

Midwifery.

It has been shown that the employment of women in the arts of medicine, nursing and teaching was chiefly, though not entirely, confined to the domestic sphere; midwifery, on the other hand, though occasionally practised by amateurs, was, in the majority of cases, carried on by women who, whether skilled or unskilled, regarded it as the chief business of their lives, and depended upon it for their maintenance. Not only did midwifery exist on a professional basis from immemorial days, but it was formerly regarded as a mystery inviolably reserved for women; and though by the seventeenth century the barrier which excluded men had broken down, the extent to which the profession had in the past been a woman's monopoly is shown by the fact that the men who now began to practise the art were known as men-midwives.

The midwife held a recognised position in Society and was sometimes well-educated and well-paid. Nothing is known as to the mediæval history of midwifery in England; and possibly nothing ever will be

⁴ *Somerset Q. S. Records*, Vol. III., p. 212. 1653.

known concerning it, for the Englishwoman of that period had no impulse to commit her experience and ideas to writing. All the wisdom which touched her special sphere in life was transmitted orally from mother to daughter, and thus at any change, like the Industrial Revolution, which silently undermined the foundations of society, the traditional womanly wisdom could vanish, leaving no trace behind it. Even in the Elizabethan period and during the seventeenth century, when most women could read and many could write, they show little tendency to record information concerning their own affairs. But the profession of midwifery was then no longer reserved exclusively for women. The first treatise on the subject published in England was a translation by Raynold of "The Byrth of Mankynd." He says in his preface that the book had already been translated into "Dutche Frenche, Spanyshe and dyvers other languages. In the which Countries there be fewe women that can reade, but they wyll haue one of these bookes alwayes in readinesse . . . it beinge lykewyse sette foorth in our Englyshe speeche . . . it may supply the roome and place of a good Mydwyfe, . . . and truly . . . there be syth the fyrst settinge forth of this booke, right many honourable Ladyes, & other Worshypfull Gentlewomen, which have not disdayned the oftener by the occasion of this booke to frequent and haunt women in theyr labours, caryinge with them this booke in theyr handes, and causyng such part of it as doth chiefly concerne the same pourpose, to be read before the mydwyfe, and the rest of the women then beyng present; whereby ofttymes, then all haue been put in remembraunce of that, wherewith the laboring woman hath bene greatly comforted, and alleuiated of her thronges and travayle . . . But here now let not the good Mydwyves be offended with that, that is spoken of the badde. For verily there is no

science, but that it hath his Apes, Owles, Beares and Asses at the fyrst commyng abroade of this present booke, many of this sorte of mydwyves, meuyd eyther of envie, or els of mallice, or both, diligented to fynde the meanes to suppress the same; makyng all wemen of theyr acquayntaunce to beleue, that it was nothyng woorth: and that it shoulde be a slaunder to women, forso muche as therein was descried and set foorth the secretes and priuities of women, and that euery boy and knaue hadd of these bookes, readyng them as openly as the tales of Robinhood &c.”¹

It is sometimes supposed that childbirth was an easier process in former generations than it has become since the developments of modern civilisation. The question has a direct bearing on the profession of midwifery, but it cannot be answered here, nor could it receive a simple answer of yes or no, for it embraces two problems for the midwife, the ease and safety of a normal delivery and her resources in face of the abnormal.

No one can read the domestic records of the seventeenth century without realising that the dangers of childbed were much greater then than now; nevertheless the travail of the average woman at that time may have been easier. There was clearly a great difference in this respect between the country woman, inured to hard muscular labour, and the high born lady or city dame. The difference is pointed out by contemporary writers. McMath dedicated “the *Expert Midwife*” to the Lady Marquies of Douglas because “as it concerns all Bearing Women so chiefly the more Noble and Honourable, as being more Excellent, more Tender, and Delicate, and readily more opprest with the symptoms.” Jane Sharp confirms this, saying that “the poor Country people,

¹ Raynold, *The Byrth of Mankynd*, Prologue.

where there are none but women to assist (unless it be those that are exceeding poor and in a starving condition, and then they have more need of meat than Midwives) . . . are as fruitful and as safe and well delivered, if not much more fruitful, and better commonly in Childbed than the greatest Ladies of the Land."¹

Rich and poor alike depended upon the midwife to bring them safely through the perils of childbirth, and it is certain that women of a high level of intelligence and possessing considerable skill belonged to the profession. The fees charged by successful midwives were very high, and during the first half of the century they were considered in no way inferior to doctors in skill. It was natural that Queen Henrietta Maria should send for one of her own country women to attend her, French midwives enjoying an extraordinarily high reputation for their skill at this time. The payment in 1630 of £100 to Frances Monnhadice, Nurse to the Queen, "for the diet & entertainment of Madame Peron, midwife to the Queen," and further of a "Warrant to pay Madame Peron £300 of the King's gift"² shows the high value attached to her services.

That English midwives were often possessed of ample means is shown by a deposition made by "Abraham Perrot, of Barking parish, Gentleman," who "maketh oath that a month before the fire . . . he . . . paid unto Hester Shaw Widow, . . . the summe of £953. 6. 8."³ the said Mrs. Shaw being described as a midwife; but relations who were members of this profession are never alluded to in letters, diaries or memoirs. From this absence of any social reference it is difficult

¹ Sharp (Jane), *The Midwives Book*, p. 3.

² S. P. D. 1630. Sign Manual Car. I., Vol. VII. No. 11.

³ *Mrs. Shaw's Innocency Restored*. 1653.

to determine from what class of the community they were drawn, or what were the circumstances which led women to take up this responsible and arduous profession. No doubt necessity led many ignorant women to drift into the work when they were too old to receive new ideas and too wanting in ambition to make any serious effort to improve their skill, but the writings of Mrs. Cellier and Mrs. Jane Sharp prove that there were others who regarded their profession with enthusiasm, and who possessed an intelligence acute enough to profit by all the experience and instruction which was within their reach.

The only training available for women who wished to acquire a sound knowledge of midwifery was by apprenticeship; this, if the mistress was skilled in her art, was valuable up to a certain point, but as no organisation existed among midwives it was not possible to insist upon any general standard of efficiency, and many midwives were ignorant of the most elementary circumstances connected with their profession. In any case such an apprenticeship could not supply the place of the more speculative side of training, which can only be given in connection with schools of anatomy where research work is possible, and from these all women were excluded.

As has been said, many women who entered the profession did not even go through a form of apprenticeship, but acquired their experience solely, to use Raynold's words, "by haunting women in their labours." In rural England it was customary when travail began, to send for all the neighbours who were responsible women, partly with the object of securing enough witnesses to the child's birth, partly because it was important to spread the understanding of midwifery as widely as possible, because any woman might be called upon to render assistance in an emergency.

Several handbooks on Midwifery were written in response to the demand for opportunities for scientific training by the more intelligent members of the profession. One of the most popular of these books, which passed through many editions, was published in 1671 by Jane Sharp "Practitioner in the art of Midwifery above 30 years." The preface to the fourth edition says that "the constant and unwearied Industry of this ingenious and well-skill'd midwife, Mrs. Jane Sharp, together with her great Experience of Anatomy & Physick, by the many years of her Practice in the art of Midwifery hath . . . made them . . . much desired by all that either knew her Person . . . or ever read this book, which of late, by its Scarceness hath been so much enquired after . . . as to have many after impressions." The author says that she has "often sate down sad in the 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) meerly for Lucres sake. I have been at Great Cost in Translations for all Books, either French; Dutch or Italian of this kind. All which I offer with my own Experience."¹

Jane Sharp points out that midwives must be both speculative and practical, for "she that wants the knowledge of Speculation; is like one that is blind or wants her sight: she that wants the Practice, is like one that is lame & wants her legs, . . . 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 Apprenticeship for that end and purpose, where anatomy Lectures being frequently read the

¹ Sharp, Mrs. Jane, *The Midwives Book, or the whole Art of Midwifery discovered.*

situation of the parts both of men and women . . . are often made plain to them. But that objection is easily answered, by the former example of the Midwives amongst 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 not being so much as one word concerning men midwives mentioned there . . . it being the natural propriety of women to be much seeing into that art; and though nature be not alone sufficient to the perfection of it, yet further knowledge may be gain'd by a long and diligent practice, and be communicated to others of our own sex. I cannot deny the honour due to able Physicians and Chyrurgions, when occasion is, Yet . . . where there is no Men of Learning, the women are sufficient to perform this duty . . . 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 oftimes 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."¹

Though the schools of Medicine and Anatomy were closed to women, individual doctors were willing to teach the more progressive midwives some of the science necessary for their art; thus Culpeper dedicated his "Directory" to the midwives of England in the following words:—"Worthy Matrons, You are of

¹ Sharp, Mrs. Jane, *The Midwives Book*, pp. 2-4.

the number of those whom my soul loveth, and of whom I make daily mention in my Prayers : If you please to make experience of my Rules, they are very plain, and easie enough; 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 : All the Perfections that can be in a Woman, ought to be in a Midwife; the first step to which is, To know your ignorance in that part of Physick which is the Basis of your Act If *any want Wisdom, let him ask it of God* (not of the *Colledg of Physitians*, for if they do, they may hap to go without their Errand, unless they bring Money with them)."¹

Efforts made by Peter Chamberlain to secure some systematic training for midwives drew upon himself the abuse, if not persecution, of his jealous contemporaries. In justifying the course he had taken he pleads "Because I am pretended to be Ignorant or Covetous, or both, therefore some ignorant Women, whom either extream Povertie hath necessitated, or Hard-heartedness presumed, or the Game of Venus intruded into the calling of Midwifry (to have the issues of Life & 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? The objection infers thus much. Because there was never any Order for instructing and governing of Midwives, therefore there never must be 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

¹ Culpeper, Nich., Gent., Student in Physick and Astrologic, *Directory for Midwives*.

taking this Oath and paying their Money with the testimonie of two or three Gossips, any may have leave to be as ignorant, if not as cruel as themselves, . . . but of Instruction or Order amongst the Midwives, not one word."¹

The danger which threatened midwives by the exclusion of women from the scientific training available for men, did not pass unnoticed by the leading members of the Profession. They realised that the question at stake did not concern only the honour of their Profession, but involved the suffering, and in many cases even the death, of vast numbers of women and babies who must always depend on the skill of midwives and urged that steps should be taken to raise the standard of their efficiency. Mrs. Cellier² pointed out

¹ Chamberlain (Peter), *A Voice in Babes, or the Cries of Women and Children*. 1646.

² Cellier (Mrs.). *A scheme for the foundation of a Royal Hospital, Harleian Miscellany, Vol. IV. pp. 142-147.*

The scheme was well thought out, and some details from it may be given here as showing the aspirations of an able woman for the development of her profession. Mrs. Cellier proposed that the number of midwives admitted to the first rank should be limited to 1000, and that these should pay a fee of £5 on admittance and the like sum annually. All the midwives entering this first rank should be eligible for the position of Matron, or assistant to the Government.

Other midwives may be admitted to the second thousand on payment of half the above fees.

The money raised by these fees is to be used for the purpose of erecting "one good, large and convenient House, or Hospital," . . . for the Receiving and Taking in of exposed Children, to be subject to the Care, Conduct and Management of one Governess, one female Secretary, and twelve Matron Assistants, subject to the visitation of such Persons, as to your Majesty's Wisdom shall be thought necessary . . . the children to be afterwards educated in proper Learning, Arts and Mysteries according to their several capacities. As a further endowment for this institution, Mrs. Cellier asks for one fifth part of the voluntary charity collected in the Parishes comprised within the Limits of the weekly Bills of Mortality, and that in addition collecting Boxes may be placed in every Church, Chapel, or publick Place of Divine Service of any Religion whatsoever within their limits. The scheme further provides "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 the 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 in the proper Parish." . . .

"That, within the Space of twenty years last past, above six thousand women have died in child-bed, more than thirteen thousand children have been born abortive, and above five thousand chrysome infants have been buried, within the weekly bills of mortality; above two-thirds of which, amounting to sixteen thousand souls, have in all probability perished, for want of due skill and care, in those women who practise the art of midwifery To remedy which, it is humbly proposed, that your Majesty will be graciously pleased 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."

Then follow proposals for the care of the children, requiring that they may be privileged to take to themselves Surnames and to be made capable, by such names, of any honour or employment, without being liable to reproach, for their innocent misfortune, and that the children so educated may be free members of every city and corporation.

After the first settlement, no married woman shall "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 grow to maturity; if any of these Persons do marry afterwards, then to clear their accounts and depart the house, by being expelled the society."

Among many interesting rules for governing the Hospital, Mrs. Cellier appoints "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 practise, which all licensed midwives are, from time to time, to report to the society; that the female secretary be reckoned an assistant to the government, next to the governess and capable of succeeding in her stead."

"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 to be obliged to be present at it, if not employed in their practise." The lectures to be kept for future reference by the midwives.

"That no men shall be present at such public lectures, on any pretence whatsoever, except such able doctors and surgeons, as shall enter themselves students in the said art, and pay, for such their admittance, ten pounds, and ten pounds a year." The physicians and surgeons to admitted were to be "of Council with the principle man-midwife and be capable of succeeding him, by election of the governess, her secretary, twelve assistants, and the twenty-four lower assistants,"

Mrs. Cellier succeeded with her proposal, in so far that His Majesty agreed to unite the midwives into a Corporation by Royal Charter, but there the matter rested."¹

In France women were more fortunate, for a noted school of midwifery had already been established at the Hotel Dieu in Paris, at which every six weeks dissections and anatomies were especially made for the apprentices of the institution, both past and present.² Before entering on their profession the French midwives were required to pass an examination before the surgeons. Their professional reputation stood so high that Pechey alludes to one of them as "that most Famous Woman of the World, *Madam Louise Burgeois*, late Midwife to the Queen of *France*. The praises that we read of all those that ever heard of her are not so much a flourish as truth; for her reasons are solid experiences, and her witnesses have been all of the most eminent Persons of *France*: and not only of her, but as we have already exprest, of the most excellent known Men and Women of this Art of other Countries."³

According to Mrs. Cellier, English midwives were for a time examined by the College of Surgeons, but as their records for the years in question are missing there is no means of ascertaining the numbers of those who presented themselves for examination. She says that Bishops did not "pretend to License Midwives till Bp. *Bonner's* time, who drew up the Form of the first License, which continued in full force till 1642, and then the Physicians and Chirurgeons contending about it, it was adjudged a Chyrurgical operation, and the Midwives were Licensed at *Chirurgions-Hall*, but not till they had passed three

¹ Cellier, (Eliz.). *To Dr. —, an answer to his Queries concerning the Colledg of Midwives*, p. 7.

² Carrier (Henriette.) *Origine de la Maternité de Paris*.

³ Pechey, *Compleat Midwife*, Preface.

examinations, before six skilful Midwives, and as many Chirurgions expert in the Art of Midwifery. Thus it continued until the Act of Uniformity passed, which sent the Midwives back to *Doctors Commons*, where they pay their money (*take an oath which it is impossible for them to keep*) and return home as skilful as they went thither. I make no reflections on those learned Gentlemen, the Licensers, but refer the curious for their further satisfaction to the Yearly Bills of Mortality, from 42 to 62 ; Collections of which they may find at *Clerksball*. Which if they please to compare with these of late Years, they will find there did not then happen the eight part of the Casualties either to Women or Children, as do now.”¹

In granting licences to midwives the Bishops were supposed to make some enquiry as to their professional attainments. Among the “articles to be enquired of” during Diocesan visits was one “whether any man or woman within your Parish, hath professed or practised Physick or Chyrurgery ; by what name or names are they called, and whether are they licensed by the Bishop of the Diocesse, or his Vicar Generall, and upon whom have they practised, and what good or harm have they done ?”² And again, “whether any in your Parish do practise Physicke or chirurgery, or that there be any mid-wife there, or by what authority any of them do practise, or exercise that profession.”³ But the interest of the Bishops was concerned more with the orthodoxy of the midwife than with her professional skill.

A midwife’s licence was drawn up as follows : beginning :—“Thomas Exton, knight, doctor of laws, commisary general, lawfully constituted of the right worshipful the dean & chapter of St.

¹ Cellier (Eliz.). to Dr. — an answer to his *Queries concerning the Colledge of Midwives*, p. 6.

² *Exeter, Articles to be enquired of by the Churchwardens.* 1646.

³ *Canterbury, Articles to be enquired.* 1636.

Paul's in London ; to our beloved in Christ, Anne Voule, the wife of Jacob Voule, of the parish of St Gile's Cripplegat, sendeth greeting in our Lord God everlasting : Whereas, by due examination of diverse, honest, and discreet women, we have found you apt and able, cunning and experte, to occupy & exercise the office, business & occupation of midwife," and continuing after many wise and humane rules for her guidance with an exhortation " to be diligent, faithful and ready to help every woman travelling of child, as well the poor as the rich, and you shall not forsake the poor woman and leave her to go to the rich ; you shall in no wise exercise any manner of witchcraft, charms, sorcery, invocation, or other prayers, than such as may stand with God's laws, and the king's," concluding thus:—" Item, you shall not be privy to or consent that any priest or other party shall in your absence, or 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 borne 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 said child is born."¹

The Bishops' interest in midwives may have been caused partly by a praiseworthy desire to secure an adequate supply for the assistance of women in each parish. But from the Church's point of view, the midwife's chief importance was not due to the fact that the life of mother and child might depend on her skill, but to her capacity for performing the rites of baptism. The reasons for granting her this authority are explained as follows:—" in hard Labours the Head of the Infant was sometimes baptized before the whole delivery. This Office of Baptizing

¹ *Sussex Arch. Coll.*, Vol. IV., pp., 249-50. Extracts from Parish Registers.

in such Cases of Necessity was commonly performed by the Midwife; and 'tis very probable, this¹ gave first Occasion to Midwives being licensed by the Bishop, because they were to be first examined by the Bishop or his delegated Officer, whether they could repeat the Form of Baptism, which they were in Haste to administer in such extraordinary Occasion. But we thank God our times are reformed in Sense, and in Religion."¹ Though the midwife was only expected to baptize in urgent cases she might strain her privilege, and baptize even a healthy infant into the Roman Church. Her power in this respect was regarded with suspicion and jealousy by English Protestants, not only because she might inadvertently admit the infant to the wrong fold, but because it resembled the conferring of office in the Church upon women; however, as no man was usually present at the birth of a child, and it was fully believed that delay might involve the perpetual damnation of the dying infant's soul, no alternative remained. Peter Heylyn, in writing of Baptism, comments on the difficulty, saying that "the first Reformers did not only allow the administration of this Sacrament [Baptism] in *private* houses, but permitted it to private persons, even to women also." He continues that when King James, in the Conference at Hampton Court, seemed offended because of this liberty to women and laicks, Dr. Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, denied that the words gave this liberty, and Dr. Babington alledged "that the words were purposely made ambiguous as otherwise the Book might not have passed Parliament. To whom it was replied by the Bishop of London that there was no intent to deceive any, but the words did indeed "intend a permission of private persons to Baptize in case of *necessity*."²

The fear of secret baptisms into the Catholic

¹ Watson, *Clergyman's Law*, p. 318.

² Heylyn (*Peter*), *Cyprianus Anglicus*, p. 27.

Church is shown in a letter which states that "the wief of Frances Lovell esq^r of West Derh^m is noted for a recusant. And the said Frances had a childe about three yeares past christianed by a midwief sent thither by the La. Lovell, and the midwief's name cannot be learned."¹

It was this danger which led to the prosecution of women who practised without licences. The Churchwardens at Lee presented "the Widow Goney and the wife of Thomas Gronge being midwives & not sworne." In Hadingham they report "We have two poore women exercising the office of midwives, one Avice Rax and the wife of one John Sallerie,"² and elsewhere "Dorothy Holding wief of Jo. Holding & Dorothy Parkins wief of W^m Parkins" were presented "for exercising the office of midwives without License."³

The fees charged by midwives varied from £300 in the case of the French Midwife who attended the Queen, to the sum of 1s. 6d. paid by the Parish of Aspenden to the midwife who delivered a woman "received by virtue of a warrant from the justices."⁴ In most cases the amount paid by the parents was supplemented by gifts from the friends and relations who attended the christening.⁵ Thus the baby's

¹ Bacon, (Sir Nat.). *Official Papers*, p. 176. 1591.

² S. P. D., ccxcvi., 17. August 21, 1635. *Visitation presentments by the Churchwardens*.

³ S. P. D., ccxcv., 6. August 19, 1636.

⁴ *Hertford County Records*, Vol. I., p. 435. 1698.

⁵ The Rev. Giles Moore "gave Mat [his adopted daughter] then answering for Edwd. Cripps young daughter 5s. whereof shee gave to the mydwife 2s & 1s. to the Nurse. Myself gave to the mydwife in the drinking bowle 1s. (*Sussex Arch. Coll.*, Vol. I., p. 113. *Rev. Giles Moore, Journal*.)

Later is entered in the Journal, he being god-father "1674. Mat was brought to bed of a daughter. Gave the mydwife, goodwyfe & Nurse 5s. each." (*Ibid.*, p. 119.)

After Lady Darce's confinement at Herstmonceux Castle, is entered in the accounts "paid my Lord's benevolence to Widdow Craddock the midwife of Battle £5. 0. 0. (*Sussex Arch. Coll.*, Vol. xlviii. 1643-1649.)

Entries in a similar book of the Howard family give "To my young ladye's midwyfe xx^s (p. 227-8) To Mrs. Fairfax her Midwife by my Lord xx^s . . . by my Ladie xx^s. More to Mrs. Faifax her midwife by my Ladie's commaund iiij^s" (*Howard Household Book*, p. 263. 1629.)

death meant a considerable pecuniary loss to the midwife. An example of her payment in such a case is given in Nicholas Assheton's diary; he enters on Feb. 16, 1617. "My wife in labour of childbirth. Her delivery was with such violence as the child dyed within half an hour, and, but for God's wonderful mercie, more than human reason could expect, shee had dyed, . . . divers mett and went with us to Downham; and ther the child was buried . . . my mother wth me laid the child in the grave . . . Feb. 24, the midwyfe went from my wyffe to Cooz Braddyll's wyffe. She had given by my wyffe xxs and by me vs."¹

The Churchwardens at Cowden entered in their account book 1627 "Item, paide for a poore woman's lying in 3. o." 1638. "to John Weller's wife for her attendance on the widow Smithe when she lay in 2. o."²

The account book of Sir John Foulis of Ravelstone gives many details of the expenses incurred at confinements in Scotland. His wife appears to have been attended by a doctor, as well as a midwife, and the latter's fee was the higher of the two. The payments are in Scots money.³ "Mar. 26 1680, to the doctor Steinsone for waiting on my wife in her labour 2 guines at 33 P. sterl. p.piece, 27. 16. o, to Elspie dickson, midwife, 40. 12. o, to her woman 2. 18. o." On November 26, 1692 there is another payment

Sarah Fell records the presents given to her sister's midwife — Jan y^e 1st 1675 by m^o Lent Bro. Lowe^r to give Jane Chorley his wifes midwife 1. 00.00
by m^o Mothe^r gave to s^d midwife 5. 00
by m^o Sist^r Sus: sist^r Rach: & I gave he^r 5. 00
(Dec. 6. 1676. By M^o Given fran. Laite Sister Lowers midwife by ffather^r & Mothe^r 5s. by sist^r Sus: 2s. by sist^r Rach: 2s. myselfe 4s. Dec. 10, 1677 by m^o Mothe^r gave frances Layte when she was midwife to Sist^r Lower of litle Love-day Lowe^r 02.06, by m^o sist^r Susannah gave he^r then 01.00 by m^o sister Rachell gave her then 01.00 (Fell, Sarah, *Household Accounts*).

¹ Assheton (Nicholas), *Journal*, p. 81.

² *Sussex Arch. Coll.*, Vol. XX., p. 101 and p. 104. *Account Book of Cowden*.

³ One pound Scots—20d. sterling.

"to my wife to give doctor Sibbald for his attendance on her in childbed and since to this day 5 guineas 66. 0. 0." Jan. 31, 1704 "to my son W^m to give the midwife when his wife was brought to bed of her sone Joⁿ 3 guineas 42. 12. 0. to my doughter Crichtoune to give the midwife for me halfe a guinie. 7. 2. 0.

The size of the gratuities given to the midwife by the friends and acquaintances who gathered at a society christening in London may be judged from Pepys, who enters in his diary when he was Godfather with Sir W. Pen to Mrs. Browne's child "I did give the midwife 10s."¹ His gratuities to people of lower rank were smaller, and of course the gifts made by the "common people" and those of the gentry in the provinces were much more modest.

In the latter part of the century there are indications of a growing tendency among the upper classes to ~~replace the midwife by the doctor.~~ The doctors encouraged the tendency. Their treatises on midwifery, of which several were published during this time, ~~deprecate any attempt on the midwife's part to cope with difficult cases.~~ Dr. Hugh Chamberlain points out "nor can it be so great a discredit to a Midwife . . . to have a Woman or Child saved by a Man's assistance, as to suffer either to die under her own hand."² In making this translation of Maurice's work on Midwifery, Chamberlain omitted the anatomical drawings, "there being already severall in English; as also here and there a passage that might offend a chaste English eye; and being not absolutely necessary to the purpose; the rest I have, as carefully as I could, rendered into English for the benefit of our midwives."³ This line of thought is

¹ Pepys's *Diary*, Vol. I., p. 308. 1661.

² Chamberlain (Dr. Hugh). *Accomplisht Midwife: Epistle to the Reader*.

³ *Ibid.*

carried yet further by McMath, who says in the preface to "The Expert Midwife" that he has "of purpose omitted a Description of the parts in a woman destined to Generation, not being absolutely necessary to this purpose, and lest it might seem execrable to the more chaste and shamfaced through Baudiness and Impurity of words; and have also endeavoured to keep all Modesty, and a due Reverence to Nature: nor am I of the mind with some, as to think there is no Debauchery in the thing, except it may be in the abuse."¹

The notion that it was indecent for a woman to ~~understand the structure and functions of her own body fitted in with the doctors' policy of circumscribing the midwife's sphere~~; McMath continues "Natural Labour, where all goes right and naturally, is the proper work of the Midwife, and which she alone most easily performs aright, being only to sit and attend Nature's pace and progress . . . and perform some other things of smaller moment, which Physicians gave Midwives to do, as unnecessary & indigent for them, and for the Matronal chastity (tho some of Old absurdly assigned them more, and made it also their office to help the Delivery, and not by Medicaments only and others, but Inchantments also)."²

Clearly in a profession which often holds in its hands the balance between life and death, those members who are debarred from systematic study and training must inevitably give way sooner or later to those who have access to all the sources of learning, but the influences which were prejudicing women's position in midwifery during the seventeenth century were not wholly founded on such reasonable grounds; they were also affected by much more

¹ McMath (Mr. James, M.D.). *The Expert Mid-wife*.

² *Ibid.*

general, undefined and subtle causes. It may even be doubted whether the superior knowledge of the seventeenth century doctor actually secured a larger measure of safety to the mother who entrusted herself to his management than was attained by those who confided in the skill of an experienced and intelligent midwife. Chamberlain admits that the practice of doctors "not onely in England but throughout Europe; . . . hath very much caused the report, that where a man comes, one or both [mother or child] must necessarily dye; and makes many for that reason forbear sending, untill either be dead or dying." He continues "my Father, Brothers and myself (though none else in Europe that I know) have by God's blessing, and our industry, attained to, and long practised a way to deliver a woman in this case without any prejudice to her or her Infant."

The discovery to which Chamberlain refers was the use of forceps, which he and his family retained as a profound secret. Therefore this invention did not rank among the advantages which other doctors possessed over midwives at this period. Even when, a century later, the use of forceps became generally understood, the death rate in childbed was not materially reduced, for it was only with the discovery of the value of asepsis that this heavy sacrifice was diminished. We must therefore look for the explanation of the growing ascendancy of male practitioners to other causes beside the hypothetical standard of their greater efficiency. Their prestige rested partly on an ability to use long words which convinced patients of their superior wisdom; it was defended by what was fast becoming a powerful corporation; and more potent in its effect was the general deterioration in the position of women which took place during the century. A lessening

¹ Chamberlain (Hugh). *Accomplisht Midwife: Epistle to Reader.*

of confidence in womanly resourcefulness and capacity in other walks of life, could not fail to affect popular estimation of their value here too; and added to this were the morbid tendencies of the increasing numbers of oversexed society women who were devoted to a life of pleasure. The fact that similar tendencies were visible in France, where an excellent scientific training was open to women, shows that the capture of the profession by men was not only due to superior skill.

The famous French Midwife, Madame Bourgeois, told her daughter "There is a great deal of artifice to be used in the pleasing of our Women, especially the young ones, who many times do make election of Men to bring them to bed. I blush to speak of them, for I take it to be a great peice of impudence to have any recourse unto them, unless it be a case of very great danger. I do approve, I have approved of it, and know that it ought to be done, so that it be concealed from the Woman all her life long; nor that she see the surgeon any more."¹

Whatever may have been the explanation, midwifery had ceased to be a monopoly for women when the "man-midwife" made his appearance in the sixteenth century, but it is only in the latter half of the seventeenth century that the profession passes definitely under the control of men. The doctors who then secured all the more profitable class of work, were united in a corporation which was often directed by men possessed of a disinterested enthusiasm for truth, and considerable proficiency in their art, even though many in their ranks might regard their profession merely as a means for acquiring personal fame or wealth. But the interest of the corporations of physicians and surgeons was centred more upon their profession than upon the general well-being of the community,

¹ Fechey, *Compleat Midwife*, p. 349. Secrets of Madame Louyse Bourgeois, midwife to the Queen of France, which she left to her Daughter as a guide for her.

and they did not regard it as part of their duty to secure competent assistance in childbirth for every woman in the community. They took a keen professional interest in the problems of midwifery, but the benefits of their research were only available for the wives or mistresses of rich men who could afford to pay high fees. Far from making any effort to provide the same assistance for the poor, the policy of the doctors, with some exceptions, was to withhold instruction from the midwives on whom the poor depended, lest their skill should enable them to compete with themselves in practice among the wealthy.

Conclusion.

The foregoing examination of the character and extent of women's professional services has brought several interesting points to light. It has been shown that when social organisation rested upon the basis of the family, as it chiefly did up to the close of the Middle Ages, many of the services which are now ranked as professional were thought to be specially suited to the genius of women, and were accordingly allotted to them in the natural division of labour within the family. The suggestions as to the character and conditions of these services during the Middle Ages, rest upon conjectures drawn from the comparison of a few generally accepted statements concerning the past, with what appears at the opening of the seventeenth century to be a traditional attitude to women, an attitude which was then undergoing rapid modifications. A more thorough and detailed examination of their position in the preceding centuries may show that it was far less stable than is generally supposed, but such a discovery need not disturb the explanation which is here given of the tendencies deciding the scope of women's professional activity within in the seventeenth century.