

Midwives in English History.

(Concluded from page 279.)

There was an interval of almost a century between the birth of Jane Seymour's last child and the next arrival in the family of the English sovereign. The old etiquette and ceremonial previously associated with such an event had been forgotten, so that Queen Anne of Denmark, wife of James I., was spared the irksome retirement of the Queen-consorts, her predecessors. There was much talk of the old customs, but it ended there. Anne's first child had been born while James was King of Scotland, and she may have preferred the Scotch ways. Her second son was born on November 19th, 1609. The King, it is said, rewarded the attendants of the Queen "with his own hand." In his accounts is an entry which runs thus:—"Item, His Majesty's self to Janet Kinlock, midwife of Her Majesty, £26 13s. 14d., punds Scot." The name suggests Janet was from beyond the Border.

At the birth of the first-born of Henrietta Maria and Charles I. a dramatic incident took place. Labour set in prematurely owing to the Queen being frightened by a dog. At the time she was at Greenwich with neither physician nor midwife in attendance. The "good old woman" who usually officiated was therefore called in by the terrified attendants, but she was so agitated and perturbed at having to minister to so exalted a patient that she swooned away and had to be carried out of the royal chamber, so adding to the general confusion. The French "sage-femme," who had been chosen by the Queen's mother to attend her had been captured en route by a privateer, who kept her in captivity till all need of her services were passed. The little premature baby only lived a few hours. The second child, Charles, was a "strong, fine babe." One of his sponsors, the Duchess of Richmond, who was renowned for her extravagant presents, gave the midwife a quantity of "massy plate."

The wife of James II., the beautiful Mary Beatrice of Modena, had the grief of losing four children in early infancy. At the birth of the fifth child there were no less than 67 persons present—"a noble mob of witnesses," including Lord Chancellor Jeffries, and several of the royal physicians.

The Queen had asked that no one should proclaim the sex of the child, "lest the pleasure on the one hand, or the disappointment on the other, should over-power her." Lady Sunderland charged the midwife to pull her dress if it were a boy; she would then touch her forehead as a token to the King that he had an heir. He, however, was so eager that he cried out, "What is it?" "What your Majesty desires," replied the nurse. A "Mrs. de Labadie" is mentioned as the nurse who carried the babe into an outer chamber for the Lords to see. She had some trouble in making her way through the crowd.

Later, all manner of malicious and foolish stories were circulated about this much be-witnessed birth. It was said that another baby had been smuggled in or substituted. The scandal became so grave,

and the doubts cast upon the maternity of the young prince so serious that an extraordinary council was convened by desire of the Queen to investigate the matter. One of the most important witnesses was naturally the Queen's midwife. Mary, wife of William of Orange, and Anne, daughters of James II. by a former marriage, when he was Duke of York, were only too anxious to disown their little brother, seeing that they were the next heirs to the throne. The shameful doubts were, however, set at rest by the courageous, consistent, and minute witness given by those present at his birth.

From this time onwards there is little mention of the Queen's midwife. The objection to men-midwives was slowly broken down, and it became the fashion to be attended by medical men, who had at last treated this branch of medicine seriously and scientifically.

One quaint story is told of a midwife, daughter of a doctor. She diagnosed a breech presentation, but longed to have it confirmed. The doctor was therefore smuggled into the room, which was in darkness. He maintained, after an examination which the patient imagined was made by the midwife, that the presentation was vertex. He was evidently less experienced than his daughter, for the course of events proved him wrong.

In reviewing the midwife in English history it cannot be said that there was any woman conspicuous for her gifts; but it must be remembered that the midwife in those days was for the most part uneducated, untrained, and somewhat grandmotherly. They were guided by rule of thumb, much like our "gamps," but there are few to deny that midwifery is essentially a profession, suitable for women, and with present-day opportunities there is no reason why they should not help to make history. M. O. H.

Somerset County Council.

MIDWIVES' ACT SUB-COMMITTEE.

INSPECTOR'S REPORT FOR MARCH 1st, 1909, TO FEBRUARY 28th, 1910.

An interesting report has been presented by Miss C. C. du Sautoy, Inspector of Midwives under the Somerset County Council, who states:—

The number of midwives who notified their intention of practising in the county during the above dates were 238; in 1908 214 notified.

	1908	1909
Trained Midwives	97	123
Bonâ-fide ,,	117	115

ANALYSIS OF TRAINED MIDWIVES.

(1) Working under Committees...	74	100
(2) Working on own account ...	23	23

1908 1909

(1) *Working under Committees*:—

(a) Under County Nursing Association 54 ... 72

9 left during 1909; their places were taken by others.

5 had no cases as Midwives.

58 at work as Midwives, Feb., 1910.

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