

LOUISE BOURGEOIS.
AN OLD MIDWIFE'S TALE.

BY
W. H. ALLPORT, M. D.,
Chicago, Ill.

(With illustrations.)

I

SINCE that day when the midwife bound the red cord around the wrist of the first of Tamar's twins and the youngster's brother—still *in utero*—unfairly drew him back and took his first place away from him, the midwife has represented the human side of obstetrics. Whether in natural sympathy, in social and moral interest, as a raconteur or as an historian, in dexterity and kindly common sense and shrewd worldliness, her position is a normal one and, up to the limits of her education, she has filled it in the past with dignity and distinction. Unless we recollect the basic fact that her male competitor has, unfairly, absorbed to himself during the past centuries all else of scientific education and all the position and profit resulting therefrom, it is difficult to understand how he has finally managed so successfully to supplant her also at a ceremony where she is a far more dignified, appropriate, and harmonious figure.

seriously by any woman making claim to respectability. The queen herself referred sneeringly to Guillemeau as "Cet homme de Paris qui accouche les femmes."

Now it so happened that the king, in spite of the sterility of his first wife, Margaret of Valois, had already passed through numerous obstetrical experiences, chiefly at the bedside of la belle Gabrielle. The little Duc de Vendosme, who figures in the subsequent narrative, was the king's child by Gabrielle d'Estrees, and the latter had died in child-bed but the year before (1599), of puerperal convulsions.* The king, therefore, already had ideas of his own about midwives and proceeded to engage la dame Dupuis, sage-femme juree of the city of Paris, for the function. This woman had confined the king's sister, the Duchess de Bar, but was still better known to him from the fact that she was the very midwife who had delivered his three children by Gabrielle.

Lax as were contemporary morals, and especially those of royalty, it may well be imagined that while Dupuis may have been professionally all that was wanted, she could hardly deodorize herself to a point where the fine nose of the Italian queen would fail to detect about the sage-femme at least a suggestion of the subtle perfume of that beloved French mistress who was but just dead. Besides this most cogent reason, probably kept well in the background, the queen's maids of honor took pains to assure her majesty that, by personal experience, they knew Dupuis to be a superannuated old shrew. Naturally, the wife rebelled, at first secretly, then openly, and took council with her own physician, de Laurens, as to a midwife quite as safe and less redolent of the king's most notorious amour. De Laurens was a shrewd courtier and bowed to the inevitable, for in her fresh imperious will the queen was recognized as more than a match for the amorous but jaded Henry. In addition, she had a villainous temper which the king even thus early in their conjugal life had learned to fear. De Laurens arranged a meeting at the Hostel de Gondy, not far from Paris, between the queen and a certain Louise Bourgeois who had successfully confined many of the ladies of the court. It took the queen "but the space of a pater noster" to form a favorable opinion of the new midwife, and she returned to Paris with her royal mind made up.

* One of the physicians (d'Alibou) who enjoyed the doubtful honor of acting as consultant in this case committed suicide shortly thereafter, thus antedating Sir Richard Croft by more than 200 years.

One shake of her head and one stamp of her foot brought the wearer of the helmet of Navarre to a proper sense of his conjugal duty, la dame Dupuis went snarling* into the discard, and the midwife question was settled in that royal family for all subsequent confinements.

Six children were borne to Henry and Marie within nine years; a dauphin, the future Louis XIII; madame Elizabeth, future queen of Spain; Christina of Savoy; the duc d'Anjou;† and Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles II, of England. One child died in early infancy in the year 1611. At the birth of this child, which came into the world feet first, M. Honore, a well-known man-midwife, was held in reserve in an anteroom, but he never passed the door of the queen's chamber, and Louise Bourgeois won the confidence of the court by delivering the child unassisted. This confidence remained unshaken until, more than twenty years later, Louise performed the same office for the wife of another duc d'Orleans, and lost her royal patient from septicemia three days after the birth of a daughter.‡

Without Ambrose Pare—or Ambroise Paracelus—as his contemporaries called him—there would have been no Louise Bourgeois to head the long list of great French midwives. For at his call modern surgery and obstetrics awoke, and with it came not only Guillemeau,§ Honore, Clement, Moriceau, and Deventer, but first of all, in point of time and intimate association with the master, Louise Bourgeois herself. The surgeon is fond of remembering Pare for his work in gunshot wounds, for the new instruments his new art called into existence, and above all because he replaced the terrible *fer ardent* with the ligature. But the obstetrician remembers him because he called back from across the dark ages the ancient practice of podalic version in *cross births* and faulty presentations, and thus saved uncounted mothers and children from the horrible mutilations practised upon them with various extractors up to the end of the seventeenth century.

* Delacoux.

† "Borne looking toward the heavens." This prince became the duc d'Orleans in 1626 at the time of his marriage to Mdle. de Montpensier. He lived till 1660.

‡ See Apologia de Louise Bourgeois.—post.

§ Guillemeau was another pupil of Pare—probably the most distinguished, for he was surgeon to the king. If Pare revived podalic version, Guillemeau amplified and developed its uses. Guillemeau and his colleague Honore devised our present method of bringing down the foot in cases of hemorrhage from placenta prævia. Between these two and Bourgeois existed a bitter and permanent feud, which culminated in the Apologie and the events immediately preceding it



FIG. 2.—Loysa Bourgeois. From Gottfried Welsch.

Louise Bourgeois,* *sage femme juree*, was born in the Faubourg St. Germaine, near Paris, in 1563, about the time much of Pare's work was appearing in print "Les Oeuvres Completes," containing: The Book of Generation; Anatomy; Arquebuss Wounds, etc., appeared in Paris in 1561. The Book on The Plague appeared in 1568, shortly after the great epidemic. She was the daughter of a middle class family and received a better education than most women of that period; this fact will be obvious when we come to study her writings. Near by was the house of the great surgeon, and living under his roof was a certain barber surgeon named Martin Boursier. Boursier lived with Pare for over twenty years and during that time came to know and marry Louise Bourgeois. During the birth of their first child, she became interested in the study of obstetrics and shortly thereafter commenced to practise as an unlicensed midwife among the poor of her neighborhood. She was dexterous and tactful and was instructed by Pare and by her husband, and her education enabled her to assimilate so thoroughly the teachings of Pare that in later years when she became herself a teacher and a writer, she was able to reproduce a good deal of his instruction without giving any too much credit to the source whence it came.† In those days it was necessary in order to

* The second portrait is from Gottfried Welsch *Hebammenbuch*, 1628 and shows the interesting inscription omitted not only from Delacoux's lithograph but also from the cuts accompanying the articles by Goodell and Hunter Robb. It is probable that all of the engravings were brought down along the same channel from the same source, which Goodell says was a portrait by Hacquin. This engraving was by De Bry, as is shown in the following poem taken from Godfried Welsch.

AN DEN LESER

Der Künstler, Mahler Kupffersticher höchste Klag
Ist diese, dass ihr Kunst, und Fleiss Nichts mehr vermag
Dann nur allein des Leibs Gestalt und Angesicht
Zurbilden ab, und fürzustellen, doch gar nicht
Die Tugend, Kunst, Geschicklichkeit, Geist und Verstand,
Dadurch dess Menschen Seel gespeist wird und erkand.
De Bry aber den Mangel seiner Kunst erstatt
Dann er mit seinem Thun ein andere Meinung hat:
Die eusserlich Gestalt zwar für Augen stellt,
Künstlich, durch Bildnus nach dem Leben wie sich hält.
Aber darneben der Person inwendig Gab
Mag man anso ihren Schriften klarlich nehmen ab:
Dann was die stumme Bildnus nicht verrichten kan
Bey dieser Frawen, zeigen dir ihr Bücher an
Denselben dich gebrauch, verständig, und mit Fleiss,
Den lieben Gott in seiner Wunderwerken preiss.

† Observations diverses sur la sterilité, perct de fruitt, fecondité, accouchements, et maladies des femmes et des enfans nouveau neez. Ampliant traittees et heureusement pratiquees par Louyse Bourgeois, dite Boursier, *sage femme de la Royne*, Paris, 1609. This book was translated into several languages. Original editions are rare. The writer has made use of a German version, bearing the date 1628;

become a licensed midwife—a sage-femme juree—to stand an examination before a board of examiners composed of doctors and midwives. In her memoirs she writes entertainingly about her difficulties in securing her certificate from this board; not because she lacked the requisite skill, but because the female members of the board with prophetic vision feared the influence which her husband and Pare would subsequently use to establish her practice. This fear was evidently well grounded, for one of her examiners was madame Dupuis, whom she subsequently deprived of the patronage of the court and royal family.

When madame Bourgeois was thirty-six years old, that is, in 1601, she was called, not only on account of the court influences already referred to, but because of her many personal and professional excellences, to Fontainebleau, to attend Marie de Medici. Behold her then tucked into the boot of the royal carriage journeying with the queen and two court physicians to Fontainebleau for the approaching confinement. How she came to be selected over her competitors for the honor, how the carriage made the three day's journey of forty miles over the rough road of those days, and how a dauphin—the first for eighty years and the future king Louis XIII—was born at Fontainebleau, September 17, 1601, she has told us in her own naive and archaic *Recit veritable de la naissance de messeigneurs et dames les enfans de France, avec la particularitez qui y on este*.*

Let us darken the room, push back the clock 300 years, draw aside the curtain, and hear from the lips of this remarkable woman the "veritable recital" of how a French dauphin was borne in 1601.

II

THE BIRTH OF LOUIS XIII; HOW AND IN WHAT TIME THE QUEEN WAS CONFINED.

The night of the twenty-sixth of September, at midnight, the king sent to call me to come to the queen, who was feeling ill.

bound with the German edition of Gottfried Welsch, Habammenbuch, etc., 1651, found in the Surgeon General's Library at Washington. See also Hunter Robb in *Johns Hopkins Bulletin*, 1893, for an analysis of the scientific value of this book.

* Paris, 1626. The following account is translated from "Nouvelle Collection des Memoirs relatif a l'histoire de France." Michaud et Poujoulat, Paris, 1854, to be found in the Newberry Library, Chicago. Comment et en quel temp la reine accouche de Mons. le dauphin, a present Louis XIII, des ceremonies qui y furent observies, l'orde y tenu, les discours intervenus entre le roy et la royne, et sur plusieurs autres occurrences, par Louise Bourgeois, dite Boursieur, sage femme de la royne.

Also in the same library: Archives curieuses de l'histoire de France Depuis Louis XI jusqua Louis XVIII. Cimber et Danjou. Beauvais, Paris, 1837.

I was sleeping in the queen's dressing-room, where were also the ladies-in-waiting. These ladies often, finding me asleep, had previously played jokes on me by giving false alarms, and in such a manner that I thought this was one of the same, I heard myself called by some one named Pierrot, who did not give me time to fasten my clothes—he hurried me so!

Entering the bed-chamber of the queen, the king asked me—“Is this the midwife? Somebody said to him—“yes”—and he said to me—“Come, come, midwife, my wife is ill—look and see if it is really her confinement—she is in great pain.” Having examined, I assured him that such was the case. At the same moment the king said to the queen—“My dear, do you remember what I have said to you a good many times about the necessity of having the princes of the blood at your accouchement*—I beg of you to permit it—it is for the future greatness of you and your child,”—to which the queen replied that she had always resolved to do whatever would please him. “I know well, my dear, that you wish to do all that I desire, but I know your nature, which is timid and embarrassed, so that I fear if you do not make a great resolution, seeing them may prevent your confinement.† That is why I beg of you not to be shocked, because it is according to the custom which always takes place at the first confinement of queens.” The pains pressed the queen, and at each pain the king embraced her, and asked me if it was time to send for the princes, reiterating that I must warn him in time, as it was an affair of the greatest importance that they should be there. I told him I would not fail to do so when it was time.

About an hour after midnight, the king, overcome with impatience, seeing the queen suffer, and thinking that she would give birth to the child and the princes would not have time to get there, sent to seek for them. They were Messieurs the princes de Conti, de Soissons, and de Montpensier. The king said, waiting for them: “If ever any one has never seen three princes in deep trouble, one will soon see them now. These are three princes very full of pity and good nature, who, seeing my wife in labor, would give most of their possessions to be far away from here. My cousin, the prince de Conti, will not easily understand what any one says, seeing my wife tormented; he will believe it is the midwife who is doing it. My cousin, the king de Soissons, seeing my wife's agony, will have deep solicitude at finding himself com-

* To prevent substitution.

† Evidently meaning that embarrassment might inhibit the pains.

pelled to stay; and as for my cousin de Montpensier, I fear he will fall down in his weakness, for he is not able to see any one suffer." All three came before the two hours, and were there about half an hour. The king, having learned from me that the delivery was not very near, told them to hold themselves in readiness until he called. M. de la Riviere, first physician of the king; M. de Laurens, first of the queen; M. Herouard, also physician of the king, with M. Guillemeau, surgeon of the king, were called to see the queen, and also retired nearby.

In the meanwhile, the great bedroom of Fontainebleau, which is near the king's bedroom, was prepared for the confinement of the queen. In it there was a great bed of crimson red velvet,

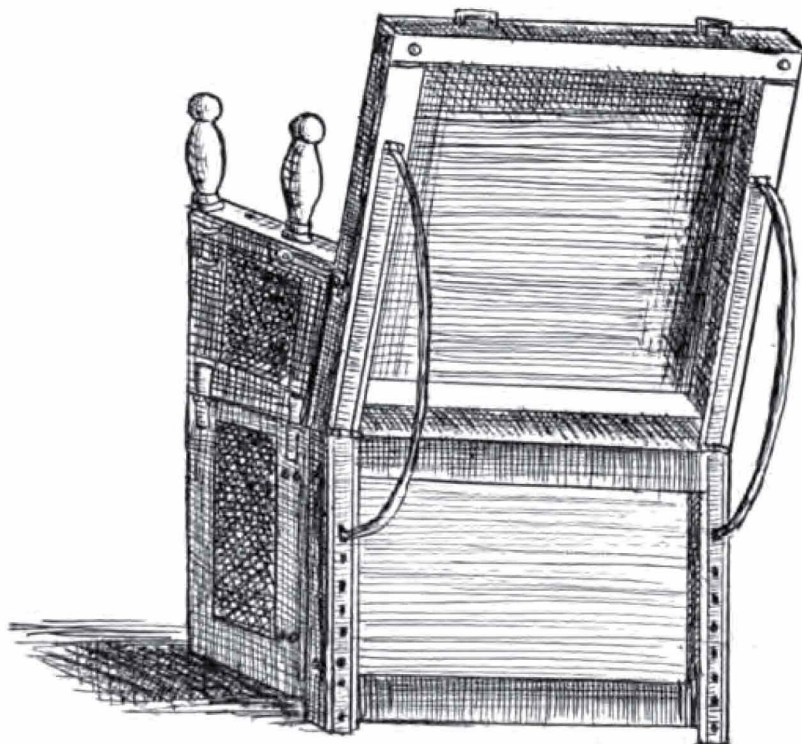


FIG. 3.—Dutch obstetrical chair, 1650. From Cornelius Solingen.

ornamented with gold, near the bed of accouchement. There were also two pavilions, large and small, attached to the floor. The large pavilion was stretched and fastened like a tent by its four corners with cords; it was of beautiful Holland linen, about twenty ells square. In the middle of the large tent there was a little one of the same linen, and under this was put the bed of accouchement. Here the queen was put to bed on coming out of her bedchamber.

The ladies whom the king had desired especially called to the accouchement of the queen were summoned. There was carried under the pavilion a chair, some folding seats, and some stools for the king, madame his sister, and madame de Nemours, to sit in.

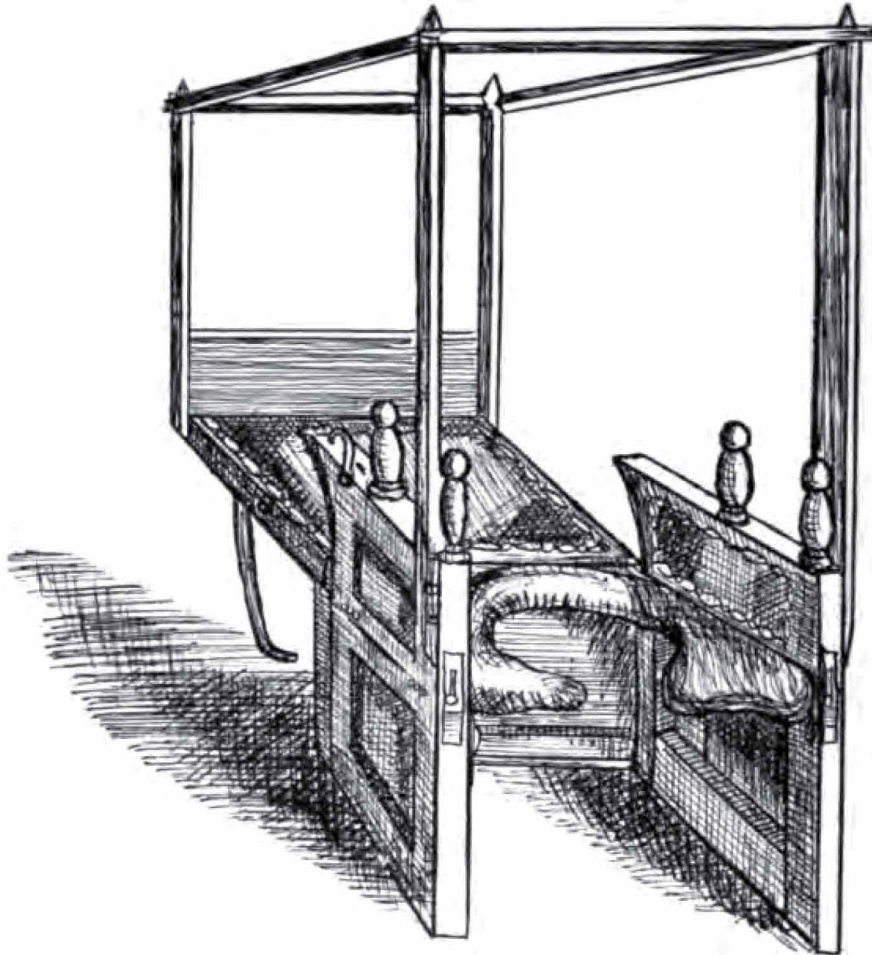


FIG. 4.—Dutch obstetrical chair, 1650. From Cornelius Solingen.

The obstetrical chair* was also brought in; it was covered with crimson velvet. About 4 o'clock in the morning a great colic,

* See prints. Many old-fashioned midwives of Ireland and the continent still favor confinements in the sitting posture. An old Kentucky woman once told the writer that in the early days of that state a chair was constantly used, and that it was often customary to have the seated husband hold the wife in his lap during the entire labor. It may be that this has accounted in the past for the smallness of Kentucky families. Jane Sharp in her *Compleat Midwife* (1680) states that she has heard this custom was also prevalent in Holland, but the following quotation from Cornelius Solingen stamps Jane as perpetrating a slander against the Dutchmen. It should be recollected that toward the end of the seventeenth century brave Admiral Van Tromp with his broom had left no pleasant recollection of the Dutch amongst the dwellers about the mouth of the Thames river. Says Cornelius: "Here in Holland in certain towns we have certain women called *Shootsters* who are used during confinements in place of obstetrical chairs and in whose laps the patients sit during delivery."

mingling itself among the travail of the queen, gave her terrible pain without helping her along. From time to time the king made one of the doctors come to see the queen and speak to me so that I might know what was taking place. The colic made the queen suffer more than the travail, and even kept her from it.

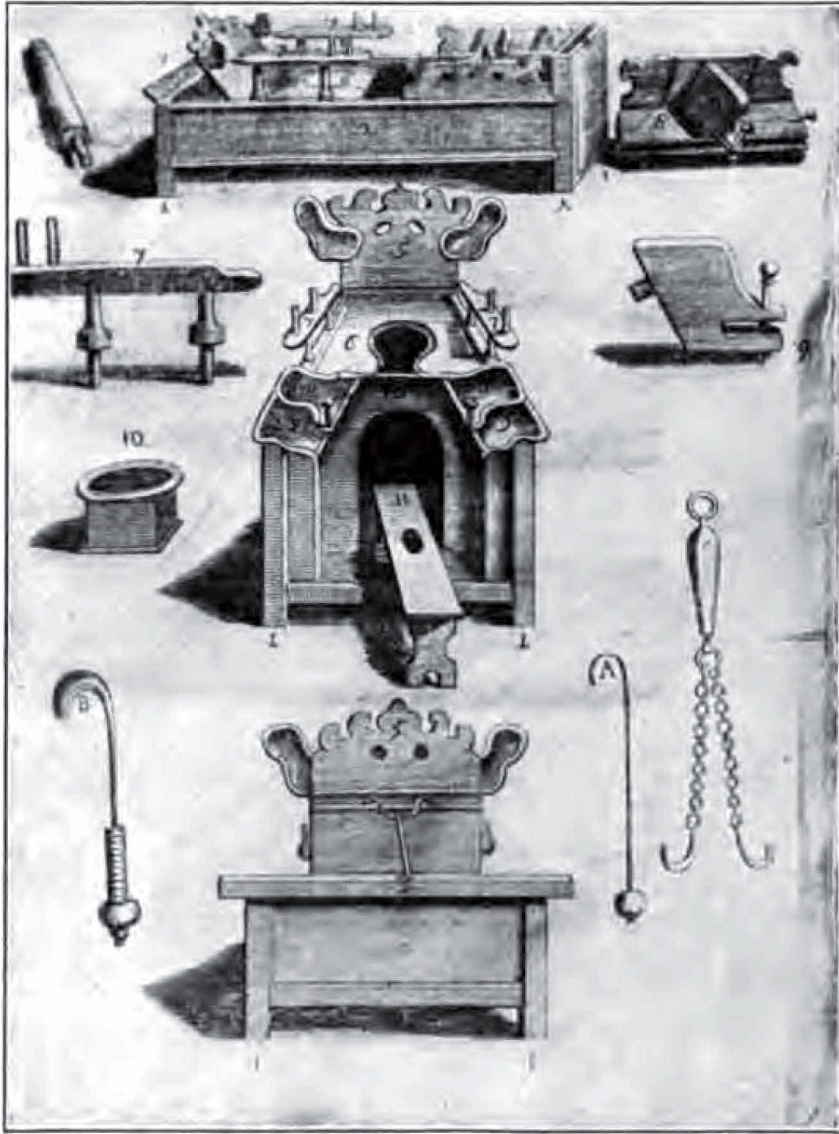


FIG. 5.—Obstetrical chair of 1600. From Justine Sieggemundins' Hof-Weh-Mutter.

The doctors asked me, "If this were a woman and you were alone with the case, what would you do?" I proposed to them some remedies which they ordered at once from the apothecary, who proposed to them others in the Italian style, which he said in

similar cases had done much good. Knowing the great zeal which the apothecary had in the service of her majesty, and knowing that if the remedy did not do all the good he claimed for it, it could not do her any harm, I made no protest, so they gave it to her.

There were also two old and wise Italian maiden ladies with the queen, who had assisted at the birth of many children and had attended many accouchements in their own country. The queen, to show her friendship for them, had wanted them at her confinement to serve her as ladies-maids. The relics of madame



FIG. 6.—Lateral facade of the Chateau of Fontainebleau. From the carp pond. The queen was confined in a room located on the second floor of the pavillion about the center of the picture.

Sainte Marguerite were on the table in the bedroom, and two holy men from Saint-Germain-des-Prez prayed God without ceasing.

The king said he did not wish any one to give any advice excepting the doctors, and that we should agree together, so that I can say I never saw anywhere such tranquillity and peaceful spirit because of the good order which the king brought there, and the assurances which the queen gave him.

To combat the insupportable colic, it was necessary to use a great many remedies. To these the queen made no resistance; for as soon as the king or doctors talked to her, she was content; and took them no matter how disagreeable they were. That is why many women, because of being so obstinate, have been the cause of things going wrong either with themselves or with

their children. The queen's sickness lasted twenty-two and one-fourth hours, and her courage was an admirable thing. She discerned clearly the first pains as well as those last ones when the terrible colic came. During all the time she was in travail the king never left her once, excepting when he went out for something to eat; then he sent constantly for news from her, and madame, his sister, did the same.

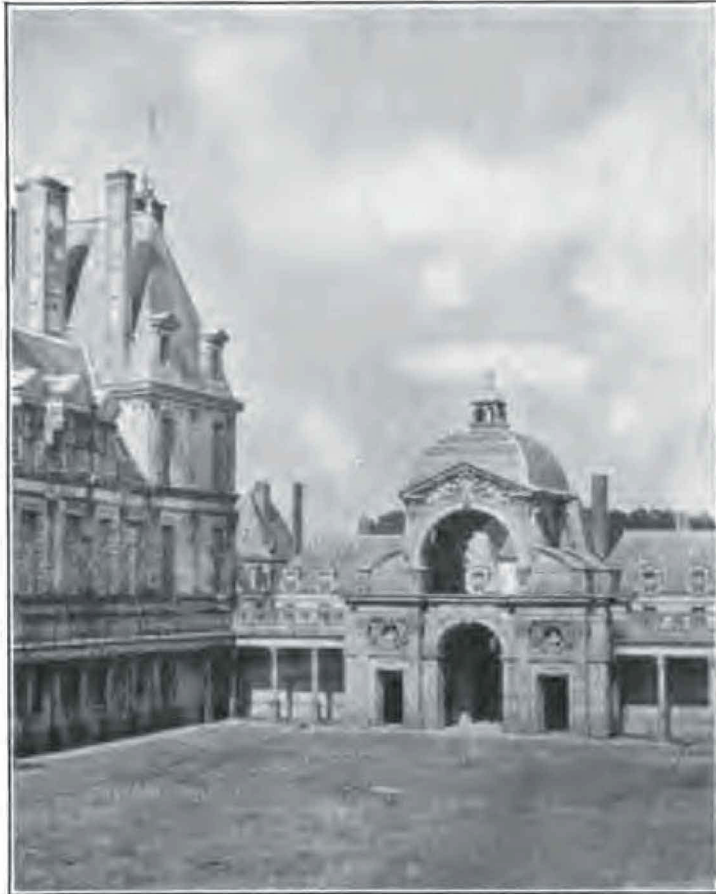


FIG. 7.—Courtyard at Fontainebleau. Seen from a window of Marie de Medici's bed chamber.

The queen, before her confinement, did not wish that the little M. de Vendosme* should come into her room during her illness, because of his youth, but she, on account of the pain, did not take note of his presence. He asked me every little while "if the queen would soon give birth." To quiet him, I said "yes." Then he asked me what the child would be, and I told him it

* The duc de Vendosme was the illegitimate child of the king and Gabrielle d'Estrees.

would be what I wished it to be. "What," said he, "is it not yet made?" I said "yes" that it was a child, but that I could make it a boy or a girl, whichever pleased me. He said, "midwife, since it depends on you, put the pieces of it into a boy." I said, "If I make a boy, Monsieur, what will you give me?" I will give you everything you wish, or rather; everything that I have." I



FIG. 8.—Old fountain Fontainebleau.

said, "I will make it a boy and will not ask anything of you but the honor of your kindness and that you will always wish me well." He promised me that, and kept his promise.

When the remedies had driven away the colic and the queen's real labor commenced, I saw that she restrained her cries. I begged of her not to suppress them, for fear her throat would swell.* The king said to her "My dear, do what your midwife tells you—

* The belief is still current in many parts of Europe that goitre-bronchocele—may be caused by holding the breath during the expulsive pains of labor. "Unter den Wehen das Haupt aber in etwas vor sich gebogen halten sollen, damit durch starke Athems holen in der Arbeit der Hals nicht kropfficht werde." Nothwendig und Nutzlicher Hebammen Unterricht. Meiningen, 1682.

cry, that your throat may not swell." She desired to be confined in her chair, and being seated, the princes who were beneath the large pavilion sat face to face with her. I was on a little seat before the queen. I placed M. le Dauphin in his linen wrappings, so that no one knew, excepting myself, what sex the child was. I wrapped him up well—this I understood was what I had to do. The king came near to me. I looked closely at the face of the child and saw he looked very feeble because of the great pain which he had endured. I asked for some wine from M. de Lozeray, one of the first valets de chambre of the king. He brought a bottle—I asked him for a teaspoon—the king took the bottle, which he held. I said to him, "Sire, if it was any other child I would put the wine in my mouth and give it to him that way, because of his great feebleness." The king put the bottle against my mouth and said "do to it as you would to another." I filled my mouth with the wine and thus gave it to the child. At that instant he was conscious and tasted the wine which I had given him.*

I saw the king sad and changed—he had drawn away from me. He did not know what sex the child was—he had only seen its face. He went to one side of the pavilion and told the two femmes de Chambre to get the bed ready. I nodded at Mdlle. de la Renouilliere to give her the signal,† so that she could go and get the king out of his trouble; she was fixing the big bed. Then I saw Gratiennne; I said to her, "My girl, warm a piece of linen for *him*." Then I saw her go over to the king, who pushed her aside and would not believe what I had just told her. He said that it was a girl—that he knew it by my face. She assured him that it was indeed a boy and that I had told her so. He said to her, "She made a wry face." "Sire, she told you that she would make it," and he said to her "that is true, but it is not possible if it had been a boy she could have made such a face." She replied to him "It is possible, because she did it." Mdlle. de la

* Good old Dr. Goodell must have been nodding when he prepared his translation of this passage; the French is somewhat archaic, but the meaning is plain. The original reads: Le Roy vint apres de Moi; je regarde l'enfant au visage que je vis lu une grande foiblesse, de la peine qu'il avoit enduee; je demande du vin a M. de Lozeray, l'un des premiers valets de la Chambre du Roy. Il apporta une bouteille, je lui demande une cuillere. Le Roy print la bouteille qu'il tenoit. Je luidis: "Sire, si c' estoit un autre enfant, je mettrois du vin dans la bouche et lui en donnerois, depeur que la foiblesse trop dure" Le Roy me mit la bouteille contre la bouche et me dit: "Faites comme a un" un antre. J'emplis ma bouche de vn, et lui en soufflay. A l'heure mesme il revint et savoura le vin que je lulu avois donne.

† Mdlle. de la Renouilliere and Gratiennne were each anxious—for their own reasons—to have the honor of being the first to notify the king of the sex of the child, and each had arranged for her own exclusive code of signals.

Renouilliere came in. She saw the king was angry with Gratienne. She came to me and I gave her the signal. She questioned me in my ear and I whispered back "yes." She took off her cap and went to make reverence to the king. She told him that I had given her the signal and had also told in her ear that it was a boy. The color came back to the king. He came over to me beside the queen and bent down to put his mouth against my ear and asked me, "midwife, is it a boy?" I said, "yes." He said, "I beg of you, do not give me a short joy—that would kill me." I unwrapped the little Monsieur le dauphin and let him see that it was a boy, but so that the queen did not see anything. He raised his eyes to heaven, joining his hands, and gave thanks to God. The tears rolled down his face as big as large peas. He asked me if I had told the queen, and if there was any danger in telling her. I said "no," but I begged his majesty that this should be done with as little emotion as possible. He went over and kissed the queen and said to her, "My dear, you have had great pain, but God has been very good to us in having given us that which we asked of him—we have a fine son." The queen clasped her hands together and lifted them, with her eyes, toward heaven—bursting into tears, and then became very weak.

I asked the king to whom he wished me to give Monsieur le dauphin, and he said "to madame de Montglas, who will be his governess." Mdlle. de la Renouilliere took the dauphin and carried him to madame de Montglas.

The king then went over to impress the princes with the weakness of the queen, then opened the bedroom door and invited in all the people that were out in the antechamber and the grand cabinet. I believe there were 200 persons, so that one could not move through the room to carry the queen to her bed. I was infinitely angry at seeing this. I said there was no reason for everyone coming in here; that the queen was not yet through her confinement. The king heard me and tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Keep still, keep still, midwife—don't be angry—this child belongs to the whole world, and everyone must rejoice over him." It was half past ten o'clock at night, Thursday, the twenty-seventh of September, 1601, day of Saint Cosme and Saint Damien, nine months and fourteen days after the marriage of the queen.*

* The same interesting collection of French historical memoirs from which this account is translated, contains also a description of the last illness and death of Louis XIII.

The valets de la chambre of the king and queen were called. They carried the obstetrical chair near the bed and the queen was then moved. Something was administered to her for her weakness, and having given her the service which was necessary, I took charge of M. le dauphin, whom madame de Montglas gave back to me. M. Herouard commenced then to wait on the child. He bade me wash it entirely in wine and water, and to look it all over before I bandaged it. The king brought up the princes and several noblemen to see it; all those belonging to the household of the king and queen saw the child, and then made places for others. Everyone was so glad they could scarcely express themselves. They all embraced each other without regard to who they were; they were so transported with joy they did not know what they did. I was told that through the entire town all night there were bonfires and the noise of trumpets and drums. Casks of wine were broken open, to be drunk to the health of the king and queen and the dauphin, and the messengers were sent out post-haste to all foreign countries to carry the news, and through all the provinces and towns of France.

As soon as the queen was put to bed the king had his bed made up near to hers, where he laid down to see that all went well with her.

The next day after dinner I found M. de Vendosme alone at the door of the ante chamber, holding aside the curtain of the cabinet through which one passed to go into the room of M. le dauphin. I stopped, very much astonished, and I said to him, "What are you doing there, Monsieur?" He said, "I do not know—scarcely anyone talks to me—no one says anything more to me." "That, Monsieur, is because everyone goes in to see M. le dauphin, who has just arrived. When everyone has greeted him, they will speak to you, as formerly." I told this to the queen, who felt very sorry for him, and said, "Behold, this kills the poor child," and ordered that everyone should caress him, as formerly. "Everyone is taken up with my son, and no one thinks of him, and that seems very strange to this child." The kindness of the queen was always very great.

The twenty-ninth of this same month I went to see M. le dauphin; the page, Biri, opened the door for me. I saw the room full: the king, madame his sister, the princes and the princesses were there, because they were just going to baptize M. le dauphin. I was about to retire, but the king saw me and said, "Come in, come in, you need never stay out." He then

said to madame and the princes: "I have seen many persons, but I never have seen any so resolute, be it man or woman, in war or elsewhere, as is this woman here; she held my son in her lap and looked at the whole world with those eyes as cold as if she held nothing at all—instead of a dauphin, and it has been eighty years since one was born in France!" I replied to this, "I have said to your majesty, Sire, that it was necessary for the health of the queen." "That is true," said the king, "and I did not tell it to my wife until it was all over, so that the joy would not upset her. Never a woman did better than you did; if you had done any different, my wife would have died. Hereafter, I shall always call you *Ma Resolue!*"

The king did me the honor to ask if I wished to be the nurse of M. le dauphin, and that I could have the same wages as the wet nurse. I begged his majesty to allow me to continue my profession, so that I would always be more capable of serving the queen, and so that he would always have near her an honest woman who understood her well. I remained near the queen to serve her in her bed one month, then eight days afterward, awaiting the return of his majesty from Paris, who had asked me to wait for him.

III

It would take too long to quote the entertaining accounts which this old midwife gives us of five other royal accouchements, but even at the risk of being accused of prolixity, we cannot pass by the interesting picture of contemporary life contained in the following incident occurring in 1602, just previous to the birth of madame Elizabeth, the future queen of Spain. The story carries its lesson even to twentieth century readers:

The queen being large with madame her eldest daughter, the royal family went to Fontainebleau for her accouchement. Immediately on their arrival, one could see numberless wet nurses busy soliciting the king and queen and everybody else with any influence. Since their majesties made the selection at Fontainebleau, it was necessary for each candidate to go there whatever it might cost, and the accouchement of the queen being expected soon, she made haste with her selection. In this connection a certain affair gave me a great deal of trouble. Among other candidates a certain man brought his wife for inspection; they had a little daughter, very delicate and pale. The woman appeared honest and came of such good people that some of the

first gentlemen of the court recommended her warmly to the doctors. She lodged with one of my friends who willingly engaged to speak for her, and she begged me also to do what I could. But I saw that her child was extremely thin, so when anyone spoke to me about her I did not respond very readily. Going one day to examine her, as was my custom, I heard this wet nurse spoken of by her husband's name. Then I remembered that this was the name of a young man whom my husband had treated for la verolle,* and who insisted upon leaving before he was cured. I had heard it said that no one could keep him from going away. He told my husband that he was cured, that he felt perfectly well, and that he was going to be married. When my husband remonstrated with him and told him what would happen, he only mocked at him. Two or three years afterward I saw some one from his town, and I asked news of him, knowing he was married. They told me that it was a long time since his return from Paris, but that he had trouble in his household, that his wife had had two or three children who were born diseased. I remembered that my husband had said he was not cured, and that if he married something would surely happen to him. Then I was very much troubled and wished I had never seen the woman. She saw that I changed color, and begged me to tell her the cause of it. I did not wish to do so, but she forced me by her prayers, and I told her that I did not take part in the selection of the wet nurses to do anyone harm and that I felt very sorry for her because she did not know what her disease was. Meanwhile, if she should be hired I would speak, but if she should not be hired I would not speak, but would let her go back to her own country. She was engaged, and they were preparing to dismiss all the others. It was time for me to speak. I sought Monsieur de Laurens, who had gone to a dinner party. When I found that he was not there to say when the other nurses were to be sent away, I begged Mdlle. Sauvage, femme de chambre of the queen, to go and tell her for me what the trouble was, which she did. She replied, "go back to the midwife and tell her she has rendered me a great service to-day; if I had been told this by any person but her I would not have believed it." The queen repeated this to the king, who said in a great rage that the wet nurse had come from a long distance to thus deceive him. He sent for Monsieur de Laurens and the other doctors to get at the truth, and to inquire how I could prove what I had said. I

* "The pox"—syphilis.

told them all, and for proof there was a valet de chambre of Monsieur Beaulieu-Ruze, who, living at the time in our apartments, had assisted in bandaging the man, and another surgeon at Auxerre who was with us at the same time, so my statement was verified. I was very sorry for the disappointment of the woman, but I owed it to my service with their majesties. They then selected another wet nurse.

IV

For twenty-seven years Louise Bourgeois served the court and royal family faithfully, and without mishap which could justly have been laid at her door. For every royal son, she received 500 crowns*; for every daughter 300 crowns, and the queen made her rich presents from time to time out of her own pocket. In addition she received 300 crowns for her two month's service during each confinement. Besides the gold cross and chain worn by other royal midwives, she wore, as a mark of special favor, the dignified and picturesque velvet cap worn by the royal nurses and never before worn by a midwife. De Laurens and Jacques de la Cuisse were her friends, but with Guillemeau and Honore she waged a successful but unceasing warfare of wit and sarcasm, not to mention the other less public weapons employed in those days by competitors for royal favor. These two old enemies, however, at last came in for their innings. In 1627 came her débâcle. She was getting on in years and should have retired, unblemished and gloriously, on the pension of 300 crowns, which she had drawn ever since the birth of Henry IV's last child. But ambition and avarice never grow old, and the retiring age, when not arbitrarily fixed, is apt to recede a year or so annually. In the year 1627 either the stars combined against her, or her hand had parted with its cunning, for she lost a royal princess from something which to our modern eyes looks suspiciously like a virulent puerperal peritonitis. It requires no stretch of historical imagination to guess at what followed. Ten medical gentlemen swooped down on the body of that poor little princess scarcely out of her teens and "posted it" with no more mercy or intelligence or regard for the truth than would have been displayed by a present

* A French crown or ecu was the equivalent of the old English or Scotch crown worth from three to five shillings. The ordinary French crown was worth from three to five francs or livres. There were, however, gold and silver crowns of greater value. Very likely the denomination referred to was the ordinary crown, which would have a purchasing value of about \$1.50 in our present American money.

day Coronor's physician. Here is the protocol; Master Jacques de la Cuisse was present, but refused to sign it, and Brunier and Guillemeau signed it though not present:

PROTOCOL.

Protocol of the dissection of the dead body of her ladyship, the late Duchess. The reader is reminded that the duchess referred



FIG. 9.—Gottfried Welsch. First title page.

to was the Duchesse D'Orleans, wife of the Duc D'Orleans, one of the princes of the blood. She was before marriage Mdlle. de

Montpensier, daughter of the duchess of the same name, and but twenty years of age.

We, the undersigned: Franciscus Vautier, consulting court physician of the late queen; Peter Seguin, court physician of the



FIG. 10.—Gottfried Welsch. Second title page.

queen; Rudolff Maistre, Frantz Tournaire, court physicians of her late highness the Duchess; Abel Brunier, Doctor of Medicine; Carle Guillemeau, Doctor of medicine and surgeon of the king; Johann Menard; Simon Pimpernelle, appointed surgeon of the

dowager queen; Wilhelm Carillon and Frantz Neron, expert surgeons of the late Duke and Duchess, testify,

That we dissected the dead body of her ladyship, the Duchess, by order of her majesty, the king's mother; that we took notice of all inner parts, and found the cavity of the stomach and entire



FIG. 11.—Title page. Second part of Gottfried Welsch. Note that this is a second German edition of Loysa Bourgeois.

contents of the abdomen filled with putrid matter. The intestines were inflated with gas, the stomach small and bloated, the liver shrunk and dry, the small bladder which contains the gall very much enlarged, the spleen larger than it should be, the kidneys small but in good condition, the bladder very small. The

matrix* was, so to say, floating in a pus-like substance, which filled the lowest part of the abdomen from the umbilicus to the symphysis pubes. The matrix was infected by cancer from the outside into the wall, especially on the left side and at the place where it touches the rectum. Within the matrix on the right



FIG. 12.—Title page. Third part Gottfried Welsch.

inner side and at the bottom or wider part, a small piece of the placenta was found, attached so firmly that we could hardly take it off or separate it with our fingers. The lungs were strong and in good condition and not adherent to the sides. The heart was very small. No water was found in the inner heart or cardial cavity, and the brain was without any defect.

* Uterus.

That this is the exact truth, we testify with our own names and signatures.

Given at Paris, on the fifth day of June, 1627.

| | | |
|----------|------------|-------------|
| (Signed) | Vautier | Seguin |
| | Le Maistre | Tournaire |
| | Brunier | Guillemeau |
| | Menard | Pimpernelle |
| | Carillon | Neron |



FIG. 13.—Title page of the Apologia in its German form. From Gottfried Welsch.

Yet one could hardly expect an old fighter like Louise Bourgeois to strike her colors, or to silently accept such a verdict, even though signed by the most distinguished French medical men of her day. And after reading her Apologia we must admit

that even if we cannot clear our minds of the suspicion that the Duchess's infection might have been introduced per vaginam by the midwife's fingers, instead of through a pair of old ruptured pus tubes which the learned faculty called cancer, she has at least cleverly established a *tu quoque* in her charge that her accusers failed not only to describe accurately what they saw but even to know at all what they were talking about. Her pen was dipped in gall, probably also in truth, when she wrote the following vindication, and none of the physicians dared to answer her over their own signatures. But her day was done; she was a dead hen in the pit; the protocol killed her; she confined no more duchesses and spent the rest of her years writing recollections which added nothing to her reputation and might better have been left unreclected.*

APOLOGIA;†

Or justification of madame Loysa Bourgeois, Royal sage-femme, contradicting the report of the Doctors of Medicine.

I, the undersigned, having read the printed protocol of the dissection of the dead body of her late Highness, etc. which the doctors and surgeons who operated upon her ladyship, the Duchess, during her recovery from confinement, have written and published, by which they tried to justify themselves and put the cause of her death entirely upon my shoulders; find it necessary for the saving of my honor to reveal the entire cause, truthfully and thoroughly, of what happened after and during her illness; by which statement it will appear as clear as daylight that the cause of her death did not proceed from the small remains of placenta, as has been wrongfully stated in the protocol.

I wish to state that her Highness, the Duchess was, during the entire period of her pregnancy, in poor health. She was troubled at times with fever, flushes, and nose bleed, and during the last month with coughing, for which reason she had been bled three times. Shortly after her confinement she had fever which did not seem to subside. As far as the birth was concerned everything went well, thank God, not alone in regard to the child,

* Recueil de Louise Bourgeois. Paris, 1635.

† The Apologia and postmortem protocol are translated from Gottfried Welsch Hebammenbuch and bear the date Franckfurt, 1629. The French original appeared in 1627. The protocol here reproduced is verbatim, but the present writer has thought best, for the sake of space, to eliminate from the Apologia several pages of seventeenth century vituperation.

which was born in the normal way, but also as concerning the afterbirth, which was entirely natural and as it should be. She was later examined by Master Jacob de la Cuisse, an experienced surgeon who had a large practice in such cases. This examination occurred in the presence of the doctors, Vautier, Seguin, Le Maistre, Tournaire, Brunier, and Guillemeau, who all recognized that the above-mentioned afterbirth was normal and in proper condition; as to this I will pledge my life.

Concerning the small piece which the doctors claimed to have been from the placenta, and which grew so close to the matrix that it could hardly be scraped off with the finger, this was not in any way a part of the above-mentioned afterbirth, but the place to which the morsel of flesh commonly called the placenta is normally fastened, which place is more protuberant than the other inner parts in the body of the uterus until the puerperal woman has entirely recovered. This protuberance, or elevation, is really a part of the uterus, and is often taken out of ignorance—I will not say malice—for a part of the afterbirth. This mass could not be removed except with the use of a scalpel. It is well known that the uterus of a pregnant woman is for more than a whole month after her recovery from childbirth made up of many membranes, lying one above the other, like the layers of of an onion. This lasts for more than a month before delivery and for about a week after until gradually the matrix shrinks. Therefore, it is proved that they have torn away this protuberant part of the inner membrane of the uterus, to which the afterbirth had been attached. Whosoever thought out this falsehood and tore this fleshy membrane off the uterus and declared it a piece of afterbirth has a poor knowledge of the art of which I am speaking. You show sufficiently, with your elaborate report, that you have no knowledge whatever of the nature of the placenta, nor of the matrix in women, either before her delivery and puerperal state, or after. You are as ignorant in these things as your Master Galeno, who, though he never had a wife and was hardly ever with pregnant or child-bearing women, yet took the liberty to dictate to midwives how to discharge their duties, and even wrote a book on this subject in which, however, he betrays that he never knew anything about the uterus of a pregnant woman or about the afterbirth. My opponents shall take upon themselves the disgrace and reproach, for having declared this normal uterus to be affected by cancer. The cause of the Duchess's death was an inflammation of all parts of

the abdomen, where, according to their own verdict, pus had collected, against which the uterus could not battle. This infection in such quantity could result from nothing else but from inflamed tissues and bowels, which finally developed cancer and caused the watery substance of the blood to retreat to the cavity of the abdomen, gradually changing into pus. Doctor Riolanus, in presence of the king, of the dowager queen, and of the Lord Cardinal,* announced the cause of her death (which could not be prevented) as nothing else but cancer in the lower parts of the abdomen. This part was swollen, as firm as a drum, and as if she had not been delivered of her child. Other doctors who were present agreed with him. Remember, also, that the Duchess suffered after her delivery until the hour of her death from continuous diarrhea, expelling often a greenish and blackish matter, denoting great fever and putrefaction in the bowels. This matter passing through the rectum caused the change in the adjacent matrix which you observed. Nor should you have omitted from your protocol the following important facts, had you spoken the truth faithfully: You should have told how much her abdomen was swollen as well before as after her death, which would have been proof enough that the cancer was of the bowels. This necessarily causes an inflammation lasting longer than twenty-four hours. Neither should you have failed to describe the various parts and state their color, as important changes take place in these cases, and certain symptoms may be taken as the forerunner of death. In plain language, you simply will not admit that it was inflammation and cancer of the intestines. Nor have you spoken clearly even of the uterus, the size of which you certainly should have described. All you noticed is that her lungs were sound, not adherent to her sides, that her brain was normal and without any defect.

I am convinced that if honest, expert professionals in this matter had been chosen as judges, they would never have approved of your invention concerning the placenta, which subject you had canvassed already before the postmortem, with the intention of accusing me of her death. These men would not have allowed you to name in your report those persons who were not even present; for instance, Ms. Brunier and Guillemeau, nor was there any mention of the surgeon, Master de la

* Richelieu: The Cardinal himself was in scarcely less trouble over this Madame Bourgeois; he was accused of having, for reasons of state, poisoned both the Dutchess and her offspring. The infant lived to write her own memoirs.

Cuisse, who assisted me during the confinement of her Highness. He was present during the dissection and declared that the injured part was not the placenta but was the result of using the nails and scalpel on a part of the fleshy membrane which nature had left inside the uterus—all of which should be sufficient to prove your report mistaken and untrue.

I have practised my profession now for fully thirty-four years, faithfully, diligently, and honorably, and acquired not only a good certificate, after various examinations, but have also written books treating on this subject, which have been printed and published in several editions and were translated into foreign languages, for which trouble many noted physicians have rendered me thanks and have gladly confessed that they were of great use to humanity. If I had knowingly left a piece of the placenta inside the matrix, I should have mentioned it in time, in order to have asked advice and help. And should I not have known it easily enough by simply examining the placenta? Such a mistake would have been evident within twenty-four hours, by symptoms which never fail to develop in that time. As none of the conditions referable to retained placenta appeared and the lochia showed neither bad color nor odor, you men of science who are such experts in the diseases of the child-bearing woman, should have warned us to prepare for other dangers.

Besides, let me tell you, that if a small piece of the placenta should have remained inside (which, however, did not happen) it would have decayed and detached itself and passed normally with the lochia, which flowed incessantly until the day of her death. We have this experience daily in our practice. On the fourth day after the birth small and tender fibers were passed normally, as fine as a spider's web, which the specialists call amnion and chorion. You will probably contradict this. However, I wish to reply that Hippocrates, whose experience in female troubles and diseases is very famous, declared that the wife of a tanner who had been confined normally had passed on the fourth day a piece of membrane, without any accident or dangerous consequences. This great and excellent man wished to give posterity to understand that this is as a rule neither harmful, not of great consequence or danger.

No one could claim after reading the treatises of noted scribes that a small piece of placenta which was dried up and attached to the uterus without putrefaction ever caused death. I read myself in Paulo Aegineta's work on surgery, that no doctor need

be surprised to find pieces of the placenta discharged even on the fourth or fifth day after confinement of some women. I am also informed that a famous surgeon and anatomist, called ab Aquapendente, was of the same opinion and asserts that he had seen many women who evacuated the putrid placenta in pieces, yet did not die of it.

So you see, you gentlemen of the Faculty, that you made a great blunder in attributing the cause of death to this invented story of the placenta. Why did you not rather ascribe it to the lasting attack of fever, which affected the patient before as well as after the birth, or to the cough which tormented her before and after confinement, or to diarrhea, which appeared too soon after? Every one of these three diseases are dangerous for a puerperal woman, and you should have considered them with more judgment and insight.

If you wish to learn something about the secret troubles and diseases of women, you should associate often with midwives and assist them in the treatment of child-bearing women, not only once or twice, but often, like your great Master and Law-giver, Hippocrates, who had no aversion to meeting and consulting with midwives or to asking for their help.

These things I have found it necessary to explain to you, for the sake of my honor, and in my defense, against the calumnies which were spread against my good name and reputation. I will gladly submit to the verdict of medical experts in Paris and elsewhere (besides those others who take a great interest in this matter) as well as to that of those persons whom her majesty will be pleased to choose for my justification.

Given in Paris, June 8, A. D. 1627.

LOYSA BOURGEOIS.
dite Boursier.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Biographie Universelle, Ancienne et moderne. Michaud. Paris, 1812.

Archives Curieuses de l'histoire de France depuis Louis XI. jusqu'a Louis XVIII. Cimber et Danjou. Paris, 1837.

Nouvelle Collection des Memoirs relatif a l'histoire de France; Michaud et Poujoulat. Paris, 1854.

Delacoux. Biographies des Sages-femmes Celebres. Paris, 1834.

Observations diverses sur la sterilité, perct de fruitt, fecondite, accouchements, et maladies des femmes et des enfants nouveau

neez; ampliant traittees et heureusement pratiquees par Louise Bourgeois, dite Boursier, sage femme de la Royne. Paris, 1609.

Recit veritable de la naissance de messeigneurs et dames, les enfans de France, avec les particularitez qui y ont este. Paris, 1626.

Apologie de Louyse Bourgeois, 1627.

Recueil des secrets de Louyse Bourgeois, Paris, 1635

Louise Bourgeois, by Wm. Goodell, Phila. Med. Soc., Philadelphia, 1876.

Louise Bourgeois, by Hunter Robb, *Johns Hopkins Hospital Bulletin*, 1893.