

The Midwife.

William Smellie, M.D.

The name of Smellie is familiar to most midwives on account of its association with the method of jaw and shoulder traction in delivering the after coming head in breech labours; but he deserves to be yet better known to them, for he was one of the first to come to their aid in difficult cases. He lived at a time when the practice of midwifery was almost wholly in the hands of untrained but experienced women and when there was great prejudice against doctors attending lying-in patients. This partly arose because the cases to which they were called often needed operative interference. The forceps were then regarded with dread and horror; very naturally also midwives were loth to let their trade pass into other hands. This, however, it was surely and slowly doing; midwifery was beginning to be treated as a science, and great impetus was given to its study by the practice, teaching, and writings of William Smellie. He was a native of Lanarkshire. In 1739 he came to London, where he taught and practised up to 1759, when he retired to his birthplace. The renowned William Hunter was one of his pupils; they lived together at one period. Smellie was one of the first to use a phantom for teaching purposes, to accurately investigate the shape and measurements of the female pelvis and foetal head, and to combine theoretical teaching of midwifery with clinical demonstrations at the bedside; he also improved the forceps and other obstetric instruments. McClintock, who edited his work on obstetrics, describes him as "one of the most skilful practitioners of the art, as well as one of the most illustrious founders of the science of midwifery." His portrait by his own hand is treasured in the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh. The face is plain but intellectual, the eyes are frank, the brow and chin strong; he is said to have been awkward and brusque in manner; this may, perhaps, account for the fact that his patients belonged largely to the lower classes.

His work on midwifery, in three volumes, is certainly a classic; it has, besides great clearness, a distinct charm of style. The first volume was published in 1751, after 30 years' experience; the third in 1764, one year after his death. The second and third consist entirely of histories of cases, with practical

comments thereon; they are 531 in number, and make delightful reading. One is amazed at the keen powers of observation and deduction, the extensive knowledge of midwifery (rare in those days), the broadmindedness, method, and industry of the author. He says quaintly he "took all opportunities of acquiring improvement, and cheerfully renounced errors imbibed in the beginning of life." Many of his most difficult cases were those for which midwives called in his help. Case 531 gives an animated description of "the adjustment of a quarrel betwixt two midwives." It is told most graphically and succinctly. One sees the gleam in the eye of Midwife No. 1, who said she would yield her seat at the bedside to Smellie, but to no midwife in London; one hears the two "scolding one another in a ferocious manner"; one rejoices at the finale, where Midwife No. 2, pleased and paid, leaves the field to the one who had been "bespoke." In another case, where a dispute had arisen between attending doctors and midwives, Smellie tells how "by mildness and remonstrance, he brought them to a better temper, and they were at last reconciled." He was not always so successful; his enemies were many and spiteful. Pre-eminent among them was a Mrs. Michell, a celebrated midwife, who lived in the Haymarket. Smellie seldom inveighs against the malpractice and ignorance of midwives, though he frankly informs them of their mistakes, and tells them that they had sent too late. He calls them "female-practitioners," and recommends their "being in friendship with gentlemen of the same profession, who may be ready to assist in dangerous cases, both from motives of humanity and a regard for their own character." One clever diagnosis by a midwife is recorded in the collection of twin cases. She found the two children presenting at once, the one a vertex, the other a footling; the head was soft and pappy, so she suspected the child was dead; the legs moved, she was therefore certain the other child was alive. So it fell out. McClintock makes a footnote: "The correctness of her diagnosis and delicacy of touch are deserving of high commendation."

On one occasion Smellie was sent for to attend a case. On arrival, he found another practitioner there, whose "dress was as forbidding as his countenance, consisting of an

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