with impunity. Riding long distances in wet wintry weather, sitting in damp clothes during the progress of tedious labours whatever her state of health might be, coupled with the anxiety and fatigue of her

calling at length caused her to relinquish country practice and remove to Bristol. With Mrs Stone midwifery was often a work requiring great bodily strength. She tells us of a case of arm-presentation which cost her "at least an hour and a half hard work," and after which she writes: "I could not turn in bed without help for two or three days after, nor lift my arm to my head for near a week; and forced to bathe my arm with spirit of wine several times a day."

This undaunted midwife thus describes the experience which finally determined her to leave Taunton:—"I was sent for to a comber's wife in St James's parish, about eight of the clock at night, but being very ill of the cholick, could not go. About five of the clock in the morning they sent again and told me the woman would die if I did not go to her assistance, for neither of her midwives could deliver her. This obliged me to rise and go with them, although I was so ill as to be forced to hold by the woman's husband and another. When I got there I found the child's arm out of the birth. I immediately searched for the feet, which I soon found, and in a little time completed the delivery. I was led home and in my bed before the clock struck six.

This fixed my resolution of leaving Taunton, for the country business was too hard for me, having no conveniences in my illness, but obliged to go on horseback or foot, which had so impaired my health, that, notwithstanding it is sixteen years since I left it, I enjoy more health and strength than I did at that time; for I brought at least three hundred children a year into the world, for many years before I left the town."

After practising in Bristol for some years, Mrs Stone's ambition led her to the Metropolis, where she and her husband (who was probably an apothecary) arrived in the year 1736.

In 1737 "Sarah Stone, of Piccadilly," possibly for the purpose of advertising her arrival in London, published "A Complete Practice of Midwifery," rather a pretentious title, as it consisted of only "upwards of forty cases," and dedicated it to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty. In her preface dated "from my house in Piccadilly, over against the Right Hon. the Earl of Burlington's," she takes up the note of alarm already sounded by Elizabeth Cellier, and opens the campaign against men-midwives and their instruments. "I cannot comprehend," she says, "why women are not capable of completing

this business when begun, without calling in men to their assistance, who are often sent for when the work is near finished ; and then the midwife, who has taken all the pains, is counted of little value, and the young men command all the praise. Which unskilful practices of women-midwives being often repeated, give occasion for pregnant women to bespeak them, so that it is become quite a fashion." Of instruments, she says, "I am certain that where twenty women are delivered with instruments (which is now become a common practice), that nineteen of them might be delivered without, if not the twentieth, as will appear in my observations." On referring to her observations we find, in No. 12, that having no incision knife with her, she was obliged to use a penknife, with which she made a large puncture in the head of the child and performed craniotomy. She, however, declares that she never found instruments requisite above four times in her life. As she appears to have been a truthful woman, we must conclude that she had very good fortune in her practice, for when at Taunton she attended over three hundred cases in a year, and there was, as she says, "no man-midwife in the place, nor any woman that was able to go through the

least difficulty, so that the whole of bad labours lay heavy on me."

Mrs Stone professed to be in possession of a secret method for preventing flooding. Observation 41 is concerning a woman whom she cured of violent flooding by "touch," after a physician had ordered several medicines in vain. The relief was only temporary, however, for it returned. "As soon as I touched her," she says, "I stopped her again, as I have often done in my practice, and always succeeded in ten minutes, or less, after touching of a woman. I have been with many women that have flooded prodigiously, some in miscarriages, and others at their full time; but, thank God, I never lost any life in that case through all my practice. It is a secret I would willingly have made known for the benefit of my sisters in the profession, but having a daughter that has practised the same art these ten years, with as good success as myself, I shall leave it in her power to make it known."

On the whole, Mrs Stone's work on midwifery was, as far as it went, practical and useful, and a great improvement upon that published by Mrs Sharpe. She must have been a most useful woman in her generation, and had she possessed

a stronger constitution, would have been the exact type of what a midwife ought to be. Nerve, patience, intelligence, and good common-sense, seldom found combined in either sex, were her predominant characteristics.

MRS BIZZOL.

What we know of this midwife is contained in a letter from Paul Chamberlen to his Hon^{red} friend Doct^r Sloan.* “ Sir,—The Lady Courtney, having a just confidence in your opinion, and forasmuch as she, it seems, is disappointed of her midwyfe who she desired to have, and, as I understand, is resolved to have one from this town, the bearer hereof, Mrs Bizzol, whom I have known several years to be skilled in her profession, desires your recommendation on her behalf to the said lady, which, if you approve, shall be esteemed a favour to Sir, yo^r very affectionate and humble servant, P. Chamberlen, 10th May, 1706.”

* Original Letters of Sir Hans Sloan, Brit Mus.

MRS KENNON.

Mrs Kennon was midwife to Queen Caroline ; she also attended the Princess of Wales at the birth of George III. From a notice of this event in the 'Gentlemen's Magazine,' we find that she lived in Jermyn Street. Mrs Kennon took an active part in the contentions now raging between men and women midwives, and boldly resisted the successful encroachments of the former. A short time before her death appeared 'The Petition-of the Unborn Babes,' a satirical and ironical tract against man-midwifery. In it the "babes" complained that their mothers through ignorance and fear were persuaded to place reliance upon ignorant men-midwives, and hire them at extravagant rates to "distress, bruise, kill, and destroy" the petitioners, contrary to the peace and good order of his Majesty's Government. Mrs Kennon so approved of this performance that she put a five hundred pound note in the hands of its author (Dr. Frank Nicholls) when she lay upon her death-bed. She died in 1755, and her "Collections," whatever

they might have been, were sold at Landford's in 1756.*

MRS HOPKINS.

In a trial which took place in 1754 between Richard Maddox, gent., plaintiff, and Dr M—y, physician and man-midwife, defendant, "Mrs Hopkins, a midwife of great experience and reputation," gave evidence.

MRS ELIZABETH BLACKWELL.

Mrs Blackwell, the daughter of a poor farmer in Lincolnshire, was born in 1712. Early in life she came to London as companion to a lady, and fell in love with an apothecary, who showed her great attention, and gratified her taste for reading by lending her books. At twenty she married the apothecary, one Alexander Blackwell, who, not being overburdened with riches, taught his spouse midwifery in order that she might assist him in defraying his debts.

She also perfected herself in the art by attend-

* "Notices and Anecdotes of Literati, Collections, &c." 'Gent. Mag.,' 1821, vol. lxxxii, pt. i, p. 205.

ing a course of Smellie's lectures. Botany, however, was the study which most enchained her attention, and, her husband having been placed in prison by his creditors, she worked at drawings of medicinal plants with so much success as not only to liberate him, but also to win for herself the patronage of Dr Mead and other learned physicians and surgeons. Her 'Curious Herbal,' three vols. folio, was published in London in 1736, and remains a lasting monument of her perseverance and skill. It is said that she abandoned her midwifery career in consequence of the ignorance and low character of the women who at that time followed the same calling.* Elizabeth Blackwell died in London in 1770, aged fifty-eight years.

MRS DRAPER.

This royal midwife officiated at the birth of George IV. The fact is thus recorded in the 'Annual Register' for 1762 :—" August 12.—The Queen was delivered of a prince by Mrs Draper ; Dr Hunter was in waiting in case of his help being wanted."

* ' Biographie des Sages-femmes,' p. 37.

The eccentric Philip Thicknesse, the champion of the 18th century midwives, asks triumphantly, in his 'Letter to a young Lady,'* "Who ushered two royal children into the world within these two years? Mrs Draper! Do you think the life of both parties was not an object of the highest concern? Methinks I hear it said, but two doctors were in waiting in case any superior assistance should be wanted; it was very proper there should." He seems to have had a great admiration for Mrs Draper's talents, for, in his 'Man-midwifery Analysed,'† he appeals to any woman of sense who lives in London, and who is within reach of Mrs Draper, whether it is sensible or decent to employ a man-midwife. It is probable that she died before the year 1772, as her name does not appear in a list of midwives published at that date.

MRS MADDOX.

Mrs Maddox was a midwife of great celebrity about the middle of the eighteenth century. She is classed by Thicknesse as a practitioner of equal

* London, 1764, p. 8.

† London, 4to, 1764.

talent with Mrs Draper. Smellie* speaks of a Mrs Maddocks, doubtless the same person, as "a midwife whom I kept on purpose to attend my patients in lingering cases."

Contemporaries with Mrs Maddox were Mrs Blackwell, Old Bond Street; Mrs Thackswaite, Marylebone Street; Mrs Mercer, Great Windmill Street; Mrs Nix and Mrs Newby, of the London Lying-in Hospital; and Mrs Fletcher. Three others who lived about this time are mentioned by Smellie—Mrs Brown, Princes Street, Soho; Mrs Fox, at the Acorn, in New Court, by Bord Street, in Covent Garden; and Mrs Charles.

MRS ELIZABETH PHILLIPS.

This midwife, after receiving her instruction in midwifery and license to practise in England, went over to America. In the old burying ground of Charlestown, on a cheap slab, bedimmed by time, may be found the following biographical sketch:—"Here lyes interred the body of Mrs Elizabeth Phillips, wife of Mr John Phillips, who was born in Westminster, in Great Britain,

* 'Cases in Midwifery,' Collection 33, No. 2, Cases 6.

and commissioned by John, Lord Bishop of London, in the year 1718, to the office of a midwife, and came to this country in the year 1719, and, by the blessing of God, has brought into the world above three thousand children. Died May 5th, 1761, aged 76 years."

MRS SIMPSON.

This midwife was taught by Smellie,* and kept by him to teach his pupils and attend labours with them. These pupils were of the male sex, for "she had assembled about ten of the gentlemen," he says, around the bed of a patient whose case was so difficult as to require his assistance.

* 'Midwifery,' vol. iii, p. 301.

CHAPTER VIII.

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (*continued*).

MRS ELIZABETH NHELL.

THE name of Elizabeth Nihell is met with more frequently in the works of obstetrical writers than that of any other English midwife; not because she wrote upon or practised her art better than her professional sisters, but because of the fierce attack she made upon men-midwives and their instruments. She was evidently possessed with the fear that midwives were about to be entirely superseded by men, and in defence of her sex she came boldly to the front and unfurled the banner of defiance. With true instinct she recognised the strongest point of the men-midwives' position, and against that she directed her principal attack.

It was the midwifery forceps which dealt the irreparable blow to the prestige of midwives, and they were not long in discovering it. Boldly and

persistently they fought against their introduction and use. They knew that a surgical instrument must be controlled by the hand of a surgeon, as a sword must be wielded by a soldier, so they persistently denounced all "instrumentarians," and maintained that every requisite operation could be best performed by the hand alone. Public opinion was appealed to, and anxious mothers wavered which sex to employ. We all remember the arrangements which were made relating to the birth of Tristram Shandy. How his father was for having a man-midwife by all means and his mother by no means—how it was arranged that his mother was to have the old woman, and the operator was to have license to drink a bottle of wine with Mr Shandy and Uncle Toby in the back parlour, for which he was to be paid five guineas—how it was found necessary to call in Dr Slop (Dr Burton, of York), and the disfiguring effects his forceps had on the nose of Tristram. In spite, however, of the breaking of this historical nose the revolutionising forceps still continued their work, and men-midwives increased in number until the complaint was made that there were "more men-midwives than streets."

Mrs Nihell attributed the success of the "he-practicers," as she calls them, in a great measure to fashion. "I have myself known," she says, "women so infected by this silly vanity that on receiving visits from their friends after lying in, and being delivered by a woman, have been ashamed of having had the better sense and regard for themselves to employ a midwife in defiance of the fashion, and have told their friends that it is true Mrs ——— had lain them, but that there was a doctor at hand in the next room."

Mrs Nihell was born in London in 1723, and early in life adopted the profession of midwifery. She says, "I frequented the Hôtel Dieu two whole years before being received an apprentice-midwife, which I accomplished with great difficulty on account of being born a subject of England, and consequently a foreigner there; my admission, however, I gained at length through the favor, protection, and special recommendation of His Royal Highness the Duke of Orleans." Her husband was a surgeon-apothecary, and he and she practised their professions in the Haymarket. As might be expected, it was not long before Mrs Nihell, the leader of

midwives, entered into combat with Smellie, the head of the men-midwives. The number of male pupils he instructed made her very irate, and at length she gave full vent to her feelings by writing a book with the following title:—‘A Treatise on the Art of Midwifery, setting forth various abuses therein, especially as to the practice with instruments, the whole serving to put all rational inquirers in a fair way of very safely forming their own judgment upon the question which is it best to employ, in cases of pregnancy and lying-in, a man-midwife or a midwife.’ London, 1760, pp. 471.*

The state of mind in which she enters upon her work is thus described in her preface:—“My very natural and strong attachment to the profession, which I have long exercised and actually do exercise, created in me an insuppressible indignation at the errors and pernicious innovations introduced into it, and every day gaining ground, under the protection of Fashion, sillily fostering a preference of men to women in the practice of midwifery; a preference first admitted by credulous Fear, and admitted without examination, upon this so suspicious recommendation

* “Said to have been written by her husband.”—Merriman.

of those interested to make that Fear subservient to their selfish ends." Her book is divided into two parts, which she epitomises thus :—"The first treats of our title to the practice of this art, of the pleas used by the men for arrogating to themselves the preference, and whether the superior safety is on the side of employing men-practitioners. The second has more particularly for object to demonstrate the insufficiency, danger, and actual destructiveness of instruments in the art of midwifery." As she proceeds she abandons herself to the freest expression of her feelings, applies to men-midwives all sorts of opprobrious names, and ridicules, often doubtless with justice, "that multitude of disciples of Dr Smellie, trained up at the feet of his artificial doll, or, in short, those self-constituted men-midwives made out of broken barbers, tailors, or even pork butchers, for I know myself one of this last trade, who, after passing half his life in stuffing sausages, is turned an intrepid physician and man-midwife. See the whole pack open in full cry: to arms! to arms! is the word; and what are those arms by which they maintain themselves, but those instruments, those weapons of death! Would not one imagine that the art

of midwifery was an art military?" Yes, those "murderous instruments," those cold, hard, inflexible instruments were even more objectionable to Mrs Nihell than the men-midwives themselves, for did she not know and say, "In truth, the faculty of using those instruments is the sole tenure of their usurped office." She did not confine herself, however, to the abuse of instruments. Smellie was honoured by a large share of her attention. He had endeavoured to soften the prejudice against men-midwives by a well-intentioned but injudicious proposal that they should adopt an effeminate but, what he called, a "commodious dress, namely, a loose washing nightgown, which he may have in readiness to put on when he is going to deliver; his waistcoat ought to be without sleeves, so that his arms may have more freedom to slide up and down under cover of the wrapper; and the sleeves of his shirt may be rolled up and pinned to the breasts of his waistcoat. Where he is obliged to alter his position a sheet ought to be tucked round him or an apron put on." Smellie unfortunately also had a very large hand,* and

* Dr W. Douglas describes Smellie as "a raw-boned, large-handed man, fit only to hold horses or stretch boots in Cranburne Alley."

Mrs Nihell, speaking of these two subjects, hands and dress, satirically alludes to "the delicate fist of a great-horse-godmother of a he-midwife, however softened his figure might be by his pocket nightgown being of flowered calico, or his cap of office tied with pink and silver ribbon. I would advise for the younger ones a round-ear cap, with pink and silver bridles." All this proves with what hostility the contest was being carried on; some would have annihilated the whole race of midwives, and others would have completely crushed the accoucheurs. Accoucheurs forsooth! said the midwives, a fine new-fangled title, first used by the French man-midwife Clement after he had delivered La Valière, who, every one knows, was no better than she should have been. The fight continued fierce and furious, and there appeared no signs of peace. The contest, however, undignified as it was, had the effect of interesting the public, and concentrating their attention upon a subject which had been too long neglected. A practical indication of this interest is to be found in the fact that about the same time five of the most important lying-in hospitals in London were established—The British Lying-in Hospital, 1749; the City of London Lying-in

Hospital, 1750 ; Queen Charlotte's, 1752 ; Royal Maternity, 1757 ; and the General Lying-in Hospital, 1765.

In 1772 Mrs Nihell was still in practice in the Haymarket, as appears from some letters* which were published that year against man-midwives. They were signed "Man-midwife," and were probably written by her husband, or by some interested friend, for in them her book is eulogised, and her name brought forward as that of a most accomplished midwife. They also contained an indecent attack on Dr William Hunter, with whom she had quarrelled. He having been called in to assist her, found the umbilical cord separated from the placenta, and did not readily accept her explanation that the accident had been caused by the nurse in removing soiled linen from the patient.† These letters produced an angry answer from "Old Chiron," who asserted that "Midwives cram their patients with cordials, keeping them intoxicated during the time they

* 'The Danger and Immodesty,' &c. London, 8vo, 1772.

† Siebold, in his obstetrical letters, mentions a case in which a midwife had torn the cord from the placenta and had replaced it in the vagina. On taking hold of it without any traction he found it resting in his hand, when the midwife exclaimed, "My God! doctor, you have broken the cord."

are in labour, driving poor women up and down stairs, notwithstanding their shrieks, and shaking them so violently as often to bring on convulsion fits on pretence of hastening their labours, laughing at their cries, and breaking wretched jests upon the contortions of the women, whose torments would make a feeling man shudder at the sight."

Mrs. Nihell was, at this date, about fifty years of age; when she died and what family she left is not known, but that she had children we learn from her own statement, "I am myself a mother."

MRS MARGARET STEPHEN.

Mrs Stephen was a midwife of great reputation in London. She attended Queen Charlotte in her confinements, and wrote a little book on midwifery which is perhaps the best upon the subject that has been written by any woman in our own language. Its title is 'Domestic Midwife; or, the best means of Preventing Danger in Childbirth considered,' by Margaret Stephen, teacher of midwifery to females, No. 42, Ely Place, Holborn, London, 8vo, 1795.* At this

* This work is extremely rare; the only copy the writer knows to exist is that in the Radford Library of St Mary's

date she writes, "I have been above thirty years in the practice of midwifery; my instructions were regular, and received from a gentleman who had been a pupil of Dr Smellie, in his day the father of midwifery in London." But Mrs Stephen had now become in her turn an instructor, for she says, "I teach my own pupils the anatomy of the pelvis, &c., and of the foetal skull, on preparations which I keep by me, with everything else relative to practice in nature at labours; also turning, and the use of the forceps and other obstetric instruments, on a machine which I believe few teachers can equal, together with the cases and proper seasons which justify such expedients; and I make them write whatever of my lectures may prove most useful to them in their future practice, for which they are as well qualified as men." She also adds, "I intend to continue my lectures as usual to women entering upon the practice of midwifery, until the men who teach that profession render them unnecessary, by giving their female pupils as extensive instructions as they give the males.

Hospital, Manchester. Through the kindness of Dr Radford, who has done so much for midwifery and midwives, permission was obtained to copy from it the accompanying extracts.

Mrs Stephen must have led a very active life, for, besides practising and teaching midwifery, she had all the cares of a large family, being the mother of nine children. She continued the fight against the men-midwives, but less fiercely than Mrs Nihell. We find no tirade written against instruments and instrumentarians; on the contrary, "the forceps are of the greatest utility;" she says, "there is none of all the instruments I ever saw so well calculated to save the lives of children." Here, then, we find one of the great points of contest ceded—the forceps are no longer murderous, but life-saving. Mrs Stephen, however, objects to the employment of men in midwifery; she writes, "I cannot help thinking that so general an use of men in the business of a midwife has introduced a far greater number of evils amongst society than it has prevented. Ladies have been induced to dispense with that delicacy which was their greatest ornament, by the insinuations of designing men, who taught them to believe they endangered their own lives, and that of their children, by employing women." She also makes some unhandsome inuendos against those of her own sex who employ men-midwives. On the whole, however, her language

is more moderate and sensible than that of Mrs Nihell. "It has been alleged," she says, "that woman's understanding does not admit of receiving such knowledge as is necessary in the practice of midwifery ; but women's understanding is not so limited as some would represent. I only wish that those who teach midwifery would give them as clear a knowledge of that science as they are capable of receiving. If women of good education and respectable connection who, through some unseen misfortunes, have fallen into indigent circumstances, would turn their attention to this science, and compel those who teach them to do them justice by submitting their theory to a public examination, like the surgeon's mates in the army and navy, when they had finished their studies ; such women would become a blessing to society, instead of being a dead-weight upon their friends, and obliged to apply for charity in every corner in which they could hope to find it."

MARTHA MEARS.

Martha Mears, who styles herself "practitioner in midwifery," lived, at the end of the eighteenth

century, at No. 12, Red Lion Square, London. She published in 1797 a book, "The Pupil of Nature," in which we find sentiments quite in opposition to those of the midwives who lived earlier in this century. There is no violent attack either against instruments or men-midwives. The fight is evidently over, and, with the exception of a few outpost skirmishes, which will probably continue for some time yet, peace has been established. The midwives have found that their territory is not to be entirely taken away from them, and that their invaders are not as "murderous" as they anticipated. In proof of this read the peaceful proclamation of Martha Mears, "Let it not be supposed that after having spent some years under the most eminent professors of midwifery, and devoted a great part of my time to the perusal of the best treatises on the subject, such as those of a Harvey, a Leake, a Smellie, and a Denman, I am now ungratefully endeavouring to bring their doctrines and their practice into disrepute. On the contrary, I would with heartfelt rapture strain my feeble voice to swell the note of public praise which they have so justly deserved. I would put their books into the hands of every midwife in the

kingdom, and say to her, in the words of the poet—

‘ Day and night read them—read them day and night.’

I know not which most to admire the ardour of their researches, the importance of their discoveries, or the zeal and ability they have displayed in combating prejudice and error.”

It is pleasant to be able thus happily to terminate the biographical portion of this work.

The names of a few London midwives who were “ eminent in their profession ” during the eighteenth century are appended.

Mrs Brooke and Mrs Lee, of Cross Key Court, Little Britain; Mrs Harris, St Martin’s-le-Grand; Mrs Reynard and Mrs Forrest, Bartholomew Close; Mrs Smith and Mrs Page, of Cow Lane, Snow Hill; Mrs Phillips, Garlick Hill; Mrs Andrews, Bush Lane, Cannon Street; Mrs Longbottom, near Guy’s Hospital; Mrs Richardson, Westminster; Mrs Souden, Ratcliff Row, Old Street; Mrs Hall, Bunhill Row, Old Street; Mrs Barnet and Mrs Larkin, Somerset Street, Whitechapel; Mrs Blunt, Swallow Street, Golden Square; and Mrs Lyttelton, Amen Corner, Paternoster Row.

CHAPTER IX.

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (*continued*).*Proposals for the instruction and control
of Midwives.*

DURING this century the midwives used every device to prevent the employment of men-midwives. Their jealousy rendered them blind to their best friends and obstructive to their own interests, for the men-midwives constantly declared that they had no wish to injure in any way their sister practitioners. Dr Mawbray said, "It is indeed indifferent whether man or woman practise this art, so the practicers be properly adapted and duly qualified for the purpose of so great a work." Chapman also said that there were more births than men could possibly attend, and he was far from desiring that the practice of midwifery should be confined to his own sex. On the other hand, Mrs Cellier, Mrs Nihell, Dr Douglas, Mr Fores, and many

others worked hard for the entire exclusion of men from the midwifery practice, *except* in very difficult cases. They would also have allowed men to teach midwives by lecturing to them, but where the lecturers, who, as some proposed, should not be obstetricians, were to obtain their experience and knowledge it is difficult to conjecture.

In spite, however, of slandering tongues and bespattering pens, the men-midwives increased in numbers and flourished. The art of midwifery rapidly improved, the forceps had for ever supplanted the cruel crotchet, and the male practitioners continued to instruct and elevate their shy and sulky sisters. Early in this century Dr Mawbray performed this task so successfully that he is looked upon as the first public teacher of midwifery in this country. The qualifications and knowledge which he considered a midwife should possess were as follows :

“ Qualifications of the ordinary Midwife.

“NEGATIVE.

“I. She who would discreetly undertake midwifery ought not to begin the practice too young nor continue it till grown too old; for the one

will want, perhaps, due experience as well as decent gravity and solidity; the other will, peradventure, want requisite strength and vigour of body as well as the free exercise and use of her senses.

“II. She ought to be no weak, infirm, or diseased person, incapable of undergoing the fatigues which the business too often requires; such as watching night and day; turning the infants when in a wrong posture; or extracting them at length, which action frequently requires the full strength of a strong man instead of a weak woman.

“III. She ought not to be too fat or gross, but especially not to have thick or fleshy hands and arms, or large-boned wrists; which of necessity must occasion racking pains to the tender labouring woman.

“IV. She ought not to be lame or maimed, nor have stiff or crooked fingers, hands or arms; for these parts are to be used in different manners and postures, even so that the success of the labour often depends upon their readiness and agility.

“V. She ought not to be a conceived or child-bearing woman, because this may be of bad con-

sequence, not only to the labouring woman (who depends on her for more than she is able to perform, especially in strong labour) but also to the conceived midwife herself, and her own infant.

“VI. She ought not to be an ignorant, stupid, indolent, or dull person, and especially not incapable of conceiving matters distinctly, or judging of things aright; neither ought she to be a self-indulger, slothful, or lazy; nor a light, dissolute or daring person; she ought not to be inconsiderate, negligent, or forgetful; nor proud, passionate, or obstinate; neither peevish, morose or surly; nor fearful, doubtful, or wavering minded; neither ought she to be a tippler, or drunkard, nor a tatterer or vagabond, nor a covetous or mercenary person.

“AFFIRMATIVE.

“I. She ought to be a woman of a good middle age, of solid parts, of full experience, of a healthy, strong, and vigorous body, with clever small hands, since nothing can be more agreeable and conducive to the art of midwifery than slender hands, long fingers and ready feeling.

“II. She ought to be grave and considerate, endued with resolution and presence of mind, in order to foresee and prevent accidents; sagacious and prudent in difficult cases, so as not to take all upon her own shoulders or judgment, but to have immediate recourse to the ablest practiser in the art, and freely submit her thoughts to the discerning faculty of the more learned and skilful.

“III. She ought to be watchful, diligent, and expert in all occasions and conditions that can or may occur, so that no opportunity in the beginning of the labour be lost; since I have more than once observed that the neglect or mistake of improving a critical minute, hath cost the mother many violent or heavy pains afterwards and the child also its life.

“IV. She ought to be a true fearer of God, a conscientious person, of good life and conversation; since matters of the greatest moment are committed to her care, and depend entirely upon the faithful discharge of her duty: for she has the first and best opportunity of shewing her compassion, and tenderness to mankind in this infant and helpless state. In short, charity ought always to engage her, to be as ready to help the poor as the rich; the life of the one being as dear

as the others, and the image of God being equally stamped upon both; for the ineffable recompense of charity far exceeds all other considerations of trifling gain.

“V. She ought to be patient and pleasant; soft, meek, and mild in her temper, in order to encourage and comfort the labouring woman. She should pass by and forgive her small failings and peevish faults, instructing her gently when she does or says amiss; but if she will not follow advice, and necessity require, the midwife ought to reprimand and put her smartly in mind of her duty; yet always in such a manner, however, as to encourage her with the hopes of happy and speedy delivery.

“VI. In like manner, as she ought to be modest, temperate, sober, so ought she to be faithful and silent; always upon her guard to conceal those things which ought not to be spoken of.

“Theoretical Knowledge of the Midwife.

“(ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY.)

“I. Of the external and internal parts of generation, and the adjacent parts, together with a

competent skill of the respective substance and nature, connection and function of each of these in the time of birth.

“II. Of the pelvis, or bason and its contents; together with a true knowledge of its bones, their form or figure, office, and connection, &c., upon that occasion.

“III. Of that wonderful body the matrix, and its vagina or neck; together with the understanding of its substance and structure, duty, and function in time of labour.

“IV. Of the strange natural qualities and amazing singular faculties of this body in distinguishing all its peculiar properties.

“V. Of the touch, or handling the woman; together with knowing its many various uses and manifold distinct advantages.

“VI. Of the genuine and real, as well as of the spurious or bastard, labour-pains; how they differ in themselves and are to be carefully distinguished.

“VII. Of the method of laying the woman and manner of extracting the after-birth; together with all the heterogeneous and preternatural contents of the womb.

“ Practical Knowledge of the Midwife.

“(OF WHICH SHE OUGHT ALSO TO HAVE A FULL AND COMPLETE KNOWLEDGE.)

“ I. Of the various methods to be taken for the present ease and expeditious relief of the labouring woman.

“ II. Of the discreet method of turning an ill-situated infant (whatsoever the preternatural posture may be), and drawing it forth safely by the feet.

“ III. Of her own personal duty (as midwife) both to the mother and the child after delivery; as also towards all labouring women, to whom she may be called, upon critical conjunctures.”

Mawbray, like many others, was anxious that a large lying-in hospital should be established where midwives could be instructed. “ What if some of us should live to see the day in which such a signal piece of Christian charity may be begun in London?” He asks, “ What if some good Christians, as considerable in fortune as in piety, should some day lay the foundation of such a commendable and glorious work ?”

After Mawbray came John Douglas, one of the

doughtiest champions the midwives ever had. He proposed "An effectual method to enable the midwomen to perform their office in all cases (excepting those few where instruments are necessary) with as much ease, speed, and safety as the most dexterous midmen." His proposal was as follows :

"I. That an hospital be erected, *e. g.* in London or Westminster (at the public expense, by donation, or subscriptions, as several almshouses, infirmaries, hospitals, &c., of far less consequence to the common weal, have been and are daily carried on), for the reception of two or three hundred poor women who are big with child.

"II. That a proper number of midwomen be appointed to attend them.

"III. That two surgeon midmen be appointed to assist these midwomen in all extraordinary cases, and to demonstrate the structure of the parts concerned, explain the art of touching, &c., in set lectures, at least three times a week, to all the midwomen and their apprentices who please to attend.

"IV. That every young woman, who designs to practise midwifery, shall be obliged to attend these courses during their apprenticeship; and

then go and practise for a set time under those expert women in that hospital. Afterwards let them be examined as to the skill and knowledge they have acquired in their profession by two surgeons (since our *Dom. fac. totum* take midwifery either to be no part of surgery, or such a trifling part of it that it is below their notice) and six or seven other persons appointed by His Majesty (because I don't think it reasonable that so many people's bread should depend on the humour and caprice of any two men only), and if approved, to receive from them a certificate of their fitness to practise in London or anywhere else.

“V. That, until fit hospitals can be built and endowed, a midman be appointed in every city or county town in England to read the foresaid lectures to all the midwomen in the county, and demonstrate to them the truth of their doctrines on the poor of the neighbourhood, of which there are plenty everywhere.

“If this, or some such scheme, was put in execution in the principal towns of the kingdom, I am satisfied, in a very few years there would hardly be an ignorant midwoman in England. What can be more desirable? What can show

more humanity? What can be more charitable than to pursue a design whereby the lives of so many innocent children and valuable women may be yearly, nay daily, saved from destruction? If the midwomen in and about London and Westminster are so generally and so grossly ignorant, as those gentlemen (*viz.* Giffard and Chapman) have represented them, what must they be in the country? What havock must they make among His Majesty's subjects? What numbers of fine women and children must daily fall a sacrifice by the very hands, *proh dolor!* from whom they expected relief? Is not this a melancholy and deplorable case? Is it not an evil which demands both a speedy and an effectual remedy? Can anything better deserve the attention of the Legislature itself?"

Sir Richard Manningham also made a proposal "That proper measures be taken by the Legislature for establishing a national public hospital for all sorts of women promiscuously; for amongst the unhappy wretches of ill-fame there are doubtless many objects of compassion who, I think, are as properly the concern and care of the Legislature as a profligate child is that of its parents." In this hospital he would have had mid-

wives taught, but as the larger scheme could not be carried out at once, he established in 1739 a small lying-in ward or hospital in the parochial Infirmary of St James, Westminster, which was the first thing of the kind in the British dominions. Here midwives received practical instruction, as may be learnt from the following account of the infirmary issued by Manningham in 1744:—"As hitherto the due knowledge of the practice of midwifery could not easily be obtained without going into foreign countries, and as that suited the affairs and circumstances of few, so it could not reasonably be expected that our women midwives specially should be so properly and fully qualified as they ought for the skilful performance of their business; on which account it is greatly to be feared many of the better sort of women, as well as the meaner, have greatly suffered in labouring with child, through the almost unavoidable insufficiency of the knowledge of many of our midwives; but having now proper opportunities of instruction, they will, I think, have no excuse for their future ignorance. And as this lying-in infirmary may reasonably afford the best opportunity of instruction in the art and practice of midwifery for the public benefit, it is

ordered that an exact register be always kept of the names and places of abode of all persons taught or improved in midwifery at the said lying-in infirmary; after they have received a certificate from the physician of their being duly qualified for the practice of midwifery."

After Manningham, George Counsell published his straight-forward proposal. "It is a truth too well known, that mothers and their children are daily, if not hourly, destroyed (such is the practice of midwifery in our days) by ignorant wretches, in almost every state of life, a pack of young boys, and old superannuated washerwomen, who are so impudent and so inhuman as to take upon them to practise, even in the most difficult cases which can possibly occur.

"How much then is it to be lamented that no care has yet been taken by any law to prevent these cruel and most fatal proceedings! Laws have been enacted for the preservation of the brute species; and shall the human species be neglected? Surely an affair of such vast weight and importance, that is now even a national grievance, in which the safety of millions yet unborn will be concerned, must, one day or other, become the subject of a Parliamentary

enquiry. It may likewise happen that the wives and children of the first peers of the Realm, by chance, may fall as well as others into the hands of the unskilful.

“ And here I beg leave to observe that in the three professions of physick, surgery, and pharmacy, a power of the same nature is already granted to proper persons by the Legislature to examine all such as are to be admitted to practise, and take care of the lives of his Majesty’s subjects. And from the great care which has been taken in these examinations numbers of lives have been undoubtedly saved : and the lives of thousands of women and children would as undoubtedly be preserved if a power was granted by law to the Royal College of Physicians to appoint annually one or more of their members, eminent in the profession of midwifery, to examine and license all persons, men as well as women, who for the future shall practise within the present jurisdiction of the College, which extends over all practitioners in and within seven miles of London. It is, indeed, almost impossible to provide in this salutary manner for all parts of the kingdom ; but it may be easily done throughout a very great part of it, by granting

the same power to the College of appointing examiners in every city and every populous town, including always twenty miles or more around it: and this, as I have said, may easily be done; there being scarce any city, or very large town, in which a practitioner in midwifery of some eminence does not now reside.

“By this method, and by obliging all those who shall begin to practise midwifery (after a certain number of years prescribed by Parliament) to serve an apprenticeship, I am fully satisfied that not only innumerable lives in process of time will be saved, but many of the most amiable part of the creation will be relieved from suffering most grievous pains and life-lasting infirmities, which are worse to be borne by some than the pangs of death itself.”

Lastly, we have to notice the proposal of John Blunt, a pseudonym for S. W. Fores, a bookseller in Piccadilly, who published Margaret Stephen's ‘Domestic Midwife’ and wrote ‘Man-midwifery Dissected.’ It was in this latter work that he proposed the following, “Plan for the proper education of midwives and for preventing the practice of ignorant pretenders of both sexes:

“I. Let an obstetric school be instituted as

near the centre of London as possible for the instruction of midwives under forty years of age whose character for sobriety and affability is indisputable; and whose education, constitution and mental talents are promising for the profession, and let none else be received as pupils.

“II. Let these be instructed during three courses of lectures at five guineas each person, which is considerably less than half the usual expense; each midwife shall be obliged to write down the heads of the lectures so as to be able to answer any reasonable question which shall be asked her by the lecturer in the way of an obstetric catechism.

“III. All who are well qualified to answer every practical question at the end of the second course of lectures, shall have a certificate given, that they are able to undertake every case in midwifery which does not require the aid of instruments; those who (after going through three courses of lectures) are not thus qualified shall attend another course or till they be completed in the theoretical part of the art, before they receive a certificate.

“IV. They shall be taught the form, the cavity, the diameters, the axis, &c., of well formed

pelves; and also the diameters, sutures, bones, and fontanels of foetal skulls; which shall be kept at the school for that purpose, together with perfect and distorted pelves.

“ V. They shall be taught the anatomy of the vagina, the urethra and bladder, the uterus, the rectum, and the contents of the full-grown impregnated uterus, on a machine resembling nature as nearly as possible, adapted to a real pelvis and spine.

“ VI. Hereon they shall be taught the use of the catheter.

“ VII. They shall be taught the increase of the gravid uterus, from conception to delivery by Smellie's or Hunter's large plates.

“ VIII. They shall attend poor women, in any part of the town, during their second course of lectures; and two shall attend labours together, viz., one who has delivered shall go with one who has not.

“ (This eighth article will, in a few years, render subscriptions to the other charities for the purpose of delivering women at their own dwellings needless, so that the money heretofore paid to midwives and accoucheurs for that purpose may

be given to the patients by their different benefactors to assist them during the month.)

“IX. They shall be taught the art of turning, &c., on the common machine.

“The lectures shall be compiled from the best modern authors and lecturers; they shall be read, and not delivered from memory; part of them shall be delivered by an experienced surgeon and part by a skilled midwife, as shall hereafter be determined, being dependent on the nature of each lecture, which shall continue about an hour every day, except Sundays, so that each course will continue about five weeks, including some of the diseases of pregnant and lying-in women and children in the month.

“X. The lecturing midwife shall attend those difficult cases which the pupils cannot manage; if it be an instrumental case the lecturing accoucheur shall attend it.

“XI. The gentleman employed to deliver these lectures shall not be a man-midwife by profession lest his own interest should cause him to withhold necessary instructions from the female pupils.

“XII. Every annual subscriber to this institution shall be allowed two tickets for each guinea,

which tickets shall entitle two poor married women to delivery at their own homes.

“ (As the execution of this plan will be attended with very little difficulty, and is calculated to render male-midwifery unnecessary as well as to promote the comfort of many poor women, it is hoped it will not want advocates.) ”

The insinuation in paragraph XI that men-midwives taught midwifery incompletely is also to be found in Mrs Nihell's book. She says, “ The practical part of midwifery in these hospitals ought not to be under the direction of men, whose interest it should be only to form the women so deficiently as that themselves might be the less unnecessary ; to form them, in short, more for their own service than that of the public.”

There surely can be little truth in this accusation, for among the male-midwifery writers of the eighteenth century, the thought most constantly met with next to the ignorance and degraded condition of the midwives, was the desire to instruct and improve them. So anxious were they to do this that complaints were frequently made that they provided instruction too freely

and cheaply. Smellie more especially was twitted with the smallness of his fees, "nine lessons for three guineas," "an universal lecture in midwifery for half a guinea or divided into four for a guinea." And lower still than this, if it be true, as it is stated, that he had a paper lantern over his door, written upon, "*Midwifery taught here for five shillings.*"

It is remarkable, considering the number of proposals for the instruction and government of midwives which were made during this century, that no effective step should have been taken. There were two points upon which all agreed, namely, that efficient instruction ought to be given to midwives, and, when instructed, that they should be examined and receive a legal license to practise. The State it was hoped would see to this, but sufficient pressure to secure the passing of suitable enactments was never exerted. The office of midwife all saw was one of great importance and responsibility, and this responsibility they felt had both a moral and a legal aspect. It was this latter view of which no one seemed able to possess himself with sufficient comprehensiveness and clearness, to enable him to present the thought in a practical form so as to convince the nation

that Parliamentary interference was absolutely necessary.

When the Church undertook the control of medical affairs it gave licences alike to physicians, surgeons, apothecaries, and midwives, but when the faculty took these matters into their own hands midwives were ignored. The licence of the Bishop was to English mothers an excellent safeguard against ignorant and dissipated pretenders. When it ceased to be granted, and neither Church nor State demanded any qualification, women, devoid of skill and character, were permitted to practise unchallenged, and the public had no ready method left of distinguishing between those who were bold and untaught and those who were modest and instructed. In reviewing the progress of obstetrics during the eighteenth century this appears to have been the only retrograde step. In every other direction fresh light fell in floods, and the dismal death-dealing darkness of the earlier ages became dissipated for ever. Midwifery will probably never again in the same space of time make such rapid strides.

CHAPTER X.

NINETEENTH CENTURY.

As we approach our own times more nearly, we find the midwife still continuing to be an object of interest; endeavours to instruct her and to improve her position being periodically made, and the old idea which we have seen so often reiterated, gathering year by year increased energy.

Great credit is due to the Society of Apothecaries for the attempt which they made in 1813 to persuade Parliament to pass enactments for the examination and control of midwives. The clauses relating to this subject are as follows:—

“And be it further enacted that, from and after the day of , it shall not be lawful for any woman (except such as are then actually practising as such) to practise as a midwife for gain or profit, without having undergone an examination, and having obtained a certificate

from the Committee of the District, in which they shall intend to practise, of her ability to practise as a midwife.

“And be it further enacted that every person practising as a female midwife for gain or profit, in any part of England or Wales, shall, from and after the day of , and in every year between the day of , and the day of , take out a license to be granted by the Committee of the District in which such persons shall practise, and for which said license the sum of in London, and the sum of if in any other part of England and Wales, shall be paid to the Treasurer of the Committee granting the same; and if any person shall, after the said day of , practise as a female midwife in any part of England or Wales, for gain or profit, without having obtained such annual license, every person so offending shall for every such offence forfeit and pay the sum of .

“Twenty-four medical districts shall be established, inclusive of the London district, with Committees to superintend the same, each of which shall consist of one Physician and ten Apothecaries, or Surgeon-Apothecaries, seven

being practitioners in midwifery, all actually practising and resident in the district.”*

This latter paragraph was added in the “amended bill,” which also provided that the district committee to examine female midwives should have five of its number practitioners in midwifery. The annual licenses were to be renewed at a trifling fee.

The fate of this scheme is thus briefly recorded in the ‘Transactions of the Associated Apothecaries’ :—“ The Committee of the House of Commons would not allow any mention of female midwives” (p. lx). This ‘Committee’ incurred a grave responsibility in rejecting so important a part of the Apothecaries’ Bill, for although it was doubtless incomplete, inasmuch as it did not insist upon any systematic instruction of the midwives ; still, it was in other respects good and practical, and would have anticipated with beneficial results the measures which must ere long be considered and enacted by Parliament.

During the whole of this nineteenth century the old prejudice against the employment of men-midwives has continued, and in the present day

* ‘Transactions of the Associated Apothecaries and Surgeon-Apothecaries of England and Wales.’ Vol. i. London, 1823.

still exists—a prejudice fostered by ignorance and jealousy, and ever and anon galvanised into spasmodic action by the partisanship of mistaken medical men. In reply to one of these gentlemen, Dr Samuel Merriman wrote an answer as pertinent as it was convincing. He says, “The art of midwifery, as exercised by medical practitioners, has on various occasions excited much opposition. In France it was combated by the pious animadversions of Hecquet and the declamations of Roussel. In England Dr Frank Nicholls attempted to overturn it by sarcastic irony, and the eccentric Philip Thicknesse by malevolent aspersions; they were assisted in their laudable endeavours by Mrs Nihell and Mrs Stephen, two midwives who, though themselves unable to write, could easily procure others to publish in their names against the men-midwives. That these publications, so full of piety, argument, ridicule and slander, produced but little of the intended effect is evident, because the practice of midwifery by men has been ever since progressively increasing. It may, indeed, be contended as these books were very widely dispersed, that the question as to the propriety of employing men is already virtually set at rest; and that the

accoucheurs are only now preferred to the midwives because they have been proved to possess greater skill, greater judgment, greater mildness, greater patience, and greater decorum. If the men were very deficient in any one of these qualifications, it cannot be believed that they would be employed by the generality of females."

If all be true that is stated against the men-midwives, Merriman asks, "How must the column of abortive and still-born children in the bills of mortality be increased beyond the numbers which were known when midwifery was chiefly practised by women?"

In direct contradiction to this assumption he quotes the following statistics:—"From 1657 to 1681 inclusive, a period of twenty-five years, there were 273,763 christenings, and 14,397 abortive and still-born children, so that the children dead-born were to those born alive as 1 to 19. But during the last twenty-five years, from 1791 to 1815, when the practice of midwifery has been more generally conducted by men, the number of christenings is 492,464, and the still-born children 15,084, which is to those born alive as 1 to 30—diminished more than one third."

“ During the first series of twenty-five years above mentioned, there were, as has been stated, 273,763 christenings, and 14,397 still-born children, making together 288,160 cases of parturition. Of these died in child-bed 6686, which is in the proportion of 1 in 43. The 492,464 christenings in the second series of twenty-five years, and the 15,984 dead-born children make a total of 508,448 labours ; and during this period the number of deaths in child-bed amounts to 4684, which is in the proportion of 1 in 108. To what cause this diminution of mortality in child-bed is to be attributed, except to the more careful and judicious management of women in labour and after delivery adopted by accoucheurs, I am at a loss to conceive.”*

The work of instructing midwives has for many years been carried on to some extent in London, Manchester, and other large towns by the medical officers connected with lying-in hospitals. In addition to this women have lately associated themselves for the purpose of mutual instruction in obstetrics assisted by male lecturers. The

* “ On the Art of Midwifery as exercised by Medical Practitioners, in reply to Dr Kinglake.” ‘ Lond. Med. Phys. Jour.,’ March 14, 1816.

most important of these associations is the Obstetrical College in Great Portland Street, the establishment of which, besides having provided the public with excellent midwives capable of attending cases of natural labour, and of recognising difficulties requiring more skilful assistance, has shown that these 'obstetrices' are themselves desirous of obtaining better instruction and a higher position. The course of lectures, however, which the students receive is not sufficiently full to insure such a complete knowledge as would enable them to pass the examination of any recognised licensing board. They are right to aim high, but must not expect to reach eminence without painful climbing.

The writer would gladly welcome to the profession talent from either sex. If a woman feel strongly that it be her mission to become a medical *woman*, and it is found that she can pass the same examinations as those which are required of a medical *man*, let her come on boldly with the rest of us and enter into combat with disease and death. Their number will probably never be very great, for as in the field of battle there are many impediments to women becoming distinguished, so also in the fight against deadly ail-

ments have they many disadvantages. Still, as there have been heroines in the field who have fought valiantly, so have there been and may there be women in the profession capable of working successfully in the cause of suffering humanity. But let them not think that in one or two years they can be experienced midwives, for brain and body, nerve and strength, to an extent not by any means common in either sex, are required; yet in both they do sometimes exist, and the man or woman who, when death is imminent and friends and attendants are paralysed by fear, can calmly do the right thing and save life, has no nobler peer. There is no room for petty feelings here. Let us gladly welcome him or her.

Miss Nightingale, who is anxious that women should receive as good a medical education as men, speaks of the Female Medical Society as follows:—"A Society has already existed for several years, the object of which, according to its programme, is 'to provide educated women with proper facilities for learning the theory and practice of midwifery, and the accessory branches of medical science.'"

The programme states most justly that, for

want of these, for want of 'proper means of study,' of 'any public examination,' 'any person may undertake the duties of a midwife.' Let us look what the 'proper means of study' are which it provides. They are, 1, attendance upon lectures during two winter sessions; 2, attendance 'during the intervening summer' upon clinical practice at 'a' lying-in hospital or maternity charity, with personal attendance upon at least *twenty-five* deliveries."

"It is easy," she continues, "to make a rough calculation how many cases of abnormal parturition occur to how many normal. Is it likely that among 'twenty-five deliveries' there will be abnormal cases enough to practise the pupil judgment, the pupil hand? These ladies have not even the advantages which the idlest student can hardly help availing himself of, and *his* minimum is 'three years.' Yet this is the course proposed to enable a woman to 'practise midwifery,' even in the sense in which we understand a man to 'practise midwifery,'—to enable a woman to become a physician-accoucheuse (for these ladies are expressly styled 'accoucheuses') in the sense in which we understand a man to be a physician-accoucheur. The paper states, doubt-

less with truth, that these ladies 'are the best-taught accoucheurs hitherto accessible to the English public.' May we not hope that in future years the Society will be enabled to give 'accoucheuses' still better taught 'to the English public'?"*

As has been above hinted, it is not at all probable that this philanthropic "hope" will to any great extent be attained. In support of this opinion Dr Edmunds, the Honorary Secretary of the Female Medical Society, may be quoted:—"I am of opinion that a complete medical school for women, if established, would stop for want of students. Numbers of ladies come to me about 'entering the profession,' and when I advise them to set to work to pass the arts examination at the Hall, or the preliminary women's examination at the London University, they disappear, and I hear no more of them."†

This is a very important expression of opinion, coming as it does from Dr Edmunds, for the numbers of students required to support a medical school are, in some cases, as few as eighteen in the provinces and twenty in the metropolis.

* "On Lying-in Institutions," p. 109.

† 'British Medical Journal,' 1871.

Miss Nightingale has not, however, confined herself to criticising existing societies. She has, with the care and practical acumen which characterise all her good works, elaborated a scheme for the instruction of midwives. She would erect in an open, airy site, in the immediate vicinity of the centre of population, a lying-in institution of forty beds in single-bed or four-bed pavilions. The staff to consist of one matron, one head midwife, one assistant midwife, one deputy assistant midwife, thirty pupils and four domestic servants. There would also be a medical officer, non-resident, who would make his morning and evening visit, and be called in by the head midwife when any difficult case occurred. He would also give instruction, scientific and practical, to the pupil midwives, such instruction to extend over two years. The whole plan is worked out to the minutest details with admirable care; and if carried out would very materially assist in rearing a race of midwives competent and creditable to the age in which we live.

In 1869 a committee, appointed by the Council of the Obstetrical Society of London to investigate the causes of infant mortality, was requested to report upon the two following questions :

1st. What proportion of births is attended by medical men and by midwives ?

2nd. Are the midwives instructed ?

In answer to the first question it is stated that "Among the poor population of villages a large proportion, varying from thirty to ninety per cent., is attended by midwives. In the small non-manufacturing towns, on the other hand, attendance by midwives prevails to a much less extent with a very few exceptions. In the large provincial towns, and especially in large manufacturing towns, attendance by midwives among the labouring population occurs in almost as large a proportion as in the agricultural villages. Lastly, in London, in the east it would appear that from thirty to fifty per cent. of the poor are attended by midwives, while in the west the proportion is very slight, two per cent. or even less.

The reply to the second question—"Are the midwives instructed?" is as follows:—"Answers in the negative have been received from all parts of the country. From several districts the replies indicate not merely a want of any special education, but gross ignorance and incompetence, and a complete inability to contend with any difficulty that may occur. In London, on the other hand,

it would appear that there are many women practising midwifery who have received a certain amount of instruction at various institutions, but these, although fairly competent in ordinary cases, are also quite unequal to any of the emergencies of obstetrics."

With these foreboding facts before them the Fellows of the Obstetrical Society determined to grapple with the difficult but necessary task of improving the condition of midwives. They have taken their first step tentatively, believing it to be the best they can at present suggest, but by no means as all or nearly all that is demanded. For the instruction of midwives, the most important subject of all, they have been able to make no provision. A diploma only is offered to those who can show themselves to possess the minimum amount of knowledge which an ordinary midwife should have, and it is hoped that the distinction thus offered will induce midwives to seek the instruction necessary to enable them to obtain it.

The following are the regulations for the examination of midwives :

"The Obstetrical Society of London is prepared to grant a diploma certifying that the

bearer is a skilled midwife, competent to attend natural labours, to any woman who passes the examination instituted by the Society.

“Candidates for admission must submit to the Honorary Secretaries of the Society certificates of the following qualifications at least fourteen days before the date of the examination :

“ (a) A certificate of moral character.

“ (b) A certificate showing that the candidate is not under twenty-one years of age, and not over thirty years of age; but up to the year 1877 candidates above thirty years of age will be admitted to examination under special circumstances satisfactory to the Board of Examiners.

“ (c) Proof of having attended the practice of a lying-in hospital or charity for a period of not less than six months, or of having personally attended not less than twenty-five labours under supervision satisfactory to the Board of Examiners.

“ (d) Proof of having attended a course of theoretical teaching by lectures or tutorial instruction, the details of which must be submitted to, and receive the approval of, the Board of Examiners. The candidates will be required to pass—

“ (1) A written examination. (2) An oral and practical examination upon the following subjects :

“(a) The elementary anatomy of the female pelvis and generative organs.

“(b) The symptoms, mechanism, course and management of natural labour.

“(c) The indications of abnormal labour and the emergencies which may occur in practice.

“(d) A general knowledge of the puerperal state.

“(e) The management of new-born children and infants.

“(f) The conditions as to air, food, chambers, &c., necessary for health.

“(g) The duties of the midwife, with regard to the patient, and with regard to the seeking of medical advice.

“Examinations will be held at the Society’s Library on the second Wednesdays of the months of January, April, July and October, at 8 p.m. The fee for the diploma will be one guinea, and unsuccessful candidates will be required to pay a fee of five shillings.”

The diploma which may thus be obtained, although it confers a distinction, gives no legal title to practise, and is in no way officially registered so as to enable strangers to select from amongst a host of ignorant pretenders a com-

petent midwife. The General Medical Council has, however, as will be seen presently, passed a resolution which, if carried out, will remedy the defects of the Obstetrical Society's scheme by providing for the education and registration of midwives.

And thus closes the history of our English midwives and of their ignorance and incompetence. A sad story of indifference and neglect, of petty jealousies and sordid interests, of murdered innocents, lost mothers and bereaved families. A miserable story, lit up only here and there by the presence of a woman whose individual talent and unusual energy enabled her, in spite of public discouragement, to work bravely and successfully in her divine mission. Let us hope that this woeful tale is now at an end, and that future chroniclers will only have to relate the happier achievements of a more refined and intelligent class.

The "cry" of Peter Chamberlen, uttered two hundred and fifty years ago, "that some order may be settled by the State for the instruction and civil government of midwives," must surely be heard at last, and rouse the nation to action ere this nineteenth century expires.

CHAPTER XI.

PROSPECTIVE.

WE have seen the past ; what is to be the future, of English midwives ? Are they to be, but with few exceptions, ignorant and often dissipated women,

“ Taking snuff, drinking gin and tea,
And the midwife’s half-crown fee ;”

characters always spoken of with a smile, whose weaknesses are winked at because they are so common, and whose departure from the house every inmate feels to be a relief ?

Many schemes, as has already been shown, have been proposed for the instruction and elevation of midwives, but it would seem that they do not possess sufficient buoyancy to enable them to rise to the better position which awaits them. If, then, they have not this power, is it not the duty of their stronger brothers and of the whole nation to assist them ? Is it a matter of no importance

whether a woman who professes midwifery, and upon whose knowledge and skill depends the life or death of two individuals, be a competent practitioner or an ignorant impostor? Has the heart of England no care for the sorrow which blundering midwives may cause, no parsimonious concern for the poverty they may produce?*

What is to be done?

The question is an easy and a difficult one to answer, for, although what is required is sufficiently evident, how best to carry out the requirements forms one of the most difficult problems of the age. To solve it satisfactorily, however, four points must be mainly considered—the *instruction, licensing, registration, and supervision* of midwives.

The instruction of midwives.—In every European country, save Great Britain and part of Belgium, this task is undertaken by the State. Its performance is of such magnitude as to be beyond the reach of private charity, and of such importance as to demand State protection and

* "It is in the experience of not a few medical officers that, through the death of the wives of the poor in child-bed, homes have been broken up, and the orphan children have become for years a charge upon the parish."—*Brit. Med. Journ.*, Feb. 4th, 1871.

care. Taking the population of England and Wales to be 23,000,000, according to the calculation adopted in Germany and France,* there should be 11,500 midwives in this country. Now, it is quite evident that this vast number of women can never be instructed to a very high degree; the question, therefore, meets us at once, What is to be the limit of the professional knowledge which should be required of midwives?

Generally speaking, a midwife's occupation consists more especially in attending to the wants and comfort of her patient, the actual labour being a physiological process to be watched rather than interfered with. It is true, however, that more than this is sometimes required. Sudden emergencies, demanding prompt action, will occur, and it is therefore necessary that she should be able to discover early anything unnatural in a confinement calling for more skill than she possesses. Unusual intelligence cannot be expected in so large a body of women; average mental capacity, however, and a natural aptitude for the occupation should be required. An ordinary midwife can never be a practitioner ranking in education and position with medical men. If she be able to

* One midwife to every 2000 persons.

read, write, and calculate, and be healthy, strong, and moderately intelligent, these qualifications are all that can be expected of a woman who will have to exist on a scanty income in a small village.

Three modes of instruction have been adopted in this and other countries. 1st. By a sort of midwifery missionary system, in which the teacher travels about from place to place, giving oral and practical instruction to the midwives residing in each neighbourhood. 2nd. By oral instruction in a small institution and clinical tuition at the houses of the patients. 3rd. By that method of teaching which is wholly given within the walls of one building, a lying-in hospital and school united. Probably a combination of the last two systems is the best, for a midwife who has no knowledge of domestic midwifery can scarcely be looked upon as completely instructed. A labour conducted in a hospital, with every comfort and appliance at hand, is a very different affair from one taking place, perhaps, on the floor in a corner of a room, with scarcely an article of furniture in it, or, in fact, any of the necessaries of life.

For the instruction of midwives it would first be necessary to erect lying-in hospitals and

schools in London and other large towns. A staff of teachers, medical men and head midwives, would have to be appointed; the amount of instruction and the method of imparting it to the pupils, the length of time they would be required to study, the age at which they should be received, and numerous other questions, would have to be determined. The experience to be gained by examining the working of the excellent midwifery schools in Russia, Germany, and France, will save this country much trouble and expense, and enable us to solve many difficult questions which only time could test.

The licensing of midwives.—England has still to pronounce upon the question whether any needy woman, possessing sufficient hardihood, shall be allowed to practise and profess an art the knowledge of which can only be obtained by long study; or whether it be the duty of the State to interfere and declare that none shall profess midwifery save those who have proved themselves competent to practise it. In the days of our forefathers, when there were no colleges of physicians and surgeons and no society of apothecaries, the bishops looked after the interests of the public and granted licenses to physicians,

surgeons, apothecaries, and midwives. These bodies, with the exception of the last mentioned, have long since taken into their own hands the power of issuing licenses, and have obtained from Parliament charters protecting themselves and the public from quacks and mountebanks. Midwives alone remain unprotected and uncared for; in fact, they are now in a worse position than they were centuries ago, when every woman practising midwifery was obliged to be a "sworn midwife," possessing a license from the bishop of her diocese—a position far beneath that which surgeons once occupied as barbers.

Having passed satisfactory examinations, they should be entitled to licenses which would confer upon them a legal right to practise. Whether these licenses should be granted by a newly constituted body or by one or more of the existing colleges would have to be determined. They might be conferred in a similar manner to that adopted in Moscow, by the London University converting the attestation of the examiners of the Obstetrical Society of London into diplomas. Something more than the certificates at present granted by the physicians of lying-in hospitals is required. The license must be given by some

corporate body holding a high and responsible position, and be such as the General Medical Council could accept and register.

The registration of midwives.—Having obtained her qualification, it should be made compulsory that a midwife should register it. The General Council of Medical Education and Registration would probably undertake to do this. Until it is done the public can have no protection from ignorant and rash women, and no ready method of selecting a competent practitioner. Two resolutions passed in March, 1872, by the General Medical Council show that that body recognise the importance and urgency of this question. It was moved by Dr Acland, seconded by Dr Stokes, and carried—

“That a committee be appointed to consider and report whether the General Medical Council has power to make rules for the special education of women, such as may entitle them to obtain a qualification to be certified by the Council.

“And that the committee do further report for what purpose such qualifications, if any, should be granted; what are the most desirable means for educating, examining, and certifying in respect of them, with especial reference to mid-

wifery, the management of medical institutions, dispensing, and nursing."

Dr Stokes, in seconding this resolution, said, "Midwives were practitioners to a certain extent of a branch of surgery and medicine. The interests of that large number of the poor who came under the care of these female practitioners ought to be cared for. The Council should not be an examining body, but it should register the qualifications derived from other licensing bodies."

It is very gratifying to find sentiments like these promulgated by men of such exalted position and wide experience. It augurs well for the future. Dr Acland, in proposing the motion, stated that "The Medical Act gave the Council the power of providing for the medical necessities of the people." Surely the education and registration of midwives are two of these necessities. The testimony of medical men and the fatal mistakes of midwives have for centuries attested this fact.

The registration of midwives must also ensure their protection from the competition of ignorant pretenders. It must be made illegal for any but a registered midwife to call herself a "midwife,"

or to practise the calling of a midwife for profit or gain ; and the infringement of this law must be enforced by pains and penalties.* This compulsory registration of midwives would have the effect of raising their calling, and of inducing a better class of women to adopt the practice of midwifery as a congenial profession and an honorable mode of obtaining a livelihood.

The supervision of midwives.—It has been found advisable in other countries that midwives should remain under State control and supervision during the time they continue in practice. In Prussia a midwife is not allowed to establish herself in a district without the permission of the authorities, who decide whether one is required, and whether she will have a fair chance of gaining a living. She is relieved from all taxes, and receives a fee at every marriage, birth, and baptism which takes place in her district. If her instruction at the midwifery school have been paid for by any particular county, she is, after obtaining her diploma, obliged to practise in that county for five years. Each midwife is compelled

* In Austria a midwife who practises without a diploma is fined six thalers for the first offence, double that amount for the second, and is imprisoned for the third. A licensed midwife has a right to the title of Frau (Madam).

to keep a diary, in which she must enter a faithful account of every labour she attends. This journal she has to show to the Obstetric Commissioner or Inspector when he visits the district in which she resides. From it he copies the statistics of the cases she has attended, and in doing so finds out whether there have been any undue mortality the cause of which requires investigation. The midwifery statistics of the whole country are thus most accurately obtained, and every birth, whether it be premature, stillborn, or abnormal in any way, is registered. The value to humanity and science which this arrangement ensures can scarcely be over-estimated. The Obstetric Inspector also re-examines each midwife at stated periods to see if she be progressing in knowledge; for her education, like that of a medical man, must not be considered completed when she has obtained her qualification. During this interview she has the opportunity of asking him questions relating to her social position or concerning any difficulties she may have met with in practice. Every midwife is provided with an authorised Manual on midwifery, possessing which she is able to refresh her memory and extend her information.

A large part of this excellent organization might be adopted with great advantage in this country. How many valuable lives would have been saved had our midwives only known that an Inspector was coming by-and-by to investigate, like a coroner, every fatal case occurring in their practice; and that delay in sending for further help, unwarrantable interference, ignorant neglect, and all the other causes of death which may befall a parturient woman through their inefficiency, would most certainly be discovered and punished. As the law stands now, England proves herself to be utterly indifferent to the lives of her poorer daughters. When most helpless they are often left heartlessly to the care, or rather carelessness, of coarse and totally uninstructed women, whose direful work only now and then attracts attention from its very hideousness.

It is to be hoped that the extended interest which is now displaying itself in their general welfare will soon lead to the appointment of a Commission by Government to investigate and report upon the present condition of the midwives of this country, and to gather from the experience of this and other European states the best method of remedying the present deplorably

ignorant condition of this important body of women—a condition which a writer has lately very justly declared to be “a scandal and a disgrace to a country which calls itself Christian and civilised.” Were such a Commission to examine witnesses from that class of medical men who labour most amongst the poor, the answers would provide materials for a “Black book” whose pages would so startle the public with their horrible tales as to ensure the prompt and effective interference of the Legislature. It is humiliating to have to admit the fact that hitherto no national effort has been made to provide skilful assistance for poor women in their hour of peril. The rich can have it always, and with them the sad bungling which happens amongst the lower classes seldom occurs. In an obscure village or town alley the death of a poor woman in her confinement makes little impression, and, whatever may have been the conduct of the midwife, is almost invariably attributed to natural causes. The death of a woman in labour should be such a rare occurrence as to demand, when it happens, the investigation of a Coroner (see p. 95). But now, if a midwife have committed ever so grave a fault, the prosecution of her involves so much

expense and public odium as to deter any but the most heroic from interfering. It is humiliating also to think that this state of matters exists in spite of the constant warnings and the numerous proposals which medical men and eminent midwives, contrary to their own interests were they sordid, have for centuries been making to remedy it. Must we wait until the poor are sufficiently educated and well to do to be able to demand the protection which the apathy of the richer and more intelligent withholds, before anything can be done? It can be nothing but ignorance of the evil caused by uninstructed midwives which enables the many generous and charitable hearts beating amongst us to slumber in peace without one effort or attempt to remove it. The duty of investigating and dealing with it nevertheless remains with those who have wealth, intellect, and power; and with them and upon them must rest the shame of neglecting to use the proper means for attaining an end so just, so necessary, and so humane.

The State will not allow a man who knows nothing of navigation to have the management of a ship at sea, lest the crew should be lost, but a woman who is utterly ignorant of midwifery is

permitted to take charge of another during labour—a period in her voyage through life in which fatal accidents are most liable to occur. Is the preservation of a mother of less consequence than that of a sailor? This is truly a woman's question—a substantial woman's wrong. Let her take it up, then, heart and soul, and use her powerful influence to have it remedied. Empreses and Queens have in other countries been the first to encourage and provide for the instruction of midwives. Now is an appropriate time for English women to follow their good examples when a Queen reigns who extends to every good proposal her gracious patronage and assistance.

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