

## The Midwife.

### QUEEN CHARLOTTE AND THE MIDWIFE.

In a diary of William Hunter (1762-1765) written by him during his attendance at the first three accouchements of Queen Charlotte, wife of George III, interesting details are given of the medical and social customs of the last half of the eighteenth century. The Queen was attended by Mrs. Draper, one of the most celebrated midwives of the day; the surgeon and obstetrician waited in the neighbourhood of the royal bed-chamber in case their skilled professional services were required; as the labours were normal in every respect the part they played was a small one. At this time the majority of women were attended by midwives, although the scientific study of obstetrics had already seriously begun, and a certain number of women sought the attendance of well-qualified medical men at their labours. Queen Charlotte was however a German, homely, old-fashioned, and prejudiced against innovations, and she elected to follow the customs of her forbears and to be attended by a midwife. On August 12th, 1762, we read in the diary: "Being called, I came to St. James at  $\frac{1}{2}$  after 5 in the morning. Mr. Hawkins (the surgeon) told me that the Queen had been as usual over night and was taken ill at 4 o'clock, after some good sleep. A little after six Mrs. Draper came to us and told us that all was in a very natural way, but that the appearances indicated that it would be slow. At  $\frac{1}{2}$  after 7, when I little expected it, from what Mrs. Draper had told us, the Prince was born. Soon after this we examined him all over, and found him perfect, with every mark of health, and of a large size. Then we examined the placenta which was sound and very compleat, and Mrs. Draper told us that the Queen had had a very good time, and was very well."

Apparently, Hunter was told that the Queen was ill soon after 4 a.m.; men's toilets were more elaborate then than nowadays, with bag-wig, laced ruffles, solitaire round the neck, embroidered cuffs, silk stockings, sword and gold-headed cane; Hunter was to attend a Queen and would appear in full dress; he probably arrived at St. James in a sedan chair or coach, and was ushered into the ante-room to await the report of the all-important Mrs. Draper! It was not a very dignified position for the physician-accoucheur of Middlesex Hospital. Mrs. Draper was unwise enough to commit herself by giving a prognosis—"it would be slow"—the labour was however very quick, and the great Hunter cannot help giving a dig at the midwife for her mistaken prophecy, the labour had only lasted  $3\frac{1}{2}$  hours! an unusually short time for a primagravida.

However, Hunter was allowed to examine the young Prince and the placenta, and at 9 o'clock

"when her Majesty was shifted saw what was taken from the bed, and found it just moderate or what is most common." He then saw the Queen and found her without any complaint and with a good pulse. He ordered a draught for the Queen, and one for the Prince. New-born infants at that time were dosed with sweet almond oil, syrup of roses, and rhubarb, hourly, "this being designed to cause evacuation of the meconium more rapidly than nature intended." (Dr. Stark's comment.) At 12 o'clock mid-day Hunter saw the Queen again, "she desired to live some days upon broth caudle and tea, rather than to eat chicken." The etiquette of the British court did not allow queens to suckle their children; we find, however, that he was to be fed twice a day with pap, besides being fed by the wet nurse. Hunter adds: "the Princess desired a little milk to be put into the pap." This Princess was the mother-in-law of Queen Charlotte; she evidently had something to say in the management of her grandson. Three days later Hunter records, "we found the pap was without milk, the Princess having said, as the child is well, let there be no change"; the Doctor's rôle was not an easy one—the midwife managed the labour, the Princess managed the child! On the second day the Queen had "no desire to eat chicken." On the fourth "she did not chuse to eat chicken nor to get up"; the same note is made on the sixth day; however on the seventh day the Queen had been up, and on the eighth day "eat with appetite almost a whole chicken, was up three hours and felt quite well." On the seventh day Mrs. Draper "off her own bat" had given her a cup of Aq. Puleg. and Hysteric. Pulegium is pennyroyal, it must have been a very unpleasant draught; Hunter says, "Her Majesty, however, had a good night." The breasts seem to have given no trouble, though for a few days the milk ran out freely, she took doses of rhubarb regularly and on the fourteenth day was perfectly well.

The baby gave no trouble in spite of his frequent dosings, "he was washed all along with cold water;" it was certainly a Spartan-like treatment in those days of shut windows and curtained cradles; as it was August, the weather was probably warm.

A year afterwards the Queen gave birth to a second son; the Queen, "after complaining lightly for about two hours, was delivered with three pains of a fine boy so that there was not time to call the proper people together." Mrs. Draper reported the labour to Hunter, "she did not imagine the Queen was near delivery, till three strong pains came suddenly and close together and finished it. This she *said*" (underlined.) Evidently the good Doctor credited Mrs. Draper with aspirations after the honour and glory of attendance upon the royal patient

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