

The Midwife.

Midwives in English History.

The first Royal midwife mentioned in the old records is Marguerite Cobbe, wife of John Cobbe. She was granted a pension of £12 per annum, ordered by Letters Patent, in recognition of her services to Queen Elizabeth Woodville, wife of Edward IV., at the birth of Edward, the elder of the ill-fated little Princes murdered in the Tower. He was born in a troublous time; the King was waging war against Warwick; the Queen had been sent to the Tower for safety; she was expecting a fourth child.

With great energy she prepared the Tower for a siege, but when the news came that Warwick was in London she fled panic-stricken with her mother and three little daughters to a great, gloomy fortress, known as the Sanctuary. Here, destitute of necessities, and dependent on the charity of generous subjects, she gave birth on November 1st, 1470, to the much-hoped-for heir. "Mother Cobbe, a well-disposed midwife, resident in the Sanctuary, charitably assisted the distressed Queen in the hour of maternal peril, and acted as nurse to the little Prince." When the rebellion was crushed Edward bestowed " princely rewards " on those who had aided " his Elizabeth," as he called her, in that fearful crisis.

There is a quaint story anent the birth of the first child of Elizabeth Woodville. Edward and the royal physicians learned in astrology had predicted the birth of a prince. One of the physicians, Dominic by name, crouched outside the bed-chamber listening. Directly he heard the child cry he knocked and asked what her Grace had? Thereupon one of her ladies smartly answered: " Whatsoever the Queen's grace hath here within, sure 'tis a fool that standeth there without." Poor Dr. Dominic stole away discomfited.

In the first half of the sixteenth century Alice Massey was Queen's midwife. In the privy-purse accounts of Elizabeth of York, wife of Henry VII., is found an entry of £10 paid to Alice Massey for exercise of her office, and later clothing for a former " norice " to her brother, Edward V., is one of the items.

It is interesting to compare the salaries given then with those of to-day. The maids of honour had an allowance of £6 13s. 4d. per annum, and the governess received £13 6s. 8d., so it appears the midwife was not ill paid. To the Countess Margaret Beaufort, mother-in-law of Queen Elizabeth Woodville, we owe details of the ancient etiquette and ceremonial previous to a royal birth. The Queen went into retirement for the last month. She first attended Mass at Westminster, accompanied by the greater part of the nobles of the realm, and then passed on to the Royal Chambers in Westminster Palace. Arrived at the ante-room, the Lord Chamberlain desired, in the Queen's name, " all her people to pray that God would send her a good

hour"; then she retired into her chamber, which was " hanged and ceiled with blue cloth of arras, enriched with gold fleur-de-lis." A curtain was drawn, and " thenceforth," says the old chronicler, " no manner of officer came within the Queen's chamber, but only ladies and gentlewomen, after the old custom."

It must have been a dreary, unwholesome confinement; for " the Royal patient was enclosed not only from air, but from the light of day"; sides, roof, windows, and all of the lying-in-chamber were hung with rich cloth of arras, except one window, " where it was hanged so that the Queen might have light when it pleased her."

When Elizabeth was expecting her seventh child, she conferred with a French nurse, but dismissed her with a gratuity of 6s. 8d.; later she interviewed a Mistress Harcourt, who had been commended to her, but she likewise was dismissed with a gratuity. It appears that Her Majesty was not easily pleased in the matter of midwives, though history extols her as gentle, pious, and lovely. She was the last Queen to choose the Tower for her accouchement; it ended tragically in her death, nine days after the birth of a daughter, Katherine.

There is mention later of one Elizabeth Gaunforde, a devout Catholic, who christened the child " in utero " in cases of delayed labour.

This office of Queen's midwife was doubtless much sought after, but it was a delicate matter even to speak of it when Henry VIII. ruled our Merrie England, and took unto him wives at pleasure.

A Matron of Watlington was attended by one Johane Hammulden, a midwife; so skilled was she that the Matron said she was worthy of being midwife to the Queen of England, provided it were Queen Kateryn, but she was too good for Queen Anne." This latter she abused so roundly that the ungrateful Johane informed against her. The scandal and gossip seethed in Watlington, and it transpired that Mrs. Hammulden had likewise indiscreetly spoken of " Queens." The whole business was gravely investigated by a right worshipful quorum of justices at Reading. Much discretion and keeping of counsel was then, as now, most desirable in a midwife.

M. O. H.

(To be concluded.)

Conference of Midwifery Inspectors.

It is proposed that the County Inspectors of Midwives should meet and hold an informal conference during the last week in April, when the Midwifery Conference is being held.

Any Inspector who would like particulars is requested to apply to Miss du Sautoy, Inspector for Somerset, 16, Elm Grove, Taunton.

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