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The New England woman and medical practice in colonial times

Rosa A. Lambert
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THE NEW ENGLAND WOMAN AND MEDICAL PRACTICE
IN COLONIAL TIMES

by

Rosa A. Lambert

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts, in the
Department of History, in the Graduate
College of the State University
of Iowa.

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INTRODUCTION

The work of women in medicine may be traced back to the Greeks who gave a considerable amount of opportunity, and often actual encouragement, to the practice. Many evidences prove that women physicians were far from rare. The Romans absorbed Greek culture and learning and with it the custom of women practicing medicine.¹ For six hundred years or more women and slaves were regular practitioners. Before diseases became numerous and complicated, a study of their cure as a profession was unnecessary. Later, when they became more intricate, more skill was required. From that time the practice of medicine became a profession. Physicians were as necessary as surgeons.²

Christian women took up the work with the same enthusiasm evidenced by the earlier Roman and Greek women, advancing steadily in the work until³ by the twelfth century, a surprising amount of opportunity for a higher education in not only this but other fields was given to women. From this time to the sixteenth, every century had some outstanding woman professor in Italian Universities. Women were distinctly encouraged to apply themselves to medicine, and evidence is found of women who became authors of books on this subject.⁴ Tortula of Salerno became especially noted and published a series of books.⁵

It is not at all surprising to note that at Salerno a

department of women's diseases was organized under the care of women professors. Here they continued to train women physicians until the middle of the fifteenth century. Licenses granted to woman physicians are still preserved in the archives of Naples.⁶ A quotation from one of these licenses proves that women were considered superior to men in the treatment of women's diseases. "Since, then, the law permits women to exercise the profession of physicians, and since, besides, due regard being had to purity of morals, women are better suited for the treatment of women's diseases, after having received the oath of fidelity, we permit"....⁷

This liberal attitude towards women practitioners was largely brought about by the Benedictines who were accustomed to seeing women serving and caring for the sick, thus letting the intellectual keep pace with the spiritual life.⁸

By the sixteenth century the number of women physicians had decreased greatly, and in the centuries following, their number became more and more rare. There were still many who were anxious for medical knowledge, but few actually took up the practice.

The liberal training granted to women in Italy was not available to those of Mediaeval France. Apparently higher education for women was discouraged at the University of Paris. Since this university was the parent of Oxford, and Oxford in turn of Cambridge, and the three the pattern for all the universities of the west, the example was followed by most of the western universities. At any rate in northern France, Germany, and England women did not receive formal degrees from a university.⁹ Women,

however did possess a certain amount of scientific knowledge of disease, yet they did not receive a license to practice.¹⁰ They continued to treat and prescribe for the sick in the households over which they presided.

The small number of physicians found in the early settlements in America made it necessary for the colonial woman to care for many of the physical ills of the community. In the discussion herein presented the writer attempts to trace the extent of the New England woman's participation in medicine during the colonial period. Her activities are discussed in three separate phases; that of diagnosing and treating disease, the concoction of the various remedies used in ministering to the sick, and the practice of midwifery.

INTRODUCTION

1. James J. Walsh, Old Time Makers of Medicine, New York, 1911, p. 179.
2. Benjamin Rush, Medical Inquiries and Observations, 3rd. rev. ed., Vol I, Philadelphia, 1809, p. 156.
3. Walsh, Old Time Makers of Medicine, p. 181.
4. James J. Walsh, Mediaeval Medicine, London, 1920, p. 154.
5. Ibid., p. 155.
6. Walsh, Old Time Makers of Medicine, p. 187.
7. Walsh, Mediaeval Medicine, p. 158.
8. Ibid., p. 159.
9. Ibid., pp. 166 et seq.
10. Walsh, Old Time Makers of Medicine, p. 189.

CHAPTER I
THE HOUSEHOLD PHYSICIAN

No physicians of eminence came with the first colonists to New England. There were among their number, however, ministers who had some knowledge of medicine. These ministers and other men of education served the sparsely populated settlement during the early history of the colony.¹ Much that was bad in English medicine, especially quackery, did not extend to the New England settlement, but certain teachings were transferred and made the practice of the colonial period a curious mixture of independent thought and European traditions.² Deacon Samuel Fuller was the first to practice medicine in Massachusetts. His ability as a doctor and a leader did much to establish a bond of good will among the colonists and to make permanent the plantation.³

The majority of doctors of the second generation was little better than a group of poorly trained apprentices. A young man who aspired to the medical profession had simply to become an apprentice to an older doctor for whom he served in a half menial, half professional way. He ran the doctor's errands, swept his office and cared for his horse. He helped to gather the herbs and to pound the drugs. In smoke blackened kettles he watched the brewing of remedies which the older doctor perhaps had learned as an apprentice.⁴ When he was fitted to ride he applied to the court for a license to practice, and armed with his manuscript collection of recipes and prescriptions, he was prepared to administer to the bodily ills of those who failing in their own concoctions, as a last resort called in the doctor.

Should the aspiring doctor be the possessor of wealth or hold a good position in society he was considered so much more capable of practicing medicine.⁵

However helpful many of these self styled doctors might have been, many must have been worthless if one places much faith in the writings of Dr. William Douglass who says: "In general the physical practice in our colonies is so perniciously bad that excepting in surgery and some very acute cases, it is better to let nature under a proper regimen take her course...than to trust to the honesty and sagacity of the practitioner."⁶ And John Tennant, a physician who practiced in Virginia and published one of the first doctor books in America wrote: "Indeed, some would be glad of Assistance, if they did not think the Remedy near as bad as the Disease: For our Doctors are commonly so exorbitant in their Fees, whether they kill or cure, that the patient had rather trust to his Constitution, than run the Risque of beggaring his Family."⁷

Toward the middle and last quarter of the century the rise of real American medicine begins to appear. Medical societies were formed, hospitals were built, and a native literature makes its appearance. There was also a noticeable tendency on the part of outstanding men to enter the medical profession. Their patriotic service during the Revolution is especially noteworthy. No less than five doctors became signers of the Declaration of Independence.⁸

By the middle of the eighteenth century it became possible to secure a medical degree in America, yet many continued

to study abroad. Philadelphia established the first medical school. Candidates desiring to enter were required to present evidence of a year's apprenticeship in a doctor's office.⁹ Other schools were established but the one at Philadelphia was considered the best. Harvard did not have a medical department until 1782. Not one doctor in ten had ever taken a degree¹⁰ and of the 3,500 doctors in the colonies by 1776 only 350 of them had received medical degrees.¹¹

There was a noted scarcity of doctors especially where settlements were scattered and the means of communication poor. In such places it was hard for even the best of physicians to make a living.¹² Even where the doctor was available he was called only as a last resort. The frequent occurrence of accident and illness, especially among small children, made the colonial woman an adept in brewing the strange concoctions so commonly used through this period and that of the early nineteenth century. The wife and mother carried on the greater part of the business of doctoring in the immediate family.¹³

Biographies of these early practitioners show us how common it was for one man to follow several professions at the same time. A man practicing medicine might also be a pastor, teacher, or town official.¹⁴ He might even combine his healing art with that of cooking. Many of the seventeenth and eighteenth century cook books were written by physicians. A copy of one of these rare books, The Queen's Closet Opened has been preserved as a fair example of the methods and prescriptions of that day.¹⁵

Samuel Fuller, the first doctor of Plymouth, had been a silk maker in Leyden, while John Winthrop, the younger, gave medical advice both in person and by letter and purchased remedies for his friends when in London on diplomatic business.¹⁶ Sewall frequently refers to his prescriptions, for instance when he writes: "Was saddened by Hullies being taken with Convulsion Fits at Even. Gave Dr. Winthrop's Physick and Cordials."¹⁷ "Lett me tell you," Winthrop writes, "an easy medicine of mine oune that I have seene do miraculous cures in all sorts of Ulcers, and knitting suddainly broken bones"...¹⁸ William Penn was the author of a Book of Phisick in which were found all manner of startling cures and charms to ward off disease.

Nearly all the early parsons turned eagerly to medicine. Of the early presidents of Harvard, three practiced medicine, one had six sons all of whom were ministers and doctors as well. Brief Rules for the Care of the Small Pocks, one of the first medical treatises published in America, was written by T. Thatcher, a parson. Frequently ministers, magistrates, grocers, and schoolmasters practiced medicine as a side line.¹⁹ The quotation from the Braintree Town Records shows that one doctor combined his healing art with that of educator. "Mr. Benjamin Tompson, Practitioner of Physick for above thirty years during which time hee kept a Gram. School in Boston, Charlestowne, and Brantry, having left behind him a weary world, eight children, 28 grandchildren, and deceased April 13th, 1714 and lieth buried in Roxbury"...²⁰

Low standards of medicine made the field a desirable

one for poorly trained practitioners. As early as 1649, Massachusetts passed a law to regulate the practice of medicine by "chirurgeons, Midwives, Physicians and others." This law was exactly like that which New York passed to protect itself from quacks and their like: "For as much as the Law of God allows no man to impare the Life, or Limbs of any Person, but in a judicial way; It is therefore Ordered, that no person or persons whatsoever, employed at any time about the Bodey of men, women, children, for preservation of life, or health; as Chirurgeons, Midwives, Physicians or other, presume to exercise, or put forth any act contrary to the known approved Rules of Art, in each Mystery and occupation, nor experience any force, violence or cruelty upon, or towards the body of any, whether young or old, (no not in the most difficult cases) without the advice and consent of such as are skilled in the same Art, (if such may be had)...."²¹

On the women of the new settlements were placed obligations unheard of in our day. For them it was the Iron Age. Girls married young and drudged for a life time.²² Laws carefully restrained the wearing of "wide sleeves, lace tiffany, and such things." Ducking stools and cleft sticks were provided for scolds and gossipers, but no provision was made for education. Anything except providing clothing and the care of the household was thought well beyond woman's sphere, and this was a Herculean undertaking.²³ Mrs. John Adams wrote that "to aid the mother in manual labor and by self denial to forward the welfare of her brothers was the most exalted responsibility to

which any woman aspired."²⁴

That there were brilliant minds among the women of colonial days cannot be denied, but any attempt to dabble in what was considered strictly the affairs of men was frowned upon.²⁵ During the middle seventeenth century Governor John Winthrop wrote of "A godly young Woman of special parts, who was fallen into a sad infirmity, the loss of her understanding and reason, which had been growing upon her divers years by occasion of giving herself wholly to reading and writing and had written many books." An affliction such as this was considered a sure sign that women's mental faculties were not equal to such tasks.²⁶

The vast majority of women spent their time in caring for the household and in the rearing and ministering to their large families. The task of providing and preparing food alone for these families would be enough to drive modern women to rebellion. Apparently there was no limit to the capacity of the cast iron stomachs of the early settlers. The colonial kitchen was the factory through which every particle of food must pass in its various stages before being served on the table. The very building of the fire became a task so great that seldom if ever were the embers left to die on the hearth. The size of the cooking utensils of the modern kitchen would sink into insignificance when placed side by side with those of the colonial kitchen. Great iron pots weighing forty pounds, and brass and copper kettles holding as much as fifteen gallons wasted the strength needed for the all too frequent childbirth.²⁷

A quotation from the diary of Abigail Foote, a young

girl in Connecticut, written at a later time, gives us an intimate glimpse of the daily round of work of the average woman in the country. "Fix'd two gowns for Prude,--Mend Mother's Riding-hood,--Spun short thread,--Fix'd two gowns for Welsh's girls,--Carded tow,--Spun linen,--Worked on Cheese basket,--hatchel'd flax with Hannah, we did 51 lbs. apiece,--Pleated and ironed, Read a Sermon of Doddridge's, Spooled apiece,--Milked the Cows,--Spun linen, did 50 knots,--Made a Broom of Guinea wheat straw,--Spun thread to whited,--Set a Red dye,--Had two Scholars from Mrs. Taylor's,--I carded two pounds of whole wool and felt Nationly,--Spun harness twine,--Scoured the pewter."²⁸

This young lady with all her industry might have satisfied the author of the advertisement which appeared in the Pennsylvania Packet of September 23, 1780, "Wanted at a Seat about a day's journey from Philadelphia, a single Woman of unsullied Reputation, an affiable, cheerful, active and amiable Disposition; cleanly, industrious, perfectly qualified to direct and manage the female Concerns of a country business, as raising small stock, dairying, marketing, combing, carding, spinning, knitting, sewing, pickling, preserving, etc., and occasionally to instruct two Young Ladies in those Branches of Economy, who with their father compose the Family. Such a person will be treated with respect and esteem, and meet with every encouragement due to such a character."

Among the many and varied tasks of women was that of filling the family medicine chest. To every wife was delegated the office of household physician. She must see to the gathering

and drying of herbs, the distilling of bitters and drinks, the making of ointments and salves, and the boiling of syrups.²⁹ She was the only nurse available should one of the family fall ill. As late as the beginning of the nineteenth century all women were expected to learn to nurse the sick. It was often woman's lot to act as nurse not only in her own family, but in those of neighbors and friends as well. When enumerating the fine qualities of women their skill in nursing was always mentioned.³⁰

On women rested the burden of supplying the wilderness with laborers. Interminable childbearing was the rule. Families of from twelve to fifteen children excited no comment, and many families of from twenty to twenty-five children may be noted.³¹ William Phipps, governor of Massachusetts, had twenty-five brothers and sisters, all by one mother. Benjamin Franklin had sixteen brothers and sisters. Roger Clap of Dorchester, Massachusetts, "begat" fourteen children by one wife, and Cotton Mather, twice married, was the father of fifteen children. Sewall wrote in his diary, "This is the Thirteenth child that I have offered up to God in Batisme; my wife having borne me Seven Sons and Seven Daughters."³² The same diary makes the almost annual announcement "Uxor ~~pregnans~~ est." The motto of Sewall and all his contemporaries might have been "Sic semper uxoribus."³³

If all the children born could have endured the rigors of the New England climate, their progenitors might soon have peopled the wilderness. In some families many of the children

did survive as the Braintree Town Records prove: "Decon Samuel Bass, aged 94 departed this life upon the 30th day of December, 1694, who had bin a Decon of the Church of Braintree for the space of above 50 years and the first Decon of that Church, and was the father and grandfather and great grandfather of a hundred and sixty and two children before he died, the younger where of was Benjamin Bas, the son of Joseph Bas, and Mary his wife, born seven days before his Death."³⁴ Note also the quotation from the Boston Evening Post: "Bridgewater, Jan'y 14, 1765--Died here, Joseph Pratt, aged 99 years 11 months; a man of a good character and Profession, who had 20 children by his first wife, but none, by his second, who still survive him, being about 90 years of Age."³⁵

The question of large families must have occurred often to the toiling women, "Was this clearly the will of the Almighty when they already were the mothers of many children?" Statistics indicate that this almost blasphemous question was always answered in the affirmative.³⁶ Some ministers did refuse to baptise children born on the holy day, but this was to keep the Sabbath from being profaned rather than to protect the wife.³⁷

Child mortality was high. It was only the strongest and the most Spartan of the enormous families who survived the diseases which lay in wait for all who lived through the early baptism. Of the sixteen children of Cotton Mather, nine died in infancy, and Mather himself survived them all except one son Samuel. Only three of the fourteen children of Judge Sewall outlived the father. An inscription from a tombstone in Plymouth,

"Here lyeth...with twenty small children" is mute testimony of the child mortality of the times. Clearly the only way to preserve the human race was to have families of prodigious size, a frightful waste of human life.³⁸

Writers of the period saw with alarm the inroads made on their population by the heavy death rate of infants, and a Virginia physician wrote: "In the mean Time, this is a cruel Check to the Growth of an Infant Colony, which other wise, by the Fruitfulness of our Women, and the great Number of Recruits sent from our Mother Country, would in a few years, grow populous, and consequently considerable"...³⁹ Nathaniel Ames in his Almanach for the year 1762, made the suggestion that more care be paid to hygiene and the laws of sanitation. "It certainly is," he wrote, "in some Measure, our own Fault, that so great a Part of the Human Race perish in a state of Infancy. Our indulgent Creator has done his Part with infinite Perfection."⁴⁰

Considering the heavy demands made upon the mother's strength by domestic duties and added to this the terrible strain of almost yearly childbirth, it is no wonder that the exhausted mother went to an early grave. Most of the wives died young, and the old Puritan who did not have at least two wives resting by his side in the cemetery must have been very lonely.⁴¹ A burying ground near Bath, Maine, contains the graves of ten married women, eight of whom died between the ages of twenty-two and thirty.⁴² Many inscriptions may be found like the following: "Here lyeth the body of Elizabeth

Haynie, daughter of Richard and Jane Bridger, Was born July 16th, 1665, married Richard Haynie Oct 10th 1681, by whom she had 8 children & died his wife...1697."

A study made of genealogical records of Hingham, Massachusetts, disclosed many cases of early death among married women. Most of these deaths were easily traceable to excessive childbearing. Elizabeth Lincoln died at forty, having had seven children; Sarah Cushing had twelve children and died at thirty-eight; Gail Cushing, the mother of ten, died at forty-six; Sarah Hawke had seven children and died at thirty-six; Rebecca Hersey, a mother of twelve, died at forty-five. Cotton Mather's first wife was married at the age of sixteen, bore him ten children, and died at the age of thirty-two.⁴³

Another task of gigantic proportion for the untiring hands of colonial women was the diagnosing and treatment of sickness and disease. In this they displayed such tireless energy that one wonders what was left for the regular physicians to treat. The making of salves, distilling bitters, boiling syrups and gathering and drying the herbs used in these concoctions was then considered as much of the housewife's regular duties as the preparation of food for the family.⁴⁴

The sources of most of the remedies and cures used by the colonists extend back to England and often as far back as mediæval times. Many of the colonists must have been familiar with the Herball written by the Englishman, John Gerard. No book on the quaint "conceits" and "virtues" of herbs and plants could be written without quotations from his work now

known the world over.⁴⁵ It is certain they had access to Josselyn's New England's Rarities Discovered. Many of their old recipes are found in his very words. Such sources gave household physicians a wide knowledge of the medicinal value of herbs, and enabled them to use with skill the many remedies, the knowledge of which was considered an heirloom of great value and handed down from one generation to another. From frequent contact with the Indians, the colonists soon absorbed their methods of treating the sick and the use of many native herbs and roots.⁴⁶

Favorite recipes were often copied in the family Almanac, thus keeping them for future generations. "A recipe for ye cure of Sciatic pains" is a fair example: "Take 2 ounces of flowered brimstone, four ounces of Molasses, Mix y^m together, and take a spoonful morning and evening, and if y^t do not effect a cure take another spoonful at noon also."⁴⁷

Many writers put into print the result of their wide experience and accumulation of knowledge. John Tennant of Virginia, in 1751 published the first doctor book in America, a copy of which still exists in the Library at Worcester, Massachusetts. With the increasing facilities for travel and improved communication, it is fair to assume that this book fell into the hands of many in New England. William Penn at an earlier date published his Book of Physic. Colonial newspapers frequently contained advertisements such as the following: "Just published and to be sold by the Printers hereof, Medicine: Or the Family Physician, Being an attempt to render the Medical

Art more generally useful by showing people what is in their own Power, both with respect to the Prevention and Cure of Disease"...⁴⁸

The colonial dame occasionally turned her hand to professional doctoring. From her legal monopoly of midwifery it was but a step to practice medicine. While there were many in New England who did this, most of them however confined themselves to midwifery. Anne Hutchinson and Margaret Jones were doctors, but their careers were cut short by political and religious upheavals. The Council of Connecticut paid Mrs. Allyn £20 for her services to the sick. Mistress Sarah Sands doctored in Rhode Island and Sarah Alcock, the wife of a surgeon, was active in physic. Professional doctoring was frequently practiced by the Indians. Many a decoction of leaves and bark was sold to the planters by squaws such as Molly Orcutt. There was nothing in the social code of the time to prevent a woman from helping out with the family income by this kind of work, especially if she had no husband or family.⁴⁹

Women were so often called upon to treat and diagnose the endless visitations of mumps and measles, croup and chicken-pox, that one does not wonder that they became adepts.⁵⁰ At one time they were summoned as a jury of matrons to examine women sentenced to the whipping post. One Eliza Crook of Salem, New Jersey found guilty of petty larceny was to receive "twenty lashes, well laid on her bare back at the whipping post." A jury of matrons duly qualified by law, was summoned. They examined the prisoner and declared that she was "quick with a

living child." The sentence was suspended until the prisoner had been delivered of her child.⁵¹ Women assumed much of the responsibility of helping the new settlements survive. They created the office of doctor and elected themselves to the position.⁵²

Among some old papers belonging to Governor Winthrop was found an original collection of recipes dated in 1643, headed by the words, "To my worthy friend, Mr. Winthrop," and signed by Ed. Stafford of London, which yields a bit of evidence that medicine in the early days was influenced by English doctors. A careful perusal of these recipes shows them to be exactly like those found in the collections in many New England homes. In them is found no display of learned names for aches and ailments. They were written for the special use of a friend, and show care and forethought in their writing. They might be considered a fair example of the better sort of practice of that time. At the end of the manuscript, Dr. Stafford cautioned Winthrop in the ethical code of physicians and closed with the remark that all the recipes had been tried.

He prescribes for diseases likely to be met with in a strange land such as plague, smallpox, scurvy, all sorts of fever, poisons, madness, epilepsy, hysteria, lethargy, vertigo, dysentery, jaundice, pains, pleurisies, watery humors, and dropsies. External maladies expected to be met with were fractures, dislocations, wounds, bites of venomous creatures, boils, ulcers, gangrene, scrofula, and burns from gunpowder.

In his prescriptions are found no opiates, seldom any

metallic preparations, but almost wholly simple insignificant remedies such as old women might have prescribed without fear. The chief work of the physician was "to purge the belly" which in addition to bleeding formed a large part of his practice. Dr. Holmes says in an evaluation of Stafford's work, "Whatever we think of his practice, it is not certain that his patients would have done better under the treatment of the present day. Some difference of course in our favor...but slight cases of disease would commonly get well under his treatment, and severe ones die under ours."⁵³

Another Englishman whose ideas bore a lasting influence on the care of children was John Locke. His Thoughts on Education had a wide circulation in the colonies and his teachings were eagerly put into practice. Old almanacs, the best sellers save the Bible, contained many pages devoted to his precepts.⁵⁴ From him come such suggestions as keeping children sparingly clothed both winter and summer saying, "Tis use alone hardens it, and makes it more able to endure the cold." He advised mothers to have children run about by day without caps and sleep at night without covering the head. Most widely used were his suggestions concerning the use of cold water. He said shoes should be "so thin, that they might leak and let in water, whenever he comes near it." This wide use of cold water was to harden and toughen the child. He states that "I have known it us'd every Night with very good Success, and that all the Winter, without the Omitting it so much as one Night in extreme cold Weather, when thiek Ice cover'd the Water, the Child bathed his

Legs and Feet in it, though he was of an Age not big enough to rub and wipe himself." This must have been an heroic treatment for the shivering little Puritan. Drink, he says, should be "Small Beer" which must not be taken between meals unless the child had first eaten a piece of bread. Strong liquor should not be used except as a cordial or by a doctor's prescription. Lastly, he adds that the bed should be hard and of quilts rather than feathers.⁵⁵

A great similarity is noted in the recipes used in New England which trace their origin to England, and those found in Penn's Book of Phisick. These recipes were perhaps after all gathered by his wife since several of them start with the words, "My Husband William Penn." Assuming that these words indicate Penn's authorship it might be possible that Mrs. Penn was responsible for the rest of the collection. In these recipes the same wide use is made of herbs, wine, powdered toads, snakes, snails, and crabs as was noted in those used by John Winthrop and so many of the New England household physicians. The same resort is also made to "quick swallows", dung, and other revolting mixtures. His book contains one recipe with the heading "Sir Walter Rawllis Pomatum", which certainly shows its English origin.⁵⁶ One notes a similarity also in Dr. Stafford's prescriptions and those of John Tennant; for instance the practice of wearing "Skin girt tight on your Stomach and Belly, with the Furr next you." Both made an extensive use of toads, worms, snakes, and dung. From this it may be assumed that remedies did not differ greatly among the settlers.⁵⁷

Diseases in different sections of the country were usually similar. To be sure geography made some difference, yet many diseases which were epidemic such as smallpox, measles, fevers, diphtheria, influenza, and yellow fever were common to all parts of the country. Those most prevalent in New England according to Winterbotham in his History of America were asthma, atrophy, catarrh, colic, consumption, rheumatism, and fevers.⁵⁸ Josselyn wrote that "Black Pox, the Spotted Fever, the Gripping of the Guts, the Dropse, and the Sciatica," were the "Killing Diseases in New England."⁵⁹ Fevers were believed to come from the exhalation of marshes, decayed vegetables, old rotting timber, and stagnant water.⁶⁰ Laws of sanitation were almost unknown, there was no drainage, and disinfection was still in its infancy so that it is no wonder that death rates were high. The New England colonist might well say with Sir Thomas Browne: "Considering the thousand doors that lead to death I do thank my God that we can die but once."

Epidemics took a terrible toll in human life in all the colonies. Those most feared in New England were smallpox, measles, diphtheria, influenza, fevers and dysentery.⁶¹ An early writer lists the year 1756 as one of great sickness in Massachusetts. During that time dysentery prevailed to an alarming extent, especially among children. In one parish forty-two were buried in seven weeks, a mortality that would have depopulated the entire parish at that rate in three years.⁶² Smallpox was especially dreaded. The disease appeared in New England in the early years of the seventeenth century and con-

tinued to exact a heavy toll throughout the colonial period. Massachusetts tried early to check the spread of infectious diseases but they continued in spite of all efforts.⁶³

Examinations of diaries reveal many references to smallpox. Both Sewall and Marshall mentioned it frequently.⁶⁴ John Marshall stated in his diary that it raged for almost a year in Boston at one time. 1702 was a year of sore distress, and in October a day of fasting and prayer was appointed throughout the province, but by February the disease began to abate.⁶⁵ Boyle's Journal of Occurrences in Boston states that in 1764 during an epidemic of smallpox the Selectmen "have been very vigilant in endeavoring to put a stop to the distemper, but 'tis feared by many that it will be impracticable to prevent its Spreading thro the Town" as it had already appeared in seven families. Many obtained consent from the selectmen to inoculate. This form of protection proved a successful check to the epidemic. Out of 649 persons inoculated in Charlestown only two died.⁶⁶

If life was hard for grown people, it was doubly so for children. The ordeal of baptism was performed almost as soon as the child had been ushered into his bleak surroundings. Unfortunate was the child born in winter.⁶⁷ However freezing the weather and the water, the Puritan took no chances for the soul of the little one. Better that the frail body should perish than the soul! Sewall records for Jan. 22, 1692/3: "A very extraordinary Storm by reason of the falling and driving Snow. Few Women could go to Meeting. Our two Maids and myself

there. A child named Alexander was baptized in the Afternoon."⁶⁸
 When his son John was born he was carried to the church the
 fourth day after his birth.⁶⁹ Franklin was baptized on the
 very day of his birth.⁷⁰ The Church, in exacting prompt baptism,
 may well be blamed for part of the frightfully high infant
 mortality of the time.⁷¹

The child who was tough enough to withstand the
 rigors of baptism in the freezing church had a fair chance
 to survive, although he was by no means free from danger.⁷²
 Diphtheria awaited him with no known method of cure or pre-
 vention. There was always smallpox as common as measles.
 Putrid fevers, influenzas, and malignant sore throats carried
 off children by the scores. If he survived or escaped these,
 he might still become a victim of consumption, once leading all
 others as the cause of death.⁷³ A Deacon of a church in New
 Hampshire records, "From Jan. 9, 1741 to Dec. 31, 1742. In
 the year past have Died 95 persons." From this number 70 were
 listed as "child died." Most of them died from "putrid sore
 throat", much like the diphtheria of the present time.⁷⁴
 Avoidable accidents caused the death of many others.

Boils, though not fatal, caused much trouble according
 to Anna Green Winslow, the Boston school girl. In her diary she
 complains of boils saying, "My fingers are not the only part of
 me that has suffer'd with sores within this fortnight; for I
 have had an ugly great boil upon my right hip & about a dozen
 small ones...I am at present swath'd hip & thigh, as Samson
 smote the Philistines, but my soreness is near over."⁷⁵ The

Sewall diary has many comments concerning measles and smallpox in the family. The minister was always present if the illness was considered at all serious, but the physician was seldom in attendance for children.⁷⁶

Diseases at that time perhaps differed little from those of the present time, yet they can scarcely be recognized under the curious names they bore. Old diaries are full of names of such afflictions as "violence, Poyson, Megrum, a fret of the head, giddiness of the head, and Lethargy."⁷⁷ From 1735 to 1763 in a certain New England town the following maladies were fatal: "King's Evil, a painful disorder of the head; Long Sickness (probably consumption) Mania, Mortification; Sore Mouth, Strangury, Throat Distemper, Nervous Headache, Schirrus-hardening of the gland, Violence, Worms, Decay of Nature, Fever, Nervous, putrid and mixed, Gravel and Madness."⁷⁸

The four great mainstays in treatment of diseases, however trivial or severe they might be were bleeding, blistering, physio, and sweating. Several of them were combined if the case seemed obstinate as in fevers. One doctor recommended bleeding and purging at once, and if the pain persisted bleeding was resorted to again on the third day as was also the purge. If this did not effect a cure the treatment was repeated the third time. If disease and patient held out against all this the last refuge was a blister near the seat of the pain. Pleurisy was treated in the same way. The same physician urged patients to take treatment while they yet had strength "to go Thro' all the necessary Operations," and truly this must have been indispensable.⁷⁹

Dr. Stafford cautioned "That you doe not let Blood, but in a pleurisie or contusion, and that necessitated",⁸⁰ which seems more modern than the wide spread practice of other physicians to recommend bleeding for most of the common disorders. When doctors used this method so freely it is little wonder that household physicians resorted to it for most of the sickness they treated. New England mothers relied on bleeding in treating croup,⁸¹ while in Rhode Island it was used for rickets,⁸² and it was even known to have been used with good results for restoring sight and hearing. The barber was as much of a specialist in this form of surgery as the physician, and it was not uncommon to find barber shops displaying the sign "cupper and leacher." The Indians did their cupping by placing a buffalo horn at the place to be bled, the air was then sucked through the end of the horn which made the flesh numb so an incision could be made less painful.

Blistering was not as commonly used as bleeding. To raise a blister, Indians used punk or touchwood, while the white men used the Spanish fly. This preparation was used for Washington in his last sickness. Not many could afford such expensive treatment. In its raw form Spanish fly cost from five to sixteen dollars a pound. An inventive genius in the early nineteenth century, seeing the poor cut off from this blessing, through experiments of his own found that potato bugs killed in vinegar and dried in the sun brought about the same effect.⁸³ Sewall mentions "A blistering plaister at the neck, Drops of Lavander in the Mouth and neck chaf'd with Oyle of Amber," as

treatment for palsy.⁸⁴

In addition to bleeding and blistering, the patient was dosed with large quantities of physic of which there was an abundance in every home. Locke in his Thoughts on Education advised against giving physic to children for every indisposition, and ventured the remark that "it is safer to leave them wholly to Nature than to put 'em into the Hands of one forward to tamper, or that think Children are to be cur'd in Ordinary Distress by anything but Diet."⁸⁵

From infancy to old age, so much physic was used that some of the boldest victims put their expressions of revolt against the horrible doses of the day into print by the publication of a Most Desperate Booke written against the taking of Phisick, but the book was promptly ordered burned, and the doses continued in vigor and quantity.⁸⁶ Perhaps the Sabbath afforded a temporary escape from the practice of dosing. At any rate a writer in describing the Puritans, humorously hinted that "Upon the Sabbath, they'd no Physick take, Lest it should worke, and so the Sabbath breake."⁸⁷

Accidents were frequent and their treatment formed a large part of the practice in colonial homes. To relieve pain from burns, the injured member was thrust into a snow bank. Just what form this would take during hot weather was not stated.⁸⁸ A recipe taken from Josslyn's New England's Rarities Discovered explains the method an Indian, "Webb", used in treating burns. "She first made a strong decoction of Alder Bark...Letting it drop upon the Sore, which would smok notably with it; then she

Playstered it with the Bark of Board Pine or Hemlock Tree, boyled soft and stampd betwixt two stones, till it was as thin as brown Paper, and of the same Colour, She annointed the Playster with Soyles Oyle, and the Sore likewise then she laid it on warm...⁸⁹ This same recipe has been found word for word in other books⁹⁰ and is almost identical with one that Governor Winthrop received from Dr. Stafford who suggests that one "Take y^e Inner green Rine of Elder, in latins Sambucus Sempervive, and Mosse that groweth on an old thact howse top...boyle them in stale (lotium) boyle clean away, & straine it very well; putt new herbs and (lotium) as before, boyle that likewise away, and straine it as before, Then to that oyle adde barrowes grease untill it come to be an Oyntment, with which anynt a paper, and lay it to y^e burning anynting the place with a feather."⁹¹ Josselyn instructs home physicians to use frogs "of a glistering brass colour, and very fat." "This treatment," he wrote, "is excellent for Burns, and Scaldings, to take out the fire, and heal them, leaving no Soar; and is also very good to take away any Inflammation."⁹²

Methods of treating poison were varied and interesting. Unicorn's horns ground and used in powders were good for poison. These must have been hard to obtain although Winthrop had one sent to him as a gift and prized it highly.⁹³ Tobacco was considered an infallible remedy and was used in all sections of the country. One writer states that it "is good against Poyson, and taketh away the malignitie thereof, if the juice be given to drink, or the wounds made by venomous beasts be washed therewith."⁹⁴

Gunshot wounds were frequent and were treated with sassafras chewed to a pulp.⁹⁵ Another remedy was to "make a strong decoction of Bark of Alder, pour of it into the Wound, and drink thereof."⁹⁶ This treatment had a wide use in many sections of the country.⁹⁷ Penn in his Book of Physiok suggested using the scraping of the inside of Spanish leather to stop bleeding.⁹⁸ Others treated deep cuts by binding them with green grass.

Bark of butternut was a good antidote for rattlesnake bite. In many places the leaves and bark of white oak was preferred.⁹⁹ Cupping and sucking the wound and filling the incisions with salt and gunpowder was another form of treatment. In some places the body of the snake was split open, cut to pieces and laid on the wound to draw out the poison. Sometimes the whole serpent was burned to ashes to avenge the injury he had done.¹⁰⁰ St. Andrew's Cross was another efficient remedy. The roots were reduced to powder and taken in doses of sixty grains or a strong decoction was made of the leaves and branches.¹⁰¹

In some places three doses of vinegar were a cure for hydrophobia,¹⁰² while in other localities Venice Treacle, considered an antidote against all poisons, was used. Rush recommended cutting or burning around the wounded part in addition to copious bleeding, sweating, and cordials.¹⁰³

Boiled bark of slippery elm "tyed to ye Joynt" was good for broken bones and dislocated joints.¹⁰⁴ Dr. Stafford advised one to "Take ye barke of Elme, or Witch Hazzle; cutt away the Outward part, & Cutt ye Inward redd barke small, and

and boyle it in Water, till it be thicke that it will rope: Pound it very well, and lay of it hott, backe and all upon ye Bone or Joynt, and tye it on: or with ye Mussilage of it, and bole Armeniack make a playster and lay it on."¹⁰⁵ Cut joints were treated with cat's tallow, and sprains were cured with home-rendered lard mixed with striped wormwood.¹⁰⁶ Anna Green Winslow submitted to "a plaister" for a boil. Under this treatment her boil was cured, "but", she added, "I have a new boil, which is under poultice, & tomorrow I am to undergo another seasoning with Globe Salt."¹⁰⁷

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CHAPTER II

THE APOTHECARY

Herbs held an important place in the kitchen dispensary. They were easily obtained, and it was believed they possessed mysterious virtues. The plants known as simples were herbs which had an individual quality or an element which constituted a single remedy.¹ In every home were found bunches of catnip, pennyroyal, St. John's wort, spurge, hazel, poppy seed, and parsley.² Such prime favorites as ale hoof, garlic, elder, sage, rue, and saffron may be added to this list. So many cures were ascribed to saffron that it was held by Cotton Mather to be the most useful of all medical plants.³

It was to the herb garden that the busy housewife turned if one became ill in the family. It gave solace in time of sickness and formed a pleasing variety to an otherwise commonplace cooking. Colonists did not at first find in the new country all the herbs and simples to which they had been accustomed at home. The Indians taught them the use of others that answered the purpose until more desirable ones from England could be secured. From the fields they obtained ivy berries, acorns, stones of sloes, unripe hazelnuts, daisy roots, strawberry strings, blackberry bark, and many others.⁴

The rules for gathering and drying herbs were many and manifold. The phases of the moon were gravely noted during this process or the value of the cure was lost. After the herbs had been carefully picked and dried they were taken to the attic and

hung there in fragrant bunches, awaiting the needs of the family.⁵

Tobacco, because of its many medicinal qualities, was held in high esteem. Josselyn recommended its use either in a powdered form or in a decoction of boiling water for burns and scalds.⁶ Gerard devoted several pages of his Herball to its uses. The smoke from the dry leaves "suckt into the stomach and thrust forth againe at the nostrills" expelled "rheumes and aches in any part of the bodie." People suffering from decayed and aching teeth, placed small wads of tobacco leaves in the cavity and rubbed the teeth and gums with a cloth dipped in tobacco juice.⁷ Some used tobacco for stubborn cases of gout or ague, others to relieve hunger and weariness, or to neutralize the effects of drunkenness. Its greatest virtue however was its use as an antidote for all poisons.⁸

Another plant accounted almost as useful as tobacco was the native cranberry. It was believed very useful in treatment of fevers. Besides using cranberries as medicine, the colonists discovered that they were edible as well and considered them a "delicate Sauce, especially for roasted Mutton."⁹ Often herbs were used and administered to the sick in the form of tea. Catnip, pennyroyal, camomile, and wormwood were some of the most important used in this way.¹⁰ To stop bleeding from cuts and bruises, household physicians relied on cobwebs rather than on herbs. The dry dusty centers of puffballs served the purpose equally well.¹¹

The home was the source of never failing remedies such as vinegar, wine, tallow, and salt pork. Vinegar was

believed the "soverignst thing on 'art for a fainting fit." Another restorative in high favor was white wine. Salt pork was an infallible source of help for healing wounds and for sore throats.¹² Both white people and Indians made use of tallow obtained from the wild animals of the forest. Josselyn mentions tallow of this kind as the basic element for many salves and ointments.¹³

Perhaps the most interesting and pleasant of all the household duties was that of brewing bitters and drinks, and the distillation of the various waters, syrups, and juleps for the family use. Some of the old homes had a room set aside for this purpose and it was here that the mistress and the daughters of the house brought to completion the task that begins with gathering the branches of aromatic herbs from fields and gardens. No pains were spared to make these various drinks and bitters. They plucked and pulled, stamped and shredded, powdered and distilled regardless of work or trouble.¹⁴

By the middle of the century it became possible to secure many of the more complicated medicaments from the shops in large cities. Apothecaries frequently advertised their supplies in the leading papers of the time. The Boston Gazette for Dec. 2, 1765, contained one of this kind. "William Coffin, jun. next door to the governor's, has to sell by wholesale or Retail, a general Assortment of Drugs, and Medicines, Salt-Petre in Casks of 100 wt...Country Doctors and Traders may be supplied by Letter, with the usual Fidelity and dispatch, as if present themselves."

Supplies for the medicine chest and surgeons' instruments were also advertised in many of the Boston papers. The Boston News Letter for March 17/24, 1712, contained several of this kind. At one shop could be had "Urinals, Lanoets, Plaister-boxes, Salvatory's...Fresh druggs and Medicines, both Galenical, and Chymical." Another shop advertised among other things, "an Excellent Perfume, good against Deafness, and make Hair grow as the directions set forth 1s 6d the bottle." Still another dealer advertised the services of a "Journey Man Apothecary" who had just arrived from London.

Shops did a thriving business importing drugs from Europe. The Boston News Letter in 1760, carried Benjamin Church's advertisement of a "Choice assortment of Drugs and Medicines...just imported from London." John Peck advertised his drugs in the Boston Gazette. He informed the public that he had just imported from London, drugs, medicine, and all kinds of groceries which he sold cheap for cash or short credit. Some of the preparations in the allotment were: "Turlington's Balsam, Stoughton's and Daffy's Elixer, British Oyle, Fateman's Drops, Hooper's, Anderson's & Lockyer's Pills, Golden Spirits, Sourvey Grass, Lavender and Hungary Water, and Hill's Balsam of Honey. This shopkeeper, in addition to the drugs and medicines, sold groceries and "most kinds of Surgeon's Instruments."¹⁵

Among the tools and equipment of every kitchen dispensary were found kettles of brass or iron which swung from log poles, and standing conveniently near were great green bottled which were sturdy enough to hold the most generous of the family

spring tonics. Some of these old brass kettles came with the first settlers to the new world and were among their most prized possessions. Later others were made in this country of sheet or hammered brass and wrought into shape by hand.¹⁶ Some times these kettles were sold with other kitchen articles at public auction as the Boston Gazette for June 28, 1762 advertises, "To be Sold at Public Vendue...A copper Brewing or Soap boiling Kettle..."¹⁷

Companion to the brewing kettle was the ever present mortar and pestle with which medical condiments were ground. In the centuries gone by its use was so common that the mortar and pestle is still the symbol for apothecaries.¹⁸ Occasionally mortars and pestles were made of wood. This was the case of one owned by Ichabod Potter. At the appraisal of his estate at the time of his death it was described as his "favorite Mortar of the same hard wood costing 15s."¹⁹ The inventory of the estate of Pardon Tillinghast, considered well-to-do, showed a Bell Metal Mortar valued at 8s, glass bottles, and a glass cup at 5s.²⁰

Mortars and pestles besides being an important item in wills, also figured in legal controversies. In the late seventeenth century Ann Pudeator was tried for witchcraft, and one of the most damning bits of evidence produced at this trial was a mortar which she had borrowed from a neighbor. The husband of this neighbor testified that his wife had fallen ill immediately after Mistress Pudeator had returned the mortar.²¹

Mortars and pestles were considered an important part of the equipment of every home. Judge Sewall, much pleased over his

prospective son-in-law, wished to give a rich wedding gift. He gave a complete furnishing for the home and included in the outfit "A strong Brass Mortar, that will hold about a Quart with a Pestle."²²

Prescriptions in those days were varied and complicated. One of the most popular which held sway for over a century was for Venice Treacle, supposedly invented by Nero's physician, and published in dispensaries till within the nineteenth century. Twelve vipers in white wine, opium, spices, licorice, red roses, tops of germander and St. John's wort combined with twenty other herbs, and the juice of rough sloes, mixed with honey triple the weight of all the dry spices, formed the nasty mixture. It was often used as an antidote for poison.²³

King's Evil was greatly feared since Queen Ann's healing touch was no longer available. Compounds and salves were concocted to take its place. "For this great Misfortune" one doctor recommended using the fine powder of a clean sponge which had been dried well in an earthen pot, taking for a dose as much "as will lye upon a Shilling, Morning and Evening in warm Asses-Milk." In obstinate cases the patient was required to follow the treatment for three months.²⁴ Another authority advised the use of a salve of a bushel of foxglove flowers stamped fine and "boyl'd" an hour with frequent additions of butter.²⁵

Snail pottage or snail water had a wide use in colonial practice. Women of New England and those of the more southern colonies used the same ingredients and prepared them in the same manner.²⁶ To make this "admirable and most famous

Snail water", snails were first washed in "Small Beer" and then put into an oven to dry slowly. After the snails had been well bruised in a mortar they were added to a mixture of earth worms and salt. Children suffering from rickets or fits were dosed with this preparation.²⁷

In the making of salves and ointments, women seemed to have an almost uncanny intuition of the value of ingredients. On the long list of favorites used in making these staples, mutton tallow leads all the rest in popularity. An application of tallow alone was an old cure for chapped and roughened hands. Skunk fat was an excellent ointment to reduce the pain and swelling in "joynts". A favorite salve was made with a mixture of wax and oil to which was added rosin and lard. Liniments were almost as important in the kitchen dispensary as salves. A pint of strong vinegar, a pint of soft soap, a handful of salt, and a tablespoon of sal nitre made a preparation popular in the old time kitchen.²⁸

Colonists in Rhode Island who suffered from "Gout or Rumatick Disorder" followed the directions of this recipe: "Take a Pound of Bittersweet Root, and a Pound of Saxapirilla Root ye Bark of ye Root of Each and a pound of Sweet firm Boughs one Pound of Black Birch Bark Pound them well in a Mortar Let it Soak all night in Eight Quarts of Water then Boil it away to two quarts then strain it out put in a pound of Sugar Just Boil and Skim it then take it off and put in a quart of West Indian Rum." A dose of one gill taken an hour before each meal for thirty days eased the pain.²⁹

A minister-doctor in Winsor, Connecticut, in 1769 gave exact directions for treatment of rickets. A syrup of black cherries was given in doses of two spoonful, two or three times a day, besides the heroic treatment of dipping the naked child into cold water "in ye morning, head foremost." The child was then placed in the cradle and allowed to sweat at least half an hour.³⁰ This treatment is traceable to Lock's Thoughts on Education.

Angelic Snuff was a concoction used in treating palsy, apoplexy, and gout. It was especially helpful for migrains, a malady from which many suffered.³¹ There were many remedies warranted to "cheer the heart, drive melancholy, cure one pensive, to Comfort the Brain, and for the Giddiness of ye head."³² Little quilted bags containing powdered rosemary flowers, cloves, mace, and nutmegs, sprinkled with malmsey and laid on the head of the sufferer made a pleasant and aromatic cure.³³ More obstinate cases were treated with stronger remedies. A recipe for "Water of Life" which was warranted to "strengthen the Spirit, Brain, Heart, Liver, and Stomack" called for ingredients which would strain the capacity of the largest kettles of today. To some two dozen herbs "tormented and bruised," spices and wine were added and allowed to steep for a week. Then the "loyns and legs of an old Coney," a young capon, the red flesh and the sinews of a leg of mutton, four young chickens, twelve larks, and the yolks of twelve eggs were mixed with bread, treacle, and muscadine. The whole mass of ingredients was then allowed to distill.³⁴ It was taken by itself, or with

ale, beer, or wine.

A sulphur and molasses or "treacle and molasses" mixture was the most popular of all spring tonics. Sage and East Indian molasses was a close second. A concoction of rhubarb and dandelions was another favorite. Older people were partial to dandelion wine which accomplished marvelous cures and tickled the palates as well.³⁵ Another prime favorite was Mithridate, compounded by following elaborate rules which King Mithridates himself could scarcely have recognized from his own simple formula of twenty leaves of rue, pounded with two figs, two dried walnuts, and a grain of salt. Rue itself had so many virtues that one wonders why it was not on the daily menu and thus insure perpetual good health.³⁶

In order to prevent colds it was suggested to "wash your Neck, and behind your Ears, every Morning, in cold Water."³⁷ A "Medison for the Cough" was made by placing a few handfuls of new hay and bay salt in boiling water. The "Medison" was unusual since it was not intended for internal use. It afforded relief to the patient if his "feet bee bathed and washed, and soaked therein."³⁸ The primary motive perhaps in both of these was the quite modern desire for cleanliness. "Consumptive coffs" were cured by drinking a decoction made of the warm milk of a red cow, shredded horehound, and lignum vitae. The external treatment consisted in rubbing the swelling with a stone which had been rubbed where a hog had rubbed.³⁹ Mouse-ear had many healing qualities chief among them was the power to "heale all wounds both inward and outward."⁴⁰

Throat distemper, much like the diphtheria of the present day, was greatly dreaded. It required the skill of a physician to prescribe a cure. The use of honey with sharp vinegar and alum "dissolved therein" was recommended.⁴¹ There were many outbreaks of this epidemic which were highly fatal to children.

Treatments for ear ache and deafness were similar in most of the colonies. Great reliance was placed on fats and oils of various kinds, and the juice from a roasted onion. In the south "Oyle" of rattlesnakes was a basic remedy, while in the north sufferers resorted to the "roasted fat of hedge-hogs." "Black woolle" or cotton was placed over the ears as a protection from cold drafts. These treatments were effective for one sufferer stated that "with these Remedys ye Pain Ceased," and another vouches that if the treatment were repeated six or seven times one would have "Reason to applaud the Medicine."⁴²

Among children itch was a common disease and was treated with an ointment of fishworms, hogs' lard, turpentine, and brandy.⁴³ Boils, however persistent, surrendered to a dose of globe salt which one victim said was "a disagreeable potion," but proved a cure for there were no new eruptions and a "great alteration for the better in those I had before."⁴⁴ Children suffering from worms submitted to an application of tobacco leaves soaked in vinegar and applied warm to the stomach. The author of this recipe added consolingly that it would "make the Worms much sicker than it doth the Patient."⁴⁵ A wash for old sores which "cureth wonderfully" was made of St. John's wort and

quicklime mixed with rain water.⁴⁶ Yellow jaundice was treated with a drink made of boiled sweet milk, enough bay salt or fine saltpeter to make it taste brackish, and saffron sifted through a fine linen cloth.⁴⁷

Hair was made to grow "long, thick, and curled in a very short time" by following the simple directions of an old time recipe. "Take a half pound of Aqua Mellisa in the Spring-time of the Year, warm a little of it every Morning in a Saucer, and tie a little Sponge to a big Box oombe, and dip it in the water and therewith moisten the roots of the hair in Combin it." Another hair restorative was made from the juice of "Vine Twigs that twist like Wire" added to three spoonful of honey.

Pain from aching teeth was alleviated by filling the hollow spaces with soft mastick. If it failed to produce results, a tooth from a dead man would "presently suppress the pains of the Teeth." A sage leaf rubbed over the teeth and a mouth wash of "faire water" and lemon juice was considered an excellent way to preserve the teeth. Present day halitosis was foreshadowed by the "Stinking Breath" of colonial days. A drink made from the flowers of rosemary seethed in white wine gave one a sweet breath. The drink had the added attraction of being a good face wash as well.

It occasionally happened that the toiling colonists were troubled with insomnia. A common practice was to "Bruise a handful of Aniseed and steep them in Red Rose Water, & make it up in little bags, & binde one of them to each Nostrill." Another method was to "Chop Chamomile & Crumbs of Brown Bread

small and boyle them with white Wine Vinegar." The ointment produced in this way was spread on a cloth and bound hot to the soles of the feet. Still another solution for the trouble was the application of rose leaves to the temples and hard boiled eggs to the nape of the neck.⁴⁸

In the treatment of palsy, the strong smell of a fox was accounted "exceedingly sovereign," although many people preferred using powder of mustard and bethony leaves.⁴⁹ An attack of fits or convulsions could be postponed, or prevented entirely, by taking three drops of cat's blood in a spoonful of warm milk to which had been added a grain of musk.⁵⁰

White wine was used with surprising frequency in the simples and benefits concocted in the kitchen dispensary. Many interesting recipes were given for the brewing of this household necessity. It was used more frequently than any other beverage and became almost a basic in the preparation of the old cures and medicines. Recipes for it were found in all old cook books, doctor books, and frequently in almanacs.

A feeble attempt was being made at disinfection even at this early time. During fever epidemics, gunpowder, niter, and tobacco were kept burning and vinegar was sprinkled about. Many believed themselves protected by carrying pieces of tarred rope or smelling bottles of vinegar in their pockets.⁵¹

Few of these old cures were administered with any degree of exactness. The cast iron stomachs of our ancestors were above such petty detail. Taken a cupful at a time, they were given generously and thoroughly.⁵² One patient was directed

to swallow a "quarter of a pound of new butter made into round bullets" as a dose.⁵³ Another as a remedy for "Gripping in the Belly" was to drink a gallon of warm whey or a gallon of warm water as fast as he could swallow it and to top it off with a "purge of Mallows", and "Syrup of Peach Blossoms".⁵⁴ Still another patient was told to use a decoction of herbs and powders mixed with four quarts of spring water and as a dose to drink "7 or 8 spoonfulls in the morning." After he had fasted an hour he was to continue drinking until he had taken it all.⁵⁵

Doses were as frequent as they were generous. They were taken from early morning until late at night, a "good draught at any time" or as "oft as you please". If doses were generous they were also taken with indefinite directions. Medicines were not measured with the precision of the chemists of today. Doses were far from exact when people were directed to take "the bighth of a walnut, or enough to cover a French crown", "the weight of a shilling", "the bighth of a Turkey's Egg", and "a pretty draught". These were some of the lax directions found in the old prescriptions. Favorite of them all was "enough to lie on a pen knife point".⁵⁶

The simple and credulous of the common people had not yet emerged from the superstition of the seventeenth century. Winthrop at an earlier period wrote, "I have of late tryed the following magneticall experiment with infallible success. Pare the patients nayles when the fever is coming on; and put the parings into a little bagge of fine linen or sarenet; and tye that about a live eeles necke, in a tubbe of water. The eele

will dye and the patient will recover."⁵⁷ If an enlightened man like Governor Winthrop could believe such things, little could be expected of the common people even at this later period. People in some localities still held a lingering belief in witch craft. Many were governed by emotion rather than by reasoning, and by fear instead of facts.⁵⁸

All manner of foolish and harmful methods of healing the sick were practiced. Tumors and wens were cured by rubbing with dead toads. Poultices were made of dung, the brains of some animals, or vipers' tongues soaked in wine. Cataract was treated by blowing into the eyes the ashes of a coal black cat's head, burnt in a new pot.⁵⁹ Warts were cured by tying them with a string which was afterwards buried, or by rubbing them with a used dish cloth and then hiding the cloth. Others rid themselves of the pests by placing balls of cobwebs on the wart and then setting fire to the mass.⁶⁰ Ignorant nurses dared not give worm-seed to children without first bruising the seed in a mortar, for fear that whole seed would breed worms in the bowels of the child.⁶¹

Medicine in the seventeenth century was allied with astrology and by the eighteenth this belief was still strong in the minds of many. The condition of the sun and moon was gravely noted when gathering herbs and simples. Many drugs were believed to be powerless at certain times owing to the influence of planets.⁶² An old almanac for March, 1764, contained a warning written by Nathaniel Ames: "Now let the Ladies that have got to Bed safely lie patiently longer than usual if they love their

own Lives".⁶³ Medicine was carefully concocted with the same regard paid to the position of the planets. Fevers were treated with "black dog ile rendered in the dark of the moon".⁶⁴ Stones from the eyes of crawfish were used in treating heart burn. The cure had no value unless the stones were removed while the sun was in cancer.⁶⁵

Charms to ward off disease were used everywhere. Sewall at an earlier time wrote, "Cousin Flint came to us. She said we ought to lay scarlet on the Child's head for that it had received some harm."⁶⁶ This same belief was common during the childhood of Abigail Adams. Babies before they were christened must be carried upstairs with silver and gold in their hands besides having the scarlet on their heads.⁶⁷ In 1716 a "Lyon of Barbary" was exhibited in Boston. Some of his hair was cut by the keeper and sent to Wait Winthrop to be placed as a strengthening tonic under the armpits of his sickly little grandchild.⁶⁸ People kept immune from rheumatism by carrying a horse-chestnut in the pocket. The chestnut presently became black with the pains which would otherwise have attacked the joints. Nightmare was prevented by placing the shoes with the soles up under the bed. Many old people wore little bags of sulphur suspended from their necks to ward off disease germs. Camphor gum and asafoetida accomplished the same purpose. Teeth were kept in a sound and healthy condition by biting into the backbone of a black snake or by cutting the finger nails on Friday. A mashed garlic placed on the ball of the thumb was a never failing cure for toothache.⁶⁹

Concoctions to cure diseases were much more revolting than the charms to ward them off. Snakes, toads, and many other loathsome ingredients were used. There was a belief that the cure must be as strong as the disease. There was a certain limit to the amount of bleeding and blistering that could be done. Apparently there was none to the imagination of the medicine mixers.⁷⁰ Many of the most enlightened believed that a hidden virtue was always found under a forbidding aspect as the jewel in the reptile's ugly head. Quite a common belief was that disease was personified by an evil nature and to expel it from the body odious things such as worms, vipers, and toads must be used.⁷¹

The flesh, fat, heart, and tongue of rattlesnakes were much used in the colonies both north and south. Sometimes the flesh was fed to the infirm in broths or the gall might be mixed with chalk and made into "snake bals". The heart was usually dried and powdered and used with wine or beer as a drink to cure the venom of the snake. His fat was "very soveraigne for frozen limbs and sprains", while his oil was given for gout.⁷² People were advised to have handy at all times a piece of dried snake to be used in drawing out thorns or a corn.⁷³ "Oil of Earthworms" and "Emulsion of Dried Rattlesnakes" were placed on the market by the middle of the century. Both of these preparations were popular in treating consumption.⁷⁴

The custom of using worms, snails, and dung was common among even the most enlightened. Captain Sam Ingersoll, of Salem, used this prescription for "A Metson to make a mans heare groe

when he is bald". To make the "Metson", one must "Take some fier flies & sum Redd Wormes & black snayls and sum hume bees and dri them and pound them & mixt them in milk or water".⁷⁵

An old recipe for curing an "Aitch or Bruse" called for several handful of each of eight different herbs, some frankincense, new coudung, hendung, and butter boiled and beaten together with snails. Nutmegs, cloves and cinnamon were added to give the mixture a "good sent".⁷⁶ Pills made of turpentine and deer's dung mixed in equal quantities were given to people suffering from consumption. "Bloody Flux" was treated with a drink made by boiling "Calcen'd Deers Horn" with plantain leaves.⁷⁷

In times of epidemic people took medicine to keep themselves immune. A concoction known as "Black Powder" was commonly used as a safeguard. Toads were gathered in March and placed alive in an earthen pot which was turned upside down on a bed of burning charcoal. After the toads had been thoroughly burned they were pounded in a mortar. The powder obtained in this way was given to make the patient sweat. An oil was made from toads in much the same way. Toads were kept fasting for several days so that they might spew out all their earth. They were then boiled in a pint of "Oyle" and the liquid squeezed from the mass and mixed with wax. It made a companion medicine to be used with the "Black Powder" for King's Evil. The recipe closed with the convincing words, "By this Course there is no doubt of a cure by God's assistance."⁷⁸

Many household pharmacists followed almost the same method in making "Swallows Oyle". Twelve young swallows were

taken from the nest and beaten so small that one could not tell what "they bee". Numerous herbs were added and the whole mixture heated to the boiling point. After nine days the mass was warmed and strained. It was then ready for use.

In some parts of the country coral, pearls, amber, and the tips of deer's horn were mixed with crab eyes and claws. After the mixture had been reduced to a powder it was given to "expell Infectious Disease". A powder made from young rooks was often given for "Convolltion ffeets". The rooks were dried whole in an oven and beaten to a powder. Eye trouble was relieved by dropping the liquid from white shelled snails into the eyes several times a day.⁷⁹

The familiar panaceas of modern days had their prototypes in colonial times. One of the most widely advertised remedies of that time was "Mary Bannister's Spirits of Venice Treacle." The recipe used in making the preparation was a family secret. After Mrs. Bannister's death her sons and daughter took over the business. In 1731 Edward Bannister advertised in a Philadelphia newspaper that he could supply these drops. Ten years later Humphrey Wady in a Boston paper cautioned the public to beware of imitations "there being no Person but myself and wife in New England that ever my Mother Bannister communicated the secret to."⁸⁰ The daughter also employed up-to-date methods to call the attention of the public to her business. Her advertisement stated that "Mary Bannister's Sovereign Spirit of Venice Treacle, Sold for her by David Bremthall and Francis Knowles is now, she being dead, rightly prepared by her Daughter,

who employs the same Person to sell it, and no other in the city of Philadelphia."

Mrs. Bannister did not have a monopoly on the sale of Venice Treacle. A Philadelphia paper of 1721 contained an advertisement stating that "Elizabeth Warnaty's Right and Genuine Spirit of Venice Treacle, truly and only prepared by her in Philadelphia, who was the original and First Promoter of it in this City, is still sold by her at her Shop in High Street.." ⁸¹

Itch and scaldhead due perhaps to improper care of the hair were very common. By the middle of the eighteenth century many preparations for their cure were placed on the market. Women turned eagerly to the newspapers for aid in the sale of their salves, ointments, and drinks, and all manner of wordy advertisements found their way before the public. Hannah Chapman advertised in a Boston paper that she made a mixture that by its "very smell would cure the itch or any other breaking out." Three years later it was found that she became the wife of Matthew Kitchin. Household duties did not interfere with Mrs. Kitchin's profession, as she continued to make and sell her "smelling nector" for many years.

Frequently women experienced competition in the sale and manufacture of their preparations. The Boston Evening Post in 1762 contained an advertisement stating that "Agnes Gordon, the Daughter of Dr. John Tucker, living in Mrs. Harrod's house, the Baker, makes a mixture that will cure the Itch or any other Breaking out. There be many that pretend to make it, who know nothing about it, near Charleston Ferry."

Advertisements such as these also appeared in New York and Philadelphia papers. Catherine Deimer of Germantown, Pennsylvania, hoped to draw trade from a large territory. Her advertisement stated that people living at a distance might avail themselves of her salve for scaldhead as she was making it for their benefit.

Occasionally women turned to the sale of spirits in addition to medicated waters and drinks. Anna Jones took over the business of her late husband, and advertised in the Essex County Gazette that she continued the distilling of "Cinnamon, snakeroot, clove water, aniseed, orange water, and many other sorts of spirits, all of which are sold very cheap for cash, wholesale or retail, at the shop opposite the Burying Point Lane."⁸²

It has been assumed that the colonial period was peculiarly infested with quacks and charlatans. The facts of the case would scarcely warrant this belief. The Dictionary defines a quack as a boastful pretender to skill or knowledge which he does not possess. The word is an abbreviated form of "quack salver" or one who exploits or quacks his remedies.⁸³

Little quackery of this kind was found during the colonial period for the simple reason that no rich harvest was held out to the practitioner.⁸⁴

It was only by the middle and last quarter of the eighteenth century that Nostrums were placed before the public on an extensive scale. Early in the eighteenth century Tuscarora Rice found its way on the market. It was perhaps the first example

of patent medicine in America.⁸⁵ Later such panaceas as "Robertson's Stomach Elixir of Health, Robertson's Vegetable Nervous Cordial, and Hamilton's Grand Restorative" were highly advertised.⁸⁶ The Boston News for April 25, 1771, has an advertisement of a list of cure-alls imported direct from the warehouse at London. The assortment included Turlington's Original Balsam of Life, the most highly advertised remedy in colonial newspapers; Bateman's Pectoral Drops, Anderson's Scotch Pills, Hooper's Female Pills, Essence of Peppermint, and Swenson's Electuary "being a safe medicine for the speedy cure of the Stone and Gravel, and is taken without any particular Regimen or Confinement and is now in Great Reputation in London."⁸⁷

The seventeenth and eighteenth century pharmacopoeia was full of drugs that we rightfully laugh at today. That of the nineteenth century did not lag behind. The twentieth century does not show the slightest tendency to overcome the inclination of man to be healed by anything and everything. Cures have become even more common at the present day than ever before.⁸⁸ We have all sorts of tonics, kidney cures, consumption cures, rheumatism cures and blood purifiers. These preparations are just as helpful, just as harmful as the old time remedies. In proportion to our population, more people than ever are buying and using these preparations.⁸⁹ We have only to look over the counters and shelves of our drug stores, through the pages of most of our present day magazines and papers, or scan the 1500 pages of Nostrums and Quacks published by the American Medical Association to realize the enormous extent of the quack remedies of today.⁹⁰

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CHAPTER III

THE MIDWIFE

Obstetrics in ancient times was left entirely in the hands of women, and it was not until the days of the Greeks and Romans that physicians became interested in pregnancy. The work of midwives was supervised by physicians who were often called in to assist during difficult cases. This was done at some risk to their dignity as popular ridicule branded such physicians "he-grandmothers". It has been noted that during the Mediaeval Period many women in Italy under the auspices of the Church took up the study of obstetrics and medicine. It is not at all surprising to note that through the influences of the Church male practitioners were driven entirely from the field of obstetrics and did not again participate until the sixteenth century.¹

During all these centuries women continued in the practice. It was only in such countries as Italy and perhaps southern France that they received training for the work. Outside of these countries the vast number of midwives were untrained and were often of the poorest conceivable type. It was next to impossible for men to receive practical experience in the work before the middle of the sixteenth century. One of the first doctors who gained admittance into the lying-in-room was forced to do so under disguise of female attire. When his identity was revealed he was forcibly expelled from the room and burned to death as a punishment for his immodesty.² Even

when men were willingly admitted, the work met with difficulty through the prudery of patients whose modesty forbade the open performance of the physician's work. One end of a sheet was usually tied about the waist of the patient, and the other end to the physician's neck. Manipulations were then carried on blindly under the sheet. In court circles where modesty was not deemed an important virtue, the sheet was considered unnecessary.³

The introduction of forceps in the early eighteenth century was a notable achievement brought about by the entrance of men into the profession. Some schools in Europe had already commenced giving instruction in midwifery as a separate branch. Dr. John Maubray was the first public teacher of the work in England.⁴ On the continent meanwhile a group of obstetricians became known, many of whom had achieved great renown long before colonial America even thought of obstetrics as a science.⁵

In many places in the colonies the practice of midwifery was made a public institution. Lysbet Deroken in New Amsterdam was given a house at public expense, and her successor, Hillezard Jaris, was paid a yearly salary of one hundred guilden.⁶ Annetje Janson who owned a large part of the present site of New York, gave her services and became very skillful as a midwife in the community.⁷

Dutch emigrants brought with them the custom of giving midwives a license, while in other places they were required to register before they were allowed to practice.⁸ In Albany the governor gave one midwife a legal control of all the work, except

upon extraordinary occasions when the assistance of one other woman might be secured. This monopoly was given her because she had never refused to give assistance, even when it was apparent that she could not be paid.⁹

It was considered beneath the dignity of male physicians to act as obstetricians through almost the entire colonial period, consequently the whole field was left to the women of the community. Physicians could still secure the medical degree at the University of Pennsylvania, without taking a course in the science of midwifery, as late as 1843. Facts of this kind do not make it hard to understand why this most important part of women's necessities was left so long in untrained hands.¹⁰

Childbirth was considered a purely physiological act which did not require the assistance of medical art. The only help thought necessary at this time could be obtained without scientific study from members of the mother's own sex. Midwifery was so obviously woman's work that for a century and a half it was never questioned. The advisability of limiting such attendance to women appeared self-evident, and the profession remained exclusively in their hands until the middle of the eighteenth century. During the entire period it was considered highly improper and unlawful as well for a man to assist in any way with maternity cases.¹¹ Court records of the county of York, for 1675 contain an interesting account of the arrest and fine of one of its citizens for acting in this capacity. "We present Capt. Francis Rayns, for presuming to

act the part of a midwife; the delinquent, examined by the Court; fined fifty shillings for his offence, paying the fine, is discharged.* An examination of the records revealed that Rayns some years before had been chosen Lieutenant by the company at York. Later the court stated that "Captain Francis Rayns tenderedth to this Court the laying down of his Captain's place, which by the Court was accepted, and hence forth the said Francis Rayns is not to be reputed any such officer."¹² It is possible that besides being an officer in the army, he followed and practiced medicine, and it was in the capacity of physician that he was found guilty of his offence to womanly modesty.

It is almost impossible in this age to comprehend how the so-called Blue Laws affected the daily lives of people in colonial times. Laws regulating the Sabbath were especially severe. One of these old laws stated that "Any persons traveling upon the Lord's Day, either on horseback or on foot, or by boats in or out of their own town to any unlawful assembly or meeting not allowed by law, are hereby declared to be profaners of the Sabbath and shall be proceeded against as the persons that profanee the Lord's Day by doing servile work."¹³ It was under this law that a certain New England magistrate ordered a man sent to the whipping post for daring to ride for a midwife on the Sabbath day.¹⁴ His reason for traveling on the Lord's Day was not deemed a sufficient excuse for the offence. Nor did the law make exceptions if the offender chanced to be a woman. Unless illness was extremely serious it was best to defer medical assistance until after the Lord's Day. A

woman found profaning the Sabbath in this way was arrested and "presented" at Court. The Records stated "that Elizabeth, wife of Samuel Eddy, was brought before the governor and the assembly charged with traveling on the Lord's Day." Her reason for committing this offense was that "She had been sent for by Mrs. Saffin who was nigh unto death and anxiously desired to see her." The court was unable to find this a sufficient excuse for Sabbath breaking so she was fined. The governor later graciously remitted the fine after he had contented himself by reprimanding her sharply. This was not the first time that Mrs. Eddy had been before the court. About ten years earlier her slothful habits as a housewife brought her into trouble. She had been indisposed during the week, during which time her wash accumulated. She washed and hung it out "On the Lord's Day in time of Church services." Her offence was noted, and she was arrested and arraigned before the court. This time she was fined 10 shillings, but later the fine was remitted.¹⁵

The law did not deal so harshly with all offenders. Sewall records in his Diary: "Went home with the Midwife about 2 o'clock, carrying her Stool, whoes parts were included in a Bagg. Met with the Watch at Mr. Rock's Brew House, who bad us stand, enquired what we were. I told the Woman's occupation, so they bad God bless our labours, and let her pass."¹⁶

Probably the first in the long list of illustrious midwives in New England was Samuel Fuller's third wife. She came to this country in 1623 on the Anne.¹⁷ Dr. Fuller was asked to act as physician by the town of Rehoboth. At the

same time word was sent to his mother to act as midwife.¹⁸

Whether she accepted this invitation is not stated. Later the same town "Voted and agreed that...Mrs. Bridget Fuller, (his wife) of Plymouth should be sent to see if she be willing to come and dwell among us, to attend to the office of midwife, to answer to the Town's necessity which at present is great." This invitation which she did not accept was sent to her a year after her husband's death. She herself died at Plymouth the next year.

Many of the old midwives practiced some form of healing in connection with their work. Mrs. Sarah Alcock was a notable example of this kind. The Roxbury Church Records state that she "dyed a vertuous woman, of unstained life, very skilful in physick & chirurgery, exceeding active and unwearied in ministering to ye necessities of others. Her workes praise her in ye gates."¹⁹

Frequently women took patients into their own homes for treatment. An examination of the Abstract of Earliest Wills in the Probate Office of Plymouth reveals a case of this kind. "I thought it best", writes George Allin to his friend Experience Mitchell, "to acquaint you with the death of my (thy?) Sister's Son John, whoe died att my house on the sixt day of the week, being as I judged, about the 10 day of July,...hee was not afraid of death, hee was with Mistress Swift to bee cured of his disease..."²⁰

Doctress Whitcomb was another who practiced medicine in connection with her work as midwife. A list of physicians in

Lancaster contains the notice of the death of John Dunsmoor who died in Dec. 7, 1747. An explanatory note states that "Before the first Dunsmoor, and Greenleaf, the earliest of the Faculty in this town, was a female, Doctress Whitcomb." The doctress was in the town as early as the year 1700. She studied the profession and acquired her knowledge of simples from the Indians with whom she was at one time a captive. She became distinguished in the neighborhood as one of the faculty.²¹

Few midwives had the distinction of giving as many sons to their country as Betty Allen who sent six sons to fight in the Revolution. She was the staunch friend of Reverend Jonathan Edwards of Northampton. The Church record books disclosed that she assisted at the birth of three thousand infants. Midwives were very proud of their success, and records such as these were a stamp of approval of the community for their services.²²

The women of Connecticut did not show a lagging spirit in this work. Mrs. Jacob Johnson, of Torrington, was greatly sought after and was much honored because of her great skill. Samuel Orcutt, the historian of the town says, "She rode on horseback, keeping a horse for the special purpose, and traveling night and day, far and near to meet her engagements. She kept an account of the number of cases she had, and the success of the patients, and the newcomers...In the midst of her usefulness she was removed by death and it became the great inquiry, "Who will take the place of Granny Johnson?" This question was answered by the entrance of Mrs. Huldah Beach into the profession. She became as celebrated in her calling as Granny Johnson, and

served the town until she had reached an advanced age. She was a woman of remarkably good appearance and possessed great intellectual strength and ability. All classes respected her to such extent that she had the practice of almost the entire town. At times she even made trips to towns such as Worchester, Goshen, and Litchfield.²³

Occasionally midwives became involved in legal controversies. The Probate Records of New Hampshire record an instance of this kind. Ann Hilton, a midwife, testified that she was called to the home of Mr. Samuel White to deliver Mary Dolbeare of her female child. She stated further that the patient declared herself the wife of James Dolbeare of Boston, and that she continued to board in the home of "ye said White a Considerable time as was com'nly Reported." About five months later the patient's death was reported.²⁴

Judge Sewall's Diary is one of the richest sources of information concerning the manners and customs of colonial New England. He chronicles the many births, cases of illness, and deaths of his own large family and often those of his neighbors, and usually mentions the officiating nurse and midwife. Mrs. Elizabeth Weeden acted as midwife at the birth of all except one of the Judge's thirteen children. It is not certain whether she died or moved away. She very likely carried on a thriving business, as Sewall mentions several times of her being called away from his house to attend others. Her long service in such a prominent family is indication of the high esteem in which she was held. It was usually the midwife who

carried the new baby to church for baptism.²⁵ Sewall writes thus: "So Eliz. Weeden, the Midwife, brought our infant to the third Church when Sermon was about half done in the afternoon ..."²⁶ Sometimes the nurse served in this capacity. "Mr. Willard Baptized my Son lately born, whom I named Henry...Nurse Hill came in before the Psalm was sung," then he proudly adds, "and the Child was fine and quiet." A few days later he writes: "Died in Nurse Hill's lap. Nurse Hill washed and layed him out." At the burial of the child, nurse Hill and Mrs. Weeden took turns carrying the tiny corpse to its grave.²⁷

At the birth of the last Sewall baby a new midwife, Hannah Greenleaf, was called in. This time a new minister also officiated at the baptism of the child. Perhaps different ministers were frequently called to do this for he writes: "Lord's Day, Jan'y 4. P. M. Was baptized by the Reverd Mr. Ebenezer Pemberton. It being his Turn..."²⁸

It seems strange that relatives in the Sewall family did not have the assistance of Midwife Weeden. When the Judge's sister gave birth to a child he wrote: "About the time of the Eclipse Sister Sewall was delivered of a daughter, Goodwife Brown being Midwife."²⁹ Many years later when his daughter Hirst became a mother he wrote: "Daughter Hirst was delivered of a Living lively Daughter...Mrs. Wakefield was Midwife...Nurse Johnson assisted. Nurse is from Salem."³⁰ The same year his daughter-in-law, Mrs. Rebecka Sewall, became the mother of a son. This time Mrs. Baker acted as Midwife.³¹

Sewall's list of midwives is followed by a long list

of nurses. Nurse Cowell was in attendance when his daughter Sarah was ill. "Poor little Sarah...about Break of Day...gives up the Ghost in Nurse Cowell's Arms", he wrote. He concluded with the statement that neither he nor his wife were present at the time although the nurse had promised to call them if the child grew worse.³² When his wife gave birth to a daughter in 1701/2 Nurse Hill was with them.³³ Such serious trouble was experienced in securing her services that the Judge resorted to prayer. "I prayed earnestly by myself and the family for a Nurse; Went and expostulated with Mr. Hill about his daughters failing me; in the mean time, one of the family went and call'd the Nurse, and I brought her home with me; which was beyond my expectation. For Mr. Jesse huff'd and ding'g, and said he would look her up, and she whould not come. I sent not for her, so I hope 't was an Answer of prayer."³⁴

The long list of New England midwives contains the names of several who became notable through their misfortunes. The first of this group, Anne Hutchinson, was the second midwife to practice in New England.³⁵ Besides practicing midwifery, she also achieved fame as a practitioner of physic. She and three others, Ruth Barnaby, Elizabeth Weeden, and Jane Hawkins, are the only women mentioned in a list of practitioners in Suffolk County, Massachusetts, for a period of seventh years.³⁶ One writer wrote of her as being "very helpful in the times of child-birth, and other occasions of bodily infirmities, and well furnished with means for every purpose."³⁷ Another wrote that "she did much good in our Town, women's meetings, Childbirth-

Travels, good discourse about their spiritual estates."³⁸ Because of her meddling and preaching she was ordered by the court to leave the colony. After a brief sojourn in Rhode Island, her new home, she with her family removed to Long Island. She lived there but a short time when the Indians murdered her and all but one of her family. Winthrop wrote an account of the tragedy in his History: "The Indians near the Dutch, having killed 15 men...began to set upon the English who dwelt near the Dutch. They came to Mrs. Hutchinson...and taking their opportunity killed her...and all her family..." The historian, Weld who disliked her thoroughly, wrote that it was "A heavy stroak upon herself and hers."³⁹

The next of the group was known by the demeaning title, "One Hawkins' Wife". She was well known as a midwife and acted also as a physician. Her reputation in the community was anything but good as her neighbors looked upon her as a witch, and she was greatly feared for this reason.⁴⁰ The court took action to restrain her practice in surgery and physic. "Jan Hawkins hath liberty til the beginning of the third month, called May, and the magistrates (if shee did not depart before) to dispose of her, and in the meane time shee is not to meddle in surgery, or physick, drinks, plaisters, or oyles, nore to question matters of religion, except with the Elders for satisfactions."⁴¹ After she had delivered a woman of a monstrosity, she left the settlement and Winthrop states that "indeed it was time for her to be gone, for it was known, that she used to give young women oil of mandrakes and other stuff to cause conception."⁴² Several

years later she returned. This time the court was more insistent and ordered her to "depart away tomorrow morning, & not to returne againe hither upon paine of a severe whipping, and such other punishment, as the Court shall thinke mete..."⁴³

Margaret Jones, the last of the group, was the first person executed in Boston for witchcraft. She practiced physio in connection with her work as midwife. Incidentally she was the only physician mentioned in the scandalous prosecutions in Boston for witchcraft.⁴⁴ Winthrop referred to her as "One Margaret Jones" which places her low in the social scale. Some of the evidence which sent her to the gallows was that "she was found to have such a malignant touch, as many persons, (men, women, children) whom she stroked or touched with any affection or displeasure were taken with deafness or vomiting, or other violent paine or sickness, she practicing physio, and her medicines being such things as (by her own confessions) were harmless, as ainseed, liquor, etc., yet had extraordinary violent effect." In order to promote the use of her own preparations she told "such as would not take her physio that they would never be healed, and accordingly their diseases and hurts continued."⁴⁵

Religious conflicts such as these were unusual in the life of most midwives as the greater number quietly devoted themselves to their profession. With families averaging from twelve to fifteen children, their time was well filled in caring for the needs of the community.

Little is recorded concerning the technique followed

by midwives in the performance of their work. It is certain that they still made use of the obstetrical chair, the use of which extends back to Bible times.⁴⁶ At the birth of the first Sewall baby, the Judge mentions "going home with the Midwife about 2 o'clock carrying her Stool, whoes parts were included in a Bagg."⁴⁷ There was of course little available to make childbirth less painful, unless tobacco and distilled drinks could be considered in that class. A prescription for "Sharp & Diffiicult Travel in Women with Child" has been found in Zerobabel Endicott's manuscripts. It is given in full: "Take a Lock of Vergin's haire on any Part of ye head, of half the Age of ye Woman in Travel. Cut it very smale to fine Powder then take 12 Ants Eggs dried in an oven after the bread is drawne other wise make them dry & make them to a powder with the haire, give this with a quarter pint of Red Cows milk or for want of it give it in strong Ale wort."⁴⁸ Since such prescriptions were retained in valuable manuscript collections, it might indicate that midwives occasionally made use of them.

As a rule the midwife was the only attendant at the birth of the child. During her stay with the family she either assumed supervision, or carried on the work of the household until the mother was able to resume charge. Her work was well done and her services were a matter of family concern for some weeks in advance.⁴⁹ The success achieved by midwives in their work was a matter of great pride and satisfaction in the community. At her death she received a lengthy obituary stating the extent of her service and success.

Occasionally such records were inscribed on the tombstone. Such a stone is found in the burying ground at Charlestown, Massachusetts. It contains a record of the achievements of Mrs. Elizabeth Phillips who was "Born in Westminster, in Great Britain & Commission'd by John Lord, Bishop of London, in ye Year 1718 to ye Office of Midwife; & by ye Blessing of God, has brought into this world above 3000 Children: Died May 6th 1761. Aged 76 years."⁵⁰ Another zealous worker, Mrs. Halleleyah Olney, of Providence, in her practice of thirty years claimed a like record of bringing into the world three thousand children.⁵¹ Mrs. Lydia Robinson of New London, Connecticut, did not achieve such a high record, as her score totaled only twelve hundred in her thirty five years of practice, but it was added, she had never lost a case.⁵²

Many midwives, in spite of the strains of the profession on their health, lived to a ripe old age. The Church Records of Dorchester, Massachusetts, give a glimpse of an industrious one who attained a great age. "Old widow Wait died, having arrived at the great age of 94 years. She has assisted as a midwife at the birth of upwards of one thousand and one hundred children."⁵³ Another midwife, grandmother of a Deputy Governor of Rhode Island, died in 1739 in the one hundredth year of her age. Her obituary stated that "she was accounted a very useful gentlewoman both to rich and poor on many accounts, and particularly amongst sick persons for her skill and judgment which she did gratis."⁵⁴ The Massachusetts Gazette for September 27, 1764, contained an obituary of Mrs. Anna Heywood who died in the seventy fourth year

of her age, and left "by a former Husband (John Hind) 13 Children, 82 Grandchildren, and 17 Great-Grand Children in all 112. She was very useful as a Mid-Wife and in her last sickness she had a most unshaken Trust in the Mercy of God"...⁵⁵

Ruth Barnaby pursued her occupation and that of medicine for forty years. A year before her death, at the advanced age of one hundred years, she insisted on being inoculated for smallpox.⁵⁶ Mrs. Thomas Whitmore practiced midwifery in the town of Marlborough, Vermont. In her work of relieving the distressed and suffering, it frequently became necessary for her to travel to and from her work on snowshoes. She lived to be eighty-seven years old, and officiated at the birth of more than two thousand children and never lost a patient.⁵⁷

In times of distress, women sometimes left their regular profession and joined the ranks of midwives and nurses. This was the case during a smallpox epidemic at Westerly during the winter of 1759. The Presbyterian Church Records contain this statement: "The authority pressed the widow Deborah Lambert one to nurse the sick; she was by birth an English woman, had lived several years in the town, and been employed by some of the principal inhabitants, as a school mistress for their children, to good acceptance." She was a careful manager, since it was stated that "by her industry she had something considerable."⁵⁸

Midwives and nurses were persons of vast importance and dignity in the community in those early days when families of from fifteen to twenty were common. Winthrop referred to

several midwives by the demeaning title of "the wife of one", but the vast majority were held in high repute. Sewall makes note of attending the funeral of Nurse Hannah Cowell and wrote that "She was a very pious woman and a true lover of the first ways of New England." Some time later he wrote: "Hearing of it just at the time, I was at the Chief Justice, I went to the funeral of our excellent Nurse Hill".⁵⁹ Again he made the statement: "Nurse Goose dyes about 2 or 3 o'clock in the night; having lien sick about a Week...Was helpful to herself all along till this last sickness...She saw her great Grandchildren: was a good woman."⁶⁰

Many favors and privileges were extended to both midwife and nurse. They in turn became useful members of the family during their stay in the home. They frequently became the recipient of presents. Sewall writes concerning this custom: "According to my Promise, I carried my daughter Hannah to Meadford to visit Cousin Porter Lyeing in,...Gave the Nurse 2s; maid 1s... Hannah gave the Nurse 1s;..."⁶¹ Anna Green Winslow also writes of these gifts saying: "When I went to make a setting up visit to Aunt Sukey, was dressed just as I was to go to the ball. It cost me a pistareen (seventeen cents) to Nurse Eaton for two cakes, which I took care to eat before I paid for them." The cakes which she bought were "groaning cakes" made and baked in honor of a mother and her new baby.⁶²

After the mother was able to be up, the midwife, nurse, and all the neighborhood women who had helped with the work were treated to a dinner. Judge Sewall writes that the "Women din'd

with Rost Beef and minc'd Pyes, good Cheese and Tarts."⁶³

At another time he writes: "My wife treated her midwife and Women: Had a good dinner, Boil'd Pork, Beef, Fowls; very good Roast Beef. Turkey-Pye, Tarts." Seventeen women were present at this dinner.⁶⁴

Compensation for the service of midwives varied according to the community and the skill of the practitioner. In some communities midwives were elected in town meetings. A woman in Virginia paid her midwife a dozen hens,⁶⁵ while in Rhode Island the fee varied all the way from three to eight dollars.⁶⁶ Mary Drisker, a nurse in the Sewall family, was paid 6s. for one week of service.⁶⁷

Almost as soon as newspapers were established, wet nurses began to advertise. Usually the printer acted as agent for them. The cards of both "Nurse Wanted" and "Situation Wanted" bore the words "Inquire of the printer." Standards for nurses were much lower than for midwives. Apparently many shirked their responsibilities. The Boston Evening Post for July 23, 1739, contained an advertisement for a nurse who possessed a professional sense above the average: "Any person that wants a wet-nurse in a Family, may have one with a good Breast of Milk, that can be well recommended by the Printer. N. B. She is a married woman but her husband abroad; is a notable Housewife, and willing to put her hand to any sort of business. A very rare Thing for a Nurse!"⁶⁸

Midwives did not advertise before the middle of the eighteenth century. They were often mentioned in court records

and tax lists, while old diaries contained many references to their work. Jeremiah Bumstead, for instance, writes for April 18, 1726, "Nurse Candige came to nurse my wife."⁶⁹ About the year 1750 men accoucheurs came into the field. Their employment in Boston was more common than elsewhere. This may account for the fact that few direct advertisements appeared before that time. After 1760 a number of women informed the public that their services were available. Invariably they stressed the fact of "having been examined by the Faculty" or having "Been approved by several gentlemen of that Profession." Perhaps this fact shows that it began to be difficult for women to find employment in Boston for their work. A case is noted of one midwife at least who had been practicing in Boston for some time and then removed to Salem. "Mary Bass, midwife from Boston, Beggs leave to inform the Ladies in this place and the Vicinity, that having been instructed and recommended by the First Practitioners in Midwifery in Boston; in compliance with the Request of Several Ladies, she has removed to Salem, where she intends to Pursue the Business of Midwifery. Any Lady, who may favour her with her Commands, may depend upon her earliest and best Attendance. Inquire at the House of Mr. Osgood, the Corner of Prison Lane."⁷⁰ This is the only instance on records where a midwife claimed she had received instruction. Her claim to training shows conclusively that there began to be felt a recognized need for more than the apprenticeship experience acquired by midwives through the routine of their work. When this necessity for academic preparation was recognized, men

became trained while midwives remained ignorant. It was not yet possible for them to secure formal training.⁷¹ The objection to midwives was not so much because they were women but because they lacked training.

Much of the changing attitude towards midwives was due to fashion. It had begun to be fashionable for women on the Continent to be delivered by men accoucheurs. The fashion had its origin in court circles when late in the seventeenth century, Boucher delivered La Valliere, Mistress of the Grand Monarch, and Hugh Chamberlen in 1692 delivered the future Queen Anne. The fashion soon spread to the masses.⁷²

In America the change came about gradually. Thomas Bulfinch was in Paris as early as 1720 studying obstetrics with "the greatest man midwife in the world".⁷³ The earliest regular practitioner of obstetrics in New England was Dr. James Lloyd, a pupil of William Hunter and Smellie. Dr. Attwood was the first to offer himself as a man midwife in New York, while Dr. Shippen in Philadelphia and Dr. Moultrie of Charleston began to practice at about this time. The entrance of men into the profession was deemed highly scandalous in some localities, and Mrs. Granny Brown with her fees of two or three dollars continued to be the choice of many.

Dr. Shippen of Philadelphia with many other physicians felt that midwives, however rich they might be in experience, still required the help of academic training. To remedy this condition, he opened a school for their instruction. He stated in the Philadelphia Gazette that "he thought it his duty

immediately to begin his intended Courses in Midwifery, and has prepared a proper apparatus for that purpose, in order to instruct those women who have virtue enough to own their own ignorance and apply for instruction as well as those young gentlemen now engaged in the study of that most useful and necessary branch of surgery, who are now taking pains to qualify themselves to practice in different parts of the country with safety and advantage to their fellow citizens."

This first attempt towards giving instruction to midwives in America was futile, as no women possessed "Virtue enough to own their own ignorance and apply for instructions."⁷⁴ The failure of midwives to avail themselves of formal training and the entrance of men into the field marked the gradual expulsion of women from the profession.

The entrance of men into the practice of midwifery carried with it a storm of opposition which in some places extended to the middle of the nineteenth century. Midwives were not yet willing to surrender the field to men. A southern newspaper in 1781 attributed in a lengthy article, the low morals of the day as a direct result of permitting men to act as midwives.⁷⁵ This opposition did not confine itself to America, but extended to England where Jack Stevens at a later time in a pamphlet denounced and exposed "the dangers and immorality" of employing men in midwifery. His efforts were dedicated to the Society For the Suppression of Vice.⁷⁶

In the medical profession itself the change brought about many vexations. Physicians found it hard to apportion

their time to the demands of the new practice, and the very men who were instrumental in the expulsion of midwives now discovered the field a source of inconvenience to their time and health. The Boston Evening Post and The General Advertiser for Nov., 10, 1781, voiced the sentiments of a large group of practitioners: "The Physicians of the Town of Boston Hereby inform the Public, that, in consideration of the Great Fatigue and inevitable Injury to their Constitutions, in the Practice of Midwifery, as well as the necessary Interruption of the other Branches of their Profession, they shall, for the future, expect, that in Calls of this kind, the Fee be immediately discharged."⁷⁷

The restraint placed upon midwives in the practice of their world old privilege was an ungrateful return for the services they had given. Toiling winter and summer, by day and by night, they made a worthy contribution towards the survival of the new settlements.⁷⁸ The great majority of these women were of high character, and their work viewed in the light of present day fatalities can be considered fairly successful. Probably a large proportion of the men and women of our country have been delivered by midwives without the aid of a doctor. These women have continued to render their services, often without compensation to the present day.⁷⁹

We have in the United States at this time about 28,000 licensed and 18,000 unlicensed midwives who are annually intrusted with the lives of over 500,000 women bearing children.⁸⁰ The work of these untrained midwives and that of physicians who have not specialized in obstetrics are partly responsible for our country having the highest mortality of mothers at child-

birth, 16,000 every year, of any country from which statistics are available. The United States has now held this unenviable distinction for twenty years. We have the means to prevent these deaths but they are not available to those who need them. This lack of interest in the needs of the parturient woman is a revival of the old attitude of carelessness and indifference.⁸¹

CHAPTER III

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