

The authentic medical statement of the case of Her Royal Highness the late Princess Charlotte of Wales : extraced from the forty-eighth number of the "London Medical Repository ; " published 1st December, 1817, edited by G.M. Burrows ... and Mr. A.T. Thomson, with some prefatory and concluding observations / by Anthony Todd Thomson.

Contributors

Thomson, Anthony Todd, 1778-1849.
University of Glasgow. Library

Publication/Creation

London : Sold by Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, [1818?]

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/ce89hdgx>

Provider

University of Glasgow

License and attribution

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by The University of Glasgow Library. The original may be consulted at The University of Glasgow Library. where the originals may be consulted. This work has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights and is being made available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

You can copy, modify, distribute and perform the work, even for commercial purposes, without asking permission.

**wellcome
collection**

Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>



Supplement to the

of the

CASE

NEW

of the

of the

of the

of the

LONDON

of the

of the

of the

of the

of the

of the

of the

LONDON

of the

of the

LONDON

of the

of the

of the

LONDON

Printed by J. Brettell,
Rupert Street, Haymarket, London.

THE
Authentic Medical Statement
OF THE
C A S E
OF
HER ROYAL HIGHNESS
THE LATE PRINCESS CHARLOTTE OF WALES.
&c.

PREFATORY OBSERVATIONS.

THE death of a King forms an epoch in the history of a nation ; and scarcely less importance is attached to the mortal dissolution of a youthful prince or princess, destined by birth to wield the sceptre of regal authority. In the one instance, however, more than in the other, according as the passions of men are brought into play ; the character of the

sovereign, when retrospectively examined, is not always justly appreciated; his vices, although not actually great, yet may prove heavy in the balance when weighed against his virtues; and his crimes may arise in freshened colours from his ashes, whilst the memory of the good he has done "is interred with his bones." Hence the feelings of a nation on the death of a monarch, whatever external demonstrations of mourning may be displayed, are liable to be affected by various circumstances not always obviously perceptible; the look of sorrow is not constantly seen indicating the distress of the heart, when the tomb opens to receive the father of his people; and the garb of melancholy will not always conceal the glow of exultation, when a tyrant quits this scene of his mortal existence. When a kingdom, therefore, is freed, by the hand of death, from oppressive authority, the circumstances attending the event which set it free are scarcely inquired into, the natural curiosity which attaches an

interest to every thing connected with elevated rank, is forgotten in the contentment of the moment ; and the fractured chain is left neglected in the dust, whilst the newly unfettered limbs again try their natural powers. But, when Providence issues the mandate not to spare the mighty and the good, the anxiety to pry into the most minute circumstances connected with the event, which have awakened the cry of lamentation, becomes insatiable ; the weeping subject can scarcely be persuaded that death, in his ordinary form, should invade the palace ; and that the governors and the governed are equally amenable to the laws of mortality.

Such is the nature of the feelings which have been called into action by the melancholy occurrence that has recently spread such a settled gloom over the British empire : and it can only be satisfied by a statement of the truth ; by introducing the public, as far as propriety will permit it, into the chamber of suffering royalty ; and shewing there the

awful impression of the hand of a Superior Power, who, in the immutable depths of his own Intelligence, for purposes which human reason cannot unveil, hath permitted the arrow of destruction to fall there, “that the dead may alarm the living.”

We have not indeed, fortunately, to lament the loss of a sovereign ; but, in the death of the PRINCESS CHARLOTTE and her infant child, this country may be said to have beheld vanish, in one moment, the hopes of the national happiness of two generations ; for impossible as it is to conjecture what might have been the conduct of the son, had he lived to fill his place in the line of succession ; yet, nevertheless, the most favourable anticipations might have been rationally indulged, from the known character of the parents under whose guidance his first steps in life would have been directed. If, however, the regrets for the loss of the infant might have been softened by the impossibility of raising the veil of futurity, the interest which filled

every breast for the fate of the mother, was founded on more solid expectations of welfare to the country; the disappointment of which, from the uncertainty of human life, had never been contemplated.

The character of the Princess had developed itself at a very early age. Her understanding expanded at once into masculine strength; and her manner of thinking displayed an originality, which, if it led occasionally to eccentric sallies and deviations from the beaten tract, as far as concerned the girl under preceptorial control, was likely to be productive of the most important firmness and decision of conduct in the future monarch. Every opening feature of her mind was, indeed, characteristic of the country which gave her birth; while many circumstances too well known and too recent to require to be repeated or particularised, raised her in the estimation of its inhabitants, and endeared her to them in a singular and extraordinary degree. The hopes which

the realm had thus formed of her, were further strengthened by her conduct since her union with PRINCE LEOPOLD; scarcely a day having passed since that happy moment, which has not been distinguished by some trait marking her superior worth and genuine excellence. Domestic in her habits, ardent in her affections, benevolent and frank in her disposition, constitutional in her principles, sincere in her religion, and dignified in her mind, she shone not less elevated by her goodness than by her rank.

A Princess, thus endowed with the noblest virtues, could not fail to fill a place in every British heart; while the interest she had excited in all ranks of society, deepened, as the moment drew near in which she was to become a mother; and such was the anxiety of every individual, that expectation almost sickened with the natural delay which occurred, from the time that the first symptoms of that event were announced, until the mournful notification of its lamentable issue. The ap-

proach of Death was, in this instance, indeed truly unexpected. He burst upon the country “like an earthquake at the dead of night;” and it would be in vain to attempt to paint the expression of deep and unfeigned sorrow, which the report of it simultaneously impressed on every countenance. It spoke a language which could not be misconstrued. The tidings were, indeed, for a moment discredited. The youth and previous excellent health of the PRINCESS, had not allowed the mind for an instant to harbour the possibility of such a termination: but too true was the report, “the heart that glowed with the purest fire, and beat with the best affections,” had already ceased to pulsate for ever.

The shock which the intelligence had produced was scarcely subsided; the first tumultuous impulse of feeling had not yet settled into calmer grief; nor had the mind begun to reflect on the consecutive results likely to flow from the unexpected event; ere speculation framed a thousand conjec-

tures to account for its cause. In every circle, rumours of the most preposterous and incredible nature were afloat; and, disgraceful as the fact is, the calamity that overwhelmed the nation, gave an opportunity for malice and envy to level their poisonous shafts at the characters and professional efficiency of the medical attendants of the amiable Sufferer. As is ever the case, when falsehoods and slanders are published, the most ignorant were the most credulous and loud in their abuse. But the contagion was not confined to any rank; and the most illiberal surmises have been raised by paragraphs in some of the daily journals; which have disgraced themselves by thus becoming the vehicles of propagating untruths over Europe, not only injurious to the reputation of the honourable men, who were more immediately implicated, but highly detrimental to the British medical character. It is to defend this, to fix the popular opinion, which is still vacillating between truth and error,

and to stifle the voice of falsehood, that the writer of this Address has obtruded himself upon the public; and as he feels strong in the authenticity of the statement* of the medical management of the case, which he is about to offer to it, he is confident of obtaining the most satisfactory result from the performance of the task which he has imposed upon himself.

That British subjects should be most eager to know every circumstance connected with the dissolution of an object so much endeared to them as the **PRINCESS CHARLOTTE**, is only a natural consequence of their attachment to her person and their ardent admiration of her exalted virtues; and as the degree of

* This statement has already appeared in a Medical Journal, of which the writer is one of the Editors; but it is too much mixed up with other matters not interesting to general readers, to become sufficiently widely known to the public, had it been confined to that work,—hence this mode of giving it publicity has been adopted.

their curiosity was great in the direct ratio of their attachment, by it also, the degree in which they laid themselves open to be duped by the malicious and designing, was necessarily regulated. Their very warmth of affection has rendered them credulous, and in their eagerness to discover some cause for the severe and totally unexpected loss they had sustained, they have caught at every rumour, and have not allowed themselves to pause, in order to give an opportunity for reason to examine the value of the stories to which they have so hastily accorded their belief.

An event, also, of the description of that which we deplore, was admirably adapted to produce displays of that knowledge of the medical art, with which almost every one believes himself gifted. And the queries, “Why did the PRINCESS not get this thing? Why was that thing not administered to her? Why did the Doctors not act in such a manner?” still issue from the mouths of

every female oracle, and are re-echoed by their followers. To inquire what had been really done is too troublesome; it is easier to propagate rumours and to vouch for their authenticity, however absurd they may appear to the reflecting mind. It was in vain to expect that the general voice would have been silenced, until a statement should appear that could satisfactorily explain what was so eagerly sought after; for as it was concluded that an event so extraordinary and unexpected could only have proceeded from ignorance or neglect, the conclusion was instantly generally adopted by the idle and the uninformed. It is not for the writer to say, how far the Physicians have acted judiciously in relying on the high reputation they so justly enjoy, by declining to satisfy the public curiosity. The consciousness of having done their duty; and the flattering testimonies of approbation they have received from every branch of the Royal Family, and from those best fitted by knowledge and professional

talent to form an accurate judgment on the subject, constitute the armour with which they have clothed themselves, and on which the weapons of slander certainly fall harmless: but the public mind is unsettled, some statement is requisite, and the honour of the profession must be maintained. But, before presenting this Statement, which has been drawn up from the most authentic information, it may be proper to shew in what manner the honour of the profession has been stained, by the calumnies thrown upon the attendants of the PRINCESS.

The writer would demand from those who have been loudest in their aspersions, an answer to the question, Who are the men, and what character do they maintain with the profession, to whom a life so valuable to the community has been entrusted? The reply is—Dr. MATHEW BAILLIE, Dr. JOHN SIMS, and SIR RICHARD CROFT; for it is unnecessary to do more than to name them, to shew that they are those who have long and most de-

servedly enjoyed the largest share of the public confidence ; that they are men, who, as members of the profession, and every individual of it well knows the correctness of the assertion, hold a most enviable place in the esteem of their brethren, and who would be those most likely to be consulted in cases of difficulty and danger. The inference to which a knowledge of these facts lead is, that as they were fully competent for the important duties for which they were selected, so every thing that art could accomplish must have been attempted to avert the fatal catastrophe. The magnitude of the responsibility was almost appalling, and the eyes not only of their country, but those of all Europe and of the world, were upon them ; and is it possible, for a moment, in such a position, seriously to attribute any thing to neglect ? The charge of ignorance is still more preposterous ; and hence, if the fatal termination of the case can be attributed to neither neglect nor ignorance, and yet we

are told to believe that it might have been prevented ; to what can it be attributed, but to some deficiency in the art itself, with the arcana of which these men are supposed to be thoroughly acquainted? Either the physicians must have been negligent or deficient in skill, or the art itself must be inadequate, or it must be admitted that the event was inevitable. That it originated in no defect in the art, which has attained to a greater degree of perfection in this country than in any other part of the world, might be easily demonstrated ; and that it was not ascribable either to negligence or to incapacity, will be sufficiently obvious, were the characters of physicians not a guarantee, from the perusal of the Statement. If, therefore, it appear evident that no secondary causes, satisfactory to the inquiring mind, have contributed towards it ; while every one will form his own conclusions, he, perhaps, will approach nearest to the truth who shall regard the calamity

as the dispensation of a Providence, whose awards are not to be questioned; but who, whilst he has given the commission to the Destroyer to go into the world and Strike without distinction of age and condition, hath also given mankind the assurance that light shall again “arise upon the shades of death, and the morning dawn upon the long night of the grave.”

The only part of the accusations advanced against SIR RICHARD CROFT, which appears to be borne out by any rational argument, is that which blames him for not having had more assistance combined with him in his undertaking. To those unacquainted with the profession, this charge has the shew of much plausibility; and as a politic measure SIR RICHARD would have done wisely thus to have divided the responsibility; but professional men know more accurately how to appreciate the value of a multiplicity of advisers. It is more than probable that, if the whole of the faculty had been present,

the same consequences of the confinement would have resulted; the fatal termination would not have been prevented. But this will appear more evident from the following Statement of the Case*.

“THE PRINCESS CHARLOTTE, previous to her confinement, was in good health, and immediately under the eye of her accoucheur, SIR RICHARD CROFT, who resided at Clermont for three weeks, up to the moment in which she was taken ill. Her spirits were excellent, and she anticipated only the most favourable issue of the event which was hourly expected. Dr. BAILLIE was also in waiting, chiefly, as we have been informed, on account of a promise exacted from him by the

* Extracted from No. XLVIII. of the London Medical Repository, Monthly Journal and Review. In making this extract, the terms of art have been altered, and a few remarks, proper for professional perusal only, omitted.

PRINCESS that he would be near her on this occasion, but we believe he was not at Clermont until she was actually taken ill.

“She was first made sensible of her approaching delivery at seven o’clock on Monday evening, the 3rd of November; but the labour pains were so inefficient, although acute, as scarcely to evacuate the water, which had ruptured the membranes at the commencement of the labour; a circumstance, however, which every accoucheur knows prognosticates nothing either uncommon or untoward. In this manner the labour proceeded, slowly, for twenty-six hours; the PRINCESS being frequently up and walking about, from finding that the pains almost left her when she was in the recumbent posture. About this time, also, judging from the inefficiency of the pains, and the little progress made in the labour, we understand SIR RICHARD CROFT suspected that there were either twins, or there existed some irregular action of the womb: and considering that a

consultation might ultimately be required, he wrote to Dr. JOHN SIMS, requesting his immediate attendance. He had, in the mean time, provided whatever could be wanted, should it be found expedient to have recourse to artificial delivery.

“ Dr. SIMS arrived at Clermont at two o'clock in the morning of Wednesday, but did not then see the PRINCESS; and, as the cause of this has been grossly mis-stated, we think it proper, in justification of an honourable man, and so highly respected a member of the profession as SIR RICHARD CROFT is well known to be, to state, that we have been informed, from a quarter which we must credit, that it was proposed by SIR RICHARD to Dr. SIMS, that he should then be introduced to the PRINCESS; but both Dr. SIMS himself and Dr. BAILLIE thought his presence, at that time, could not be productive of any benefit, but might agitate the patient. Dr. SIMS, therefore, declined entering the lying-in room. No consultation was

at this period necessary, as the labour was evidently advancing, although slowly: but, on hearing the statement of the situation of the **PRINCESS** from **SIR RICHARD CROFT**, **Dr. SIMS** concurred in the opinion that every thing should be left to Nature.

“About noon, on Wednesday, it was first suspected that the child might be dead, or that it might be born in a state of suspended animation; and every known means of recovery were immediately prepared. Still the labour continued to be scarcely progressive, the pains being such as tend to forward birth rather by moulding the head so as to admit of its easy passage, than by forcible expulsion. When this was completed, the pains became more efficient; and, at the termination of fifty hours from the commencement of the labour, the **PRINCESS** was delivered, by natural efforts, of a still-born male child. No great discharge followed the birth; but it was soon discovered that the womb was acting irregularly, and taking on the hour-

glass contraction; and an unfavourable separation of the after-birth was anticipated. This, likewise, in some degree, accounted for the protracted character of the labour.

“ At half-past nine o’clock, a discharge of blood occurred. Dr. SIMS, who was then employed in an adjoining room, in endeavours to re-animate the infant, was instantly informed of this occurrence; and, in consultation with SIR RICHARD CROFT, agreed that the immediate separation and removal of the after-birth was necessary. It was effected with little difficulty, and was followed by a very trifling discharge of either fluid or coagulated blood.

“ The PRINCESS now was as well and composed as ladies usually are immediately after delivery; and continued so until a quarter before twelve o’clock, taking frequently small supplies of nourishment; but at this time she became restless and rather talkative, and complained of being sick. She vomited, but nothing was ejected, except a little camphor

julep, which she had taken; and at this moment her pulse was firm, steady, and under a hundred. She again was composed. About half-past twelve, however, the breathing became impeded; the respiratory organs were evidently under the influence of spasm, and continued in that state until she breathed her last, at half-past two o'clock; exactly five hours and a half after her delivery.

“In this afflicting state of the case, Dr. BAILLIE and Dr. SIMS, who had been called into the room when the breathing first became affected, united their judgment and their skill with that of SIR RICHARD CROFT, but in vain, to avert the impending calamity. Art proved unavailing; although every thing which it could devise, and which experience could suggest, was attempted.

“On the 7th of November, the body was opened by SIR EVERARD HOME, assisted by SIR DAVID DUNDASS, Mr. BRANDE, and the Apothecary of PRINCE LEOPOLD'S household;

and, we believe, the following is a pretty accurate statement of the appearances these gentlemen observed:

“The membranes of the brain presented their natural aspect. The vessels of one of its envelopes, called the pia mater, were less distended with blood than was to be expected after so severe a labour. The ventricles or cavities of the brain contained very little fluid. The plexus choroides, a very vascular part within the ventricles, was of a pale colour; and the substance of the brain had its natural texture.

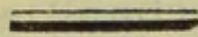
“The pericardium, or envelope of the heart, contained two ounces of red coloured fluid. The heart itself and the lungs were in a natural state. The stomach contained nearly three pints of liquid. The colon, (the largest of the intestines,) was distended with air. The kidneys and other abdominal viscera were in a natural state.

“The womb itself contained a *considerable* quantity of blood, and extended as high up

in the abdomen as the navel; and the hour-glass contraction was still very apparent.

“The foregoing narrative throws very little light upon the immediate cause of the death of the PRINCESS. The fluid found in the pericardium might have obstructed the due action of the heart; but it is not easy to account for its presence there, nor to conceive that so large a quantity could have been effused during the short space of time that supervened to delivery, before the breathing became impeded. The quantity of the blood which was found in the womb might have induced exhaustion; but this opinion can only be conjectural, as it is impossible to draw any certain inference from the rather indefinite expression “considerable,” contained in the REPORT of the surgeons. Conjecture, indeed, has been busy, and a phalanx of casual circumstances have been arranged to account for the dissolution; some of which are ungenerously and un-

guardedly, not to say maliciously calculated to attach blame to the medical attendants; but we must consider such expositions as unjust to the individuals concerned, and in no degree honourable to the profession. We have been informed that the whole of the **ROYAL FAMILY** are liable to the spasms of a violent description; and to this hereditary predisposition, and the increased excitability of the amiable Sufferer, owing to the tedious nature of the labour, are we left to ascribe an event which has destroyed the flattering hopes of the nation, and lopped off the fairest branch from the stem of its Monarchal Succession."



Such being the Statement of the Case, let us examine how far it justifies the proceedings of those to whom the management of it was confided.

In the first place, we are informed that the **PRINCESS** was in good health previous to

her confinement ; that her spirits were excellent, and her mind anticipating no evil. Here then there was nothing to dread, nor can we discover any reason for such an anxiety on the part of **SIR RICHARD CROFT**, as should have made him foresee the necessity of a consultation. The high rank of the patient did not render her situation the more precarious ; and although as a matter of mere prudence, and to lessen his own responsibility, **SIR RICHARD** might have had some of the principal accoucheurs in attendance ; yet, if such a circumstance had been known to the **PRINCESS**, it would undoubtedly have diminished her confidence in her accoucheur ; and probably have produced a state of mind, unfavourable at all times in her situation. In the case of any other female, **SIR RICHARD** would have felt himself fully adequate to his task ; and why, it may rationally be demanded, should the confidence of a man in himself be diminished, because the person he is about to attend holds an elevated rank in society ?

The progress of the labour, after it commenced, was slow, but it proceeded regularly; and, although SIR RICHARD CROFT found it necessary to call Dr. SIMS into attendance, in case a consultation should have been found to be requisite; yet, so little was it then required, that Dr. SIMS was not introduced into the lying-in room. The animadversions that have been made upon this part of the proceedings, have been loud and severe; but surely the opinions of Dr. BAILLIE and Dr. SIMS, and that of SIR RICHARD CROFT also, who were upon the spot, and thoroughly acquainted with every circumstance connected with the case, must be received in preference to those of a host of evidence, wholly ignorant of the subject, and misled by their imaginations or the floating rumours of the moment. Every one, although not of the profession, who has been frequently in lying-in rooms, must be satisfied that no prognostic of danger can be founded on the mere tardiness of a labour,

unless the period it occupies far exceed the length of that which is under discussion.

After the birth, when the irregularity in the process of Nature, which had supervened, was discovered, the separation of the after-birth was undertaken by Dr. SIMS' advice, and the propriety of the measure was evident from the consequences. The labour was terminated without any untoward circumstance.

The sickness and spasm upon the respiratory organs which succeeded, could not have been foreseen, nor can their appearance be explained by any thing connected with the accouchement. When they unfortunately made their appearance, the state of the case was of a nature which required the most prompt assistance; and accordingly we find Dr. BAILLIE and Dr. SIMS at the bed-side of the patient; and can it be supposed, as we have before said, that any thing which skill, judgment, and experience could accomplish was not at-

tempted. It is true, we have not been informed of the remedies which were employed; but can we doubt of their having been the most proper, when the patient was in such hands? Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that the PRINCESS had been in other hands, that the same circumstances had occurred, and that further advice had been deemed essential, who of the profession was the most likely person to have been called in? Does not the idea of Dr. BAILLIE instantly present itself to the mind: and if his advice, when so demanded, would have been considered as the best, whatever might have been the result, was it less valuable because he was upon the spot; and can we admit, what almost involves an absurdity, that he would be less energetic in his practice? Thus we must admit, that the best assistance was procured that the country could afford; that every thing was done which the skill of the physicians could accomplish; and will any member of the profession who

respects candour pretend to say, that in a similar case, were it now before him, and the result equally uncertain, he could positively save the patient? That the better informed and the reflecting part of the community will be satisfied with the plain statement of the facts, there can be little doubt: but to suppose that the perversely prejudiced and the ignorant shall be silenced, would be to suppose what has never yet occurred under any circumstances.

But if the ability and attention of the physicians be admitted, is the profession itself to be undervalued? That may be the case with those who consider the science of medicine, as consisting merely of a catalogue of specifics, each of which is capable of removing some particular disease: but it ought to be generally known, that the more able and experienced a physician is the less reliance does he place upon the specific effects of remedies. The great object of the real physician is to discover the proper indications for applying

his remedies; it is this which the science teaches him, and in which the excellence of the art consists. But, although the remedy which is administered may be the best adapted to secure the intention of the prescriber, and the symptoms for which it is exhibited be clearly and unequivocally ascertained; and, although success may have followed its use in every other case, in which it has been as clearly indicated, yet, no physician can venture positively to assure the patient of the certainty of the same result in his particular case. But because medicine is not a perfect art, it is not to be disparaged; the benefit which mankind have received from it cannot be concealed. It often averts approaching evils; it often turns aside the fatal dart already levelled at the victim; and when it does fail, nothing more is proved than that the highest efforts of human skill come infinitely short of perfection.

It is of great importance to impress upon

the female mind that the state of pregnancy is not a state of disease; that the process of childbirth is a natural operation, very rarely attended with danger in a healthy and well-formed woman; and that even in cases of deformity, the resources of nature are capable of overcoming obstacles, apparently insurmountable. The case of the PRINCESS cannot be quoted in opposition to these truths. It is an anomalous case, which goes for nothing, when weighed against the experience of centuries. But, at the same time, those about to be mothers should be informed, that impatience and irritation may render an operation otherwise safe in itself, critical and uncertain, whereas nothing contributes so much to facilitate it and ensure the safety of both mother and child, as patience, fortitude and composure of mind, seconded by entire confidence in the medical attendant.

It is impossible to close this Address, without noticing the very extraordinary demonstration of respect which the country, as if

actuated by one soul, paid to the memory of the departed, on the day of the funeral. It forms a very singular feature in the character of Britons; and, perpetuated as an epoch in the page of History, will be contemplated by posterity as the most splendid tribute to individual worth, and the sublimest triumph of virtue, which mankind have ever witnessed; a tribute worthy of exciting the envy of the proudest monarchs, and an eternal memorial of the ardent feelings of a brave, a generous, and an honest-hearted people.

FINIS.

