Letter

from

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To the author of the London Journal. 17 Dec. 1726.

The general alarm that the late imposition of Mary Toft has given, makes it necessary to spread the detection of so infamous a deceit as far as possible; that the impressions this gross fraud has raised, may be totally removed, and that the world may learn not to be so easy in their belief for the future. I have, therefore, collected together from the several accounts published, a short and plain narrative of the proofs of this imposture; and doubt not but that you will give it a place in your paper; as it is complying with a request for the publick service.

It appears, That while Mary Toft continued in the country, the whole business was so artfully managed that both the persons there, and those whose curiosity carried them from London, in general gave into the belief of it; and that those who now seem ashamed of their credulity, if they did not then acknowledge themselves fully satisfied, yet expressed their suspicions but in a very slight manner. But on her arrival in Town on Tuesday the 29 November and being lodg'd at Lacy's Bagnio in Leicester fields, a stricter inquisition began to be made. And Dr Manningham who there attended her, gives the following relation of what was observed from that time to the time of her confession; and considering that he himself was influenced by others to give too much credit to the cheat he can the less be suspected in his account of its discovery. Tho' the observation cannot be concealed, that they who all along most countenanced the imposture have been the forwardest to express their zeal publickly for its detection.

"I sat up with her all that night; she often had the motion (which he had before described) on the right side of her belly, and sometimes very strongly. Wednesday the 30th the motion was more faint, and she passed the night tolerably well. Thursday the 1st instant about ten in the morning, the motion was very languid,

and having intermitted for a while, she was seiz'd with pains like those of labour. I then prepared, as before at Guildford, to deliver her; and having diligently searched the vagina I found it clear, and received a pain or two, which were strong and exactly like labour pains. Upon this I desired Dr Douglass, who was then present that He would please likewise to examine her, and openly declare his opinion; which he did, and in the hearing of several persons of distinction, professed that he found the vagina clear, and was of opinion the pains were of the same nature with labour pains. I then took my place again, and received more pains of the like nature, and perceived the os uteri to spread a little, and grow softer; her face also flushed and her pulse was raised, as it always was whenever she had those pains upon her. After some time the motion on the right side of her belly, which they called the leaping up of the rabbet, began again, and those pains like labour pains, went suddenly off; her pulse soon became calm, as before, and the flushing of her face disappeared. She passed the remainder of the day indifferently well having for the most part the motion on the right side of her belly, which I never observed had any influence on her pulse. Her diet was beef, red herring, and such like. That night she slept very well. Friday the 2 instant, she had the motion the greatest part of the day; towards evening it increased extremely, insomuch that she fell into violent convulsions, which I never before observed in her, with frequent contractions of her fingers, rolling of her eyes, and great risings of her stomach and belly. During the fit she would often make a whining noise and at intervals be more than ordinary faint. She continued in her fit near two hours, for some minutes I could scarcely perceive she had any pulse. When she came out of her fit, she perceived herself very weak for some time; and when I asked if she remembered she had been in a fit, she answered, no. She rested well that night.

On Saturday the 3d in the morning, she was brisk, and all that day had the motion by intervals; towards evening she had another convulsion fit, though not so violent as the former; this night she was very restless, and sometimes convulsed, had a difficulty in making water, and the motion in her belly was very little. On Sunday the 4th instant, about eleven of the clock in the morning, Dr Douglass and myself did carefully examine her belly, when we perceived a swelling a little above the os pubis, such as we had never felt there before; it was long, and, as we apprehended, in the cavity of the uterus, which we observed had little or no motion, this we could not account for; we each of us examined the vagina, and found it clear as before, the os uteri soft and spread, as on thursday last, but something more relaxed. About three in the afternoon, the pains, like labour pains, came on again: after having received several pains, they, together with the other symptoms of approaching labour, vanished on the sudden, as formerly. In the evening, Thomas Howard, Porter to Mr Lacys Bagnio, made an information against Mary Toft, before Sir Thomas Clarges, Bart. one of his majestys Justices of the peace, concerning a rabbit she had clandestinely procured by his assistance; upon which she was taken into custody, and strictly examined by Sir Thomas: She very obstinately denied all the porter had sworn; but her sister, who nursed her, being examined to the fact upon oath acknowledged the procuring the rabbit in a clandestine manner, but that it was not designed for the use we suspected, but for eating only. Soon after Mary Toft confessed she had procured the rabbet according to the porters deposition, but that it was her intention to eat it, she having longd for it, and most obstinately persisted that she was still big with a rabbit. The same evening I examined her again, and her uterus appeared to me to contain something of substance in it, whereupon I earnestly pressed Sir Thomas Clarges, that she might not be sent to prison that night, being

still apprehensive there might something come from her uterus in a little time; and as the fraud was not fully detected, I judged it might prove of very ill consequence to remove her till the whole was found out: On Monday the 5th, I gave my opinion to Sir Thomas, concerning Mary Toft; and lest he should commit her to prison, I spoke to several persons of distinction, and that day wrote to the Honorable Mr Molyneux to assist me in that affair, well knowing how industrious they had always been in endeavouring to find out this supposed fraud; for I believed a sudden commitment of her to prison, before the cheat did manifestly appear, would be a means of preventing a discovery. After some difficulty, I prevailed with Sir Thomas Clarges to let her remain in the custody of the high constable of Westminster at the Bagnio, till the cheat should be found out, or at least for a few days longer; to which he agreed."

While these observations were making on her in town, and she was thus deptrovously counterfeiting, without producing any rabbit, or part of a rabbit, strict enquiry was made in the country, whether any had been purchased for her there, and it appears by the several depositions of Edward Coster, Richard Sedman, John Sweetapple, and Mary Peyloe, taken before the Rt Honorable the Lord Onslow, that Joshua Toft her husband, had bought of them at several times, within the time of their transaction, 15 or 17 rabbits, many of different colours; that several he killed, and took out their entrails in their presence; and particularly, that two of them were bought the day his wife went to Guildford, and that he said he must convey them thither. Mary Coster, her nurse, deposed, that she was with the said Mary Toft from the beginning of November to the time she went to London; in all which time the said Mary Toft never had any rabbits dressed for her; but that she saw the said Mary Toft delivered of seven rabbits of different colours, all in several pieces, and that she never saw her delivered of any guts belonging to the said rabbits. Elizabeth Mason at whose house the said Mary Toft lodged three weeks,

deposed, that there were no rabbits dressed at her house or brought to the said Mary Toft to eat, in all that time; and that she heard the said Mary Toft say, She could not eat a bit of rabbit, were she to have a thousand pounds for so doing.

These depositions which were taken the 3d and 4th instant, being sent up to London, on Tuesday the 6th Sir Thomas Clarges threatened her severely; and to such purpose, that she never more pretended to any of her former labour pains Dr Manningham, upon this, urged her very much to confess the truth; and told her, he believed her to be an impostor, and that she was differently formed from other women, having some peculiar way of conveying pieces of rabbits into her uterus, and of imposing upon the world by her motions and pains; and that therefore he resolved to try a very painful experiment upon her; and was accordingly prepared for that purpose; whereas if she would ingenuously confess the whole truth, he would speak to several of the nobility in her behalf; some of whom then promised her their good offices on the like condition. He assured her also there was no time left for delay; & that if she would not confess, he would immediately proceed to the operation.

This made a great impression upon her; and being withal in a most particular manner exhorted also by his Grace the Duke of Montague, Lord Baltimore, and Dr Douglass, to make a free and open confession, before it should be done by any other person in the country, and to avoid so terrible an operation, she at last begg'd very heartily to be let alone till the next morning; and that if she did not then confess, he might proceed as he pleased. Accordingly on Wednesday December 7. in the morning, in the presence of two noblemen before mentioned, and Dr Douglass, she began her confession of this fraud. In her confession she owned "That on her miscarrying she was seized with violent floodings; and the womb being then as she thought open as if she had been just delivered of a full grown child, she did verily believe one of her wicked accomplices did then convey into her womb part of the monster (as she call'd it) being the claws

and body of a cat; and the head of a rabbit; which put her to much pain. After that time she believed nothing was ever put into her womb, but into the passage only, by the advice of a woman accomplice whom she would not name, who told her she had now no occasion to work for her living as formerly, for she would put her in a way of getting a very good livelihood, and promised continually to supply her with rabbits, and should therefore expect part of the gain, or to that effect. That Mary Toft asking what way that was, the woman told her she must put up her body so many pieces of rabbits as would make up the number of rabbits which a Doe rabbit usually kindles at one time, otherwise she would be suspected. Mary Toft asking also how many that was; the woman told her, sometimes thirteen, and that from that time she the said Mary Toft did often, by the assistance of that woman, convey parts of rabbits into her body, till at last she could do it by herself, as she had an opportunity; and that she did continue so to do."

Dr. Manningham on this observes, that by the constant irritation of those extraneous bodies, thus artfully conveyed into her vagina, the whole uterus suffered much, and became larger in bulk than it ought to be in its natural state; and that the bones, and other parts of those rabbits, so conveyed into the vagina did often offend the neck of the uterus; which together with artful management of herself, did occasion those violent bearing down pains, which came on by intervals and very exactly counterfeited the true labour pains. He says the motion of her belly were part by artifice, and partly real convulsions, for that he had often observed some of the motions in her soundest sleep, and even after she had confessed the fraud, part of her motion being involuntary.

Mary Toft owned that there was nothing in her passage, when Dr. Manningham examined her; only that time when he took the piece of bladder from her, which she had put into her body a little before he came to her, on Monday the 28th November, about eight o'clock in the evening; and that ever after that time she was afraid to put

any thing into her body, because he had often told her, if he found twenty rabbets at times in her body, it would go for nothing with him; for he should never be convinced, unless he took some parts of rabbits from out of the very womb itself, which he was very well assured could never be put there by art.

Two of the most eminent surgeons also dissected these pretended preternatural rabbets, and other common rabbets, before several persons of distinction and gentlemen of the faculty, and found them to agree exactly in every part.

This is the whole of what appears at present; by which the imposture of this wicked woman is made fully evident. But, as 'tis to be wish'd, if there were other accomplices with her in her iniquity, she will be brought to declare them; so, I hope, you will not fail to make their crimes equally publick, who have any way wilfully contributed thus to terrify and abuse the weak and credulous.

I am, Sir, Your, &c