

MARY TOFT—THE RABBIT BREEDER

by

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Being a representation of the frauds by which the Godliman woman carried on her pretended rabbit breeding, also of the simplicity of our Doctors by which they assisted to carry on that imposture, discovered their own skill and contributed to the mirth of His Majesty's liege subjects.

NEVER can the Medical Profession have been made to appear so ridiculous in the eyes of the general public, and indeed of each other, than by the affair of Mary Toft in 1726. She lived at Godalming (Godlyman) where she had been born and bred. In 1720 she married Joshua Toft, junior, a poor journeyman clothier, and bore him three children. She could not read or write and was said to be of healthy, strong constitution, of a small size and of a very stupid and sullen temper.

On 23 April 1726, as she was weeding in a field she saw a rabbit spring up near her. She and another woman working nearby tried to catch it but without success. Soon another rabbit sprang up and was also unsuccessfully pursued. This set her longing for a rabbit, being five weeks pregnant at the time. That night she dreamed of rabbits and for the next three weeks had a constant strong desire to eat them, being a delicacy which she could not afford. Seventeen weeks after the episode in the field, she developed colicky abdominal pain and vaginal bleeding and passed something like a lump of flesh, there being another similar happening three weeks later. The symptoms of pregnancy persisted, however, and in the early part of September, whilst working in the hop fields, milk flowed profusely from her breasts. This did not feel like a normal pregnancy to her and on 27 September she was taken very ill during the night and sent for her mother-in-law who was a midwife. She was delivered of what she took to be the lights and guts of a pig and these were taken by her husband to Mr. John Howard, who some days later came to her and delivered her of some further parts of a pig. Two weeks later, the whole affair appearing over, she was churched.

Mr. John Howard was a surgeon at Guildford where he had practised midwifery for thirty years. He knew nothing of Mary Toft until he was approached about her strange delivery and at first did not believe this story. At last he agreed to go to Godalming with the results described above, then returning to Guildford believing the whole affair to be over. One month later, however, he was again in Godalming attending Mary Toft whose labour had now begun in earnest.

During the first week in November reports began to reach London of peculiar happenings at Godalming. It appeared that one of the local inhabitants was being delivered of rabbits at the rate of almost one a day. Accounts began to

appear in the newspapers and these rumours were confirmed by letters from the man-midwife in charge of the case, written to persons of distinction in town and describing the labours. One rabbit had been seen to leap in her abdomen for eighteen hours before it died and the moment it was delivered another commenced struggling for birth. The motion produced by this struggle was so violent that it was sufficient to move the bedclothes and lasted for over thirty hours. With her pains the bones of the animal were heard to snap and break with the violent convulsive movements of the uterus. Mr. John Howard was so busily engaged in delivering rabbits that all his other work was neglected and because of this after delivering nine rabbits he moved Mary Toft to Guildford. In order that none might doubt his veracity, Mr. Howard invited anyone who wished to do so to come to Guildford where he would allow him personally to deliver one of the rabbits. This offer was keenly accepted by Mr. St. André.

Mr. St. André came from Switzerland. During his early days in England he had kept himself by teaching French, German, dancing and fencing. In 1723 he was appointed Surgeon and Anatomist to the court on account of his linguistic ability. He was apprenticed to a surgeon and actually held the post of local Surgeon to the Westminster Hospital Dispensary although he did not take any medical degrees. The letters from Mr. John Howard made him wish to be convinced of a fact of which there was no instance in nature and on 15 November he attended the Honourable Mr. Molyneux, secretary to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, and together they set off for Guildford to inquire into this extraordinary case.

They arrived in Guildford at 2.30 p.m. and sent for Mr. John Howard who came immediately, telling them that Mary Toft was at that time in labour with the fifteenth rabbit. At that point a nurse came to call him as the woman was having pains and they all proceeded to Mr. Howard's house where she was lodged. Upon entering they found her dressed in her stays sitting on the bedside with several women near her. St. André immediately examined her but delivery did not appear imminent and he waited for the onset of fresh pains. These came a few minutes later, at which time he delivered her of the trunk of a rabbit of about four months' gestation stripped of its skin but containing the heart, lungs and diaphragm. He cut off a piece of lung and put it in water in order to see that it sank, but it would not do so and even rose to the surface after Mr. Molyneux had pushed it to the bottom. They examined the viscera and found the heart to be large with the foramen ovale completely patent. The lungs were remarkably small and much darker than those of a rabbit which has breathed for some time. Mary Toft now seemed very cheerful and walked by herself to a chair by the fireside where St. André examined her and found some irregularities in the course of the right Fallopian tube, from which he deduced that the rabbits developed in the tube, only entering the uterus during her pains some hours before her delivery. On vaginal examination no blood or liquor was present and the perineum was intact. He also examined her breasts, finding milk in one but only a little serous fluid in the other. Her pulse was slow and steady and her tongue red. He asked for a specimen of urine but was unable to obtain

one. This being done they all adjourned to the house of the Mayor, who was ill. Two hours later, whilst they were still away, her pains returned violently and the nurse delivered the lower part of a male rabbit which fitted perfectly the trunk delivered earlier. It was also stripped of its skin and appeared anatomically normal.

Upon their return they examined this together with some of the parts delivered previously. The rectum contained several pellets resembling common rabbit's dung. This was also present in the guts of the other rabbits together with a dirty coloured mucus like meconium. In the guts of the first rabbit they found a slender brittle white body resembling small fish bones. They then left, coming back later that evening, shortly after which her pains returned. These were so violent that four or five people could hardly confine her to a chair. Mr. St. André examined her and found the vagina empty with the os closed. Several minutes later the pains recommenced and he delivered the skin of the rabbit rolled into a ball, free from any moisture or blood. Ten minutes later, with fresh pains, he delivered the head with the fur on but part of one ear torn off and again no blood or liquor. She was given a sedative and when examined at 10 p.m. her abdomen was soft except for the lumps noted previously. All the rabbits were examined and kept in separate pots with spirits of wine.

On detailed investigation the first animal did not appear to be a perfect rabbit, three of the feet being like the paws of a cat. The stomach and intestines together with the shape of the thorax also resembled a cat. The lungs and heart were not situated normally but were squeezed out between the upper ribs and the cervical vertebrae to which they were adherent. The lungs were only about one-sixth normal size and the bones were different from those of a rabbit apart from the head and one paw. All the others appeared normal rabbits of from two to four months' gestation. They were in component parts and were usually delivered as follows: firstly the four paws with the fur on; then the liver and intestines, the trunk and shoulders; in three or four the loins were separated from the pelvis, in the remainder in one piece; the head with its fur; lastly the skin. When put together a complete rabbit was made apart from the viscera which were missing in four or five animals. Most of them were female.

The hearts and livers appeared large in comparison with the lungs and intestines. The caecum and colon were small and the spiral structure of the caecum not yet unfolded. The stomach was also contracted and the pylorus very straight and narrow. The ductus venosus and implantation of the umbilical vein could not be found in the liver. Some of the hearts were opened and the foramen ovale and ductus arteriosus found fully open with the two trunks of the inferior vena cava united at the right auricle. The flesh of these creatures had the smell of rabbits just killed and the bones were like those of foetal rabbits with the epiphyses separated from the shafts in several. All the teeth were present in the heads but not worn down as by mastication. The nails of the paws were exceedingly sharp. The skins were of various colours with long fur which was curly on one head. The rabbit extracted by Mr. St. André weighed

twenty-one ounces allowing for one paw not yet delivered and some of the viscera which had been lost.

All these facts were verified before His Majesty on Saturday, 26 November 1726, in the presence of other doctors by the anatomical demonstration of the first, third, fifth and ninth rabbits which were compared with two natural rabbits, one four months old, the other a few days only. These two had been dissected in the presence of Mr. Molyneux on the day of return from Guildford. The larger one was of the same size as that delivered personally by St. André. The lungs of the larger were twenty times, and of the smaller eight times the size of those of the preternatural rabbits. The foramen ovale of the smaller rabbit was more than two-thirds open, whilst that of the larger just admitted a very fine probe. The stomach and intestines were also different, being at least three times bigger than in the preternatural rabbits.

From consideration of all these facts, Mr. St. André was convinced that the preternatural rabbits were undoubtedly foetuses, especially demonstrated by such parts as those which could not exist in an adult but were essential for foetal life. He thought that any doubts would be dispelled when the placentae were delivered, or on the death of the woman should they be retained.

On Sunday, 20 November, Cyriacus Ahlers, Surgeon to His Majesty's German Household, went to Guildford to see personally this phenomenon. He sent for Mr. Howard, who was followed shortly by Mary Toft's nurse saying she was again in labour. They went to see her and Mr. Ahlers examined and delivered her of the loins and lower limbs of a rabbit of about three months' gestation. Having no knowledge of midwifery, this was achieved with much difficulty under direct instruction from Mr. Howard. In the presence of witnesses Mr. Ahlers then announced that he had extracted the rabbit himself and was fully convinced and satisfied that it came out of the uterus. When asked, he rejected the possibility that it could have been forced or thrust into the uterine cavity. He examined the woman's breasts and found milk in one. He gave her one guinea, expressing great satisfaction, and promised he would procure her a pension from His Majesty. He requested that he be allowed to examine her again but Howard would not permit this as he had caused her a great deal of unnecessary pain the first time. He was, however, asked to stay the night in order that he might deliver the rest of the rabbit but said that he felt giddy, with a sore throat and headache, and left for London at 5 p.m.

On Wednesday, 23 November, St. André returned to Guildford with a Mr. D'Anteny, resolved to bring Mary Toft to town if there was any further prospect of more rabbits. Mr. Howard told them that two more had been delivered since they had last seen her, but he hoped all was now over as there was no longer any motion in the uterus. Mr. St. André visited her several times that day, during which time she complained of constant pain in the right side of the abdomen, describing this as if very coarse brown paper was tearing from within her. That evening she passed a piece of membrane rolled up like parchment which when stretched out measured six inches in diameter. The following morning she passed a similar piece of membrane, and for the first

time this was accompanied by some bloody effusion. She was still in much pain, with an irregular pulse, a white tongue, and blood and mucus in the urine. They returned to London leaving her in Guildford.

Four days later Mr. Howard sent an express message to St. André informing him that another rabbit was then leaping in Mary Toft. By the request of His Majesty, King George I, he notified Sir Richard Manningham, asking him to accompany him to Guildford. Sir Richard Manningham was a well known and respected obstetrician of the time. He was the second son of Thomas Manningham who became Bishop of Chichester, and had been knighted in 1721. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society and a Licentiate of the College of Physicians. He, St. André and Mr. Limborch, a German surgeon and man-midwife, left for Guildford at 4 a.m. the next morning, arriving soon after noon. Mr. Howard was not at home so they proceeded to the house where Mary Toft was lodged. Mary, who by this time had seventeen rabbits, was in bed and Sir Richard took a history and examined her. From her breasts he was able to express a small quantity of milky fluid. On palpation the abdomen was soft and not enlarged, but the right side appeared fuller and harder than the left and was tender on pressure. He then examined her vaginally and found a rather elongated cervix with the os tightly closed. The uterus appeared enlarged by something within its cavity and the right Fallopian tube was palpable. As he felt no movements he asked the women present how long it was since the rabbit leaped (using their own expression) and if they thought it was now dead. They said it had not leaped since 1 a.m. He then left, returning at 5 p.m. with Mr. Howard.

Upon his return he again examined her and asked Mr. Howard if he thought the rabbit was dead. He was unable to say for certain but had noticed that the local application of heat would make the rabbit leap if alive. Hot cloths were brought and applied to the abdomen, immediately following which the leaping began. It resembled the leaping of something where he had felt the hardness. The motion took various forms, jerking and pulsating so strongly at times that the whole bed shook, despite the fact that several people were sitting on it. This was quite different from anything Sir Richard Manningham had seen before. Leaving Mr. Howard behind, they adjourned to the White Hart Inn where he joined them in less than one hour bringing with him, wrapped in paper, a piece of membrane which he said he had just delivered. Sir Richard admonished him for not having sent for him so that he could have delivered it personally, having come for that purpose, but Howard said he believed that there was more to come which Sir Richard could deliver himself before his return to London. When Sir Richard examined the membrane it appeared to him like a piece of bladder, but Howard insisted that it was part of the chorion of which he had more at home. They went to his home to see this and other parts of the rabbits and then visited one of Mr. Howard's patients. At about 8 p.m. a messenger came from Mary Toft saying she was in pain. They went immediately and found her sitting in a chair by the fireside. Her pains had subsided by then and when he examined her Sir Richard found something like a piece of skin in the

vagina. In order to see if this was coming from the uterus he passed his finger to one side of it but found the os still tightly closed. On removing and examining the object he found to his great surprise that it appeared to be a piece of hog's bladder. He informed the others of this, adding that in his opinion the membrane had not come from the uterus. This upset Mary Toft who began to cry. Sir Richard asked her why she was crying but she did not answer. The women present told him it was because she supposed he thought her a cheat. He asked for a hog's bladder which they brought him, having one in the house. This made him even more suspicious. He compared the two which appeared identical apart from the bladder being thicker than the membrane, both smelling strongly of urine. He insisted that he would not be satisfied unless he could actually remove from the uterine cavity some material identical with that taken from the vagina. Mr. Howard and St. André bid him to have a little patience and thought he would soon be satisfied but he still insisted that the membrane resembled a piece of hog's bladder, with which they had to agree. St. André stated that had he not personally delivered part of a rabbit from the uterus, he too would have thought the whole affair fraudulent. Mary Toft had several more pains that evening but nothing further was delivered.

Upon their return to the White Hart Sir Richard said that the more he thought about it, the more convinced he became that the membrane he had removed had never been in the uterus but was a piece of hog's bladder which had been skilfully conveyed into the vagina. This started a heated argument, St. André saying that there was nothing more surprising in this than in the fact that rabbits should have come from her uterus, the truth of which he was convinced by examination of the rabbit he had personally removed from her uterus and which, whilst resembling an adult externally, possessed organs which were definitely foetal. This proved that the animals were not bred in a natural way, therefore why should not the membrane looking like hog's bladder have come from the uterus? He was convinced that it was part of the chorion, with which Mr. Howard and Mr. Limborch agreed and they all persuaded Sir Richard to withhold making any public announcement until the whole labour was complete or until such time as he had further evidence that it was fraudulent, as a premature announcement would prevent the truth being discovered. He agreed to this and returned to London together with the membrane which he marked by a small notch.

On Tuesday, 29 November, Mary Toft was brought to London to Mr. Lacy's Bagnio in Leicester Fields. Sir Richard Manningham sat with her all night observing movements, often strong, on the right side of the abdomen. The following day the movements were weaker and she was able to sleep fairly well that night. The same day Sir Richard informed Dr. James Douglas of what had transpired at Guildford and showed him the membrane, asking his opinion which was that it looked like a piece of hog's bladder and surely this must be a deception. He repeated the story to His Grace the Duke of Richmond, the Duke of Montague, Lord Baltimore and Mr. Molyneux, but did not make a public announcement for the reasons given previously.

On Thursday, 1 December, her pains returned and Sir Richard examined her and found the vagina empty, but thought her pains were just like labour pains whilst Dr. Douglas who also examined her said that the pains were those of labour. Sir Richard re-examined her during a pain and found that the cervix appeared to be softening and the os beginning to dilate. She became flushed and developed tachycardia and the abdominal movements returned and persisted, although without any apparent effect on her appetite as she dined on beef, rabbit and, ironically, red-herring. She slept well that night but the movements continued the next day and became so strong in the evening that she had violent convulsions with clenching of her fists, rolling of her eyes and tumultuous movements. She was making a whining noise and became comatose at times. Her pulse was barely palpable and this fit lasted nearly two hours. She was very weak following this and appeared to have retrograde amnesia. She slept well that night but the movements returned the next day and towards the evening she had another fit although not as severe as the previous one. She was restless that night and had difficulty in passing urine but only slight abdominal movements.

On Sunday, 4 December, Sir Richard Manningham and Dr. Douglas again examined her and, for the first time, found a swelling above the pubes which appeared to be continuous with the uterus. The cervix was soft and the external os patulous. The pains returned at 3 p.m. when, together with Dr. Mowbray and Dr. Limborch, they repeated the examination and all agreed that something would soon issue from the uterus. Several others saw her and concurred, but her pains suddenly vanished. It now seemed that there might be some truth in Mary Toft's story which would not be resolved until the object in the uterine cavity was delivered, but later that evening events took a dramatic turn. Thomas Howard, porter at the Bagnio, made a statement before Sir Thomas Clarges, Bart., one of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace, concerning a rabbit which he had smuggled to Mary Toft. Following this she was arrested and cross questioned by Sir Thomas. She denied the porter's statement but her sister, who nursed her, being examined under oath, admitted obtaining the rabbit secretly but said it was for eating only. Mary Toft agreed with this and persisted she was still pregnant with rabbits.

Sir Richard Manningham examined her and thought that there was something within the cavity of the uterus. He pleaded with Sir Thomas not to send her to prison that night as he still felt that something might be delivered from the uterus in a little while and, as they could not be sure it was a fraud, the consequences might be serious if she were removed before the whole truth was discovered. The next day he again spoke to Sir Thomas and to several other people of distinction, also writing to Mr. Molyneux to prevent her being sent to prison. With some difficulty he managed to persuade Sir Thomas to let her remain in the custody of the High Constable of Westminster at the Bagnio until the trick was discovered or at least for a few days more.

On Tuesday, 6 December, Sir Thomas threatened her severely and this appeared to be the correct treatment as all her labour pains vanished. Emulating

this example, Sir Richard urged her to confess the truth, saying that he believed her to be an impostor and that she was made differently from other women, having some peculiar way of conveying pieces of rabbit into her uterus and deceiving everyone with her movements and pains. He therefore proposed to try a very painful experiment on her and had come prepared for this, whereas if she would confess the whole truth he would speak to several of the nobility on her behalf, some of whom promised their good offices on the same condition. She was so frightened by this that she pleaded with all those present to leave her alone until the next morning at which time, should she not confess, Sir Richard might proceed as he pleased.

On Wednesday, 7 December, in the presence of Sir Richard Manningham, Dr. Douglas, His Grace the Duke of Montague and Lord Baltimore she began her confession of the fraud. When she miscarried she had flooded and the os being dilated she believed one of her accomplices had put part of the monster, as she called it, into her womb. This monster was the claws and body of a cat with the head of a rabbit. This proved extremely painful and after this, to the best of her knowledge, nothing more was put into the uterus but only into the vagina. All this was on the advice of a woman accomplice, not named, who told her she would have no occasion to work for a living as she would put her on to a way of a good livelihood and would continue to supply her with rabbits in return for part of the profit. She said that Mary must put up sufficient pieces of rabbit to make up the number which a doe usually kindles at one time, otherwise she would be suspected. This number was sometimes thirteen. The woman continued to obtain rabbits for her and she introduced these when she had the opportunity. From the irritation of these, together with the movements which she herself produced, the violent bearing down pains were induced at intervals just like labour pains. The movements were part artificial and part real and persisted even when she was soundly asleep after her confession. Mary admitted that the only occasion on which Sir Richard Manningham examined her when anything had been in the vagina was the time when he had removed the piece of bladder. She had been afraid to put in anything since that time because he had told her that if he found twenty rabbits at times in her body, he would not believe her unless he took some part of the rabbit out of the uterus itself. Dr. Douglas took down this confession verbatim. On 3 and 4 December 1726 further depositions were taken before the Right Honourable the Lord Onslow from six people relating to the sale of rabbits to Joshua Toft, husband of Mary.

Mary Toft was prosecuted upon the statute of Edward III as a vile cheat and impostor. She was detained as a prisoner in Bridewell in Tothill Fields where vast crowds flocked to see her but they were not allowed near her and only the keeper's wife was permitted to go into the room to deliver anything to her, her husband being strictly searched whenever he visited her. This was not the last of her misdemeanours as she was sent to Guildford jail in 1740 for receiving stolen goods. She died at Godalming in 1763.

It was said in *Mist's Weekly Journal* that the learned gentlemen who found themselves mistaken at last in their judgements of that affair were healing



Fig. 1
Mrs. Mary Toft



Fig. 2

'Cunicularii or The Wise Men of Godliman in Consultation

They held their talents most adroit
For any mystical exploit.

A—The dancing master or preternatural anatomist.

B—An occult philosopher searching into the depth of things.

C—The Sooterkin Doctor, astonish'd.

D—The Guildford Rabbitt Man Midwife.

E—The rabbit getter.

F—The lady in the straw.

G—The nurse or rabbit dresser.'

their reputations as well as they could by writing pamphlets. These certainly appear somewhat prating when compared with their previous statements.

In the *Daily Journal* of 9 December 1726, Mr. St. André published an advertisement stating that he was now thoroughly convinced that it was a most abominable fraud and asking that his mistakes be excused and that he might be regarded as an innocent party to the guilty actors.

Dr. James Douglas published his own account of the affair in which he took great exception to several statements in Sir Richard Manningham's diary, especially the references to his saying that the pains were of the same nature as labour pains, that the suprapubic lump which he found was in the cavity of the uterus and that he agreed that something would soon issue from the uterus. He said that Sir Richard and St. André were both deceived by her story, also that William Cheselden the famous lithotomist, whom he requested should be consulted, had even further complicated the picture by offending Mr. Howard by the questions which he asked him. He persisted that from the first it had been his opinion that this was contradictory to all known from both reason and experience and that at one stage he had even been denied admission to the Bagnio when he wished to visit Mary Toft. It also appears that several other medical men including Thomas Brathwaite the surgeon and William Giffard the obstetrician were refused permission by St. André to see Mary Toft in labour.

The observations concerning the woman of Godlyman written by Cyriacus Ahlers paint a very different picture to that by St. André but, in fairness, must be considered in the light of the statements made at the time and in the presence of witnesses as described previously. He said he went to Guildford with Mr. Brand, a relation of Mr. Jager, the King's Apothecary, but Mr. Howard would not allow his companion to see Mary Toft as it was said that a crowd would frighten her. The door was locked after his admission and he was told by the nurse that the skin had just been delivered. Mary was sitting in a narrow arm-chair dressed in her stays and was examined by Mr. Howard, but when Ahlers prepared to do likewise he was forbidden by Howard who said he would let him know when it was convenient. He then examined the skin which appeared like that of a wild rabbit which had just been stripped, no blood or liquor being present. He asked Mr. Howard how the rabbit could possibly have become skinned *in utero* and was told it was due to the violent pressure of the uterus against the os pubis. The patient appeared perfectly well with no tachycardia or fever. Her abdomen was not enlarged and when he examined her breasts he found them soft and was able to express a little serous fluid only. He asked Mary some questions but she would not answer and Howard intervened saying that he would inform him of all that had happened. During this time Mary was walking about the room with her knees and thighs pressed together as though she was afraid that something might drop out. Soon she pretended to go into labour, with her knees close together and gripping a chair against which she stood. She began to shout and scream and twist the upper half of her body from side to side. Meanwhile Mr. Howard and Ahlers had been telling jokes and

Mary joined in the laughter. Cyriacus Ahlers thought this rather strange but Howard explained this by saying that she had an excellent constitution and was quite well between pains. Mr. Howard made her sit in the armchair whilst he examined her, which he did by sitting in a chair opposite to her with her knees pressed between his. They were sitting in front of a charcoal fire and the smoke from this obscured Mr. Howard's actions, especially those of his right hand. He continued to keep her knees pressed together, with his head against hers and holding her hands. She had some further pains in which she pushed her back against the back of the chair with such violence that Ahlers was forced to hold it to prevent it falling. She repeated this two or three times after which Howard examined her and asked him to do the same. On doing so he felt some broken bones and flesh protruding from the vagina which gripped them strongly. He took this to be the hind part of a rabbit stripped of its skin. Howard asked him to deliver it but he was frightened of hurting her and thought it best to wait until the pains returned. Howard said that his fingers were slimmer and again examined the woman, then insisting that Ahlers pulled on the presenting part which he did and, to his surprise, it came away very easily. It was the hind part of a rabbit bent in a rather peculiar manner and with no blood or liquor present. He went to examine her to find where the remaining parts of the rabbit were and what the cervix and uterus felt like but Howard became flushed and refused to allow him to do so saying that St. André had only examined her twice and he ought to be satisfied with having extracted part of it himself. By this time he was becoming highly suspicious of the whole affair, but he concealed this and pretended to be very sorry for the woman, upon which Howard pointed out how much trouble he had taken and how much pain the woman had suffered and hoped they would both be granted a pension by His Majesty, as many who had pensions did not deserve them. After this another labour was enacted and the foreparts of the rabbit extracted, again without any blood or liquor. Howard then suggested that they went to dinner but Ahlers requested that they stay until the head was delivered, saying that he felt much concern for her condition. This made Mary, Howard and the nurse all laugh heartily. After some while as nothing further had occurred they went to dinner where Howard's elder brother joined them. Howard, junior, left saying that he would return later and Ahlers, thinking over what had happened, decided that there was nothing to gain by staying and so pretended to have a headache and asked for his coach to be got ready for his return to London. As Howard did not return as promised he went to his house with his brother and Mr. Brand but he was not at home. Since he wished to give the woman something they went to her room where they found Howard, who told them he had just delivered the head. Ahlers informed him of his proposed return to London and gathered all the pieces of rabbit to take with him. He asked what had happened to the guts and feet, which he had not seen, but Howard thought these had probably fallen to the ground and been trampled underfoot. Howard showed him some other pieces of rabbit including one very large one with some of the rectum containing faecal pellets, one of which he extracted with a pin and presented to Ahlers in a

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box. He also began to read some papers of his on the case but these were quite well known and Ahlers could not be bothered with them. He and Mr. Brand said good-bye to the brothers and returned to London. On his return Ahlers examined the rabbit, the main findings of interest being that it appeared to have been cut into its several parts by a sharp instrument; the lungs floated in water; in the rectum were hard faeces containing small pieces of hay, straw and corn.

As well as these publications, there were many of a much less serious nature. There were songs and poems, often extremely lewd, with such titles as: A Song on the Rabbit Breeder; St. André's Miscarriage; The Discovery (or The Squire Turned Ferret);* Dr. Douglas in an Ecstasy at Lacy's Bagnio; The Rabbit-Man-midwife. One of the most popular was an illustrated broadsheet entitled 'The Doctors in Labour or a New Whim Wham From Guildford'. This commenced:

Poor Mary Toft in Ignorance was bred,
And ne'er betray'd a deep designing head,
Ne'er seemed cut out for plots; Yet never did wife,
Like her impose so grossly on Man Midwife,
Who scorning Reason Common sense and Nature,
Plac'd all their faith in such a stupid Creature.

The reason for its popularity may be seen in such a verse as the following:

The Rabbet all day long ran in my Head,
At Night I dreamt I had him in my Bed;
Methought he there a Burrough try'd to make
His Head I patted and I stroak'd his Back.
My Husband wak'd me and Cry'd Moll for shame
Lett go—What 'twas he meant I need not name.

Some of the happenings were named in extremely basic English which would not be accepted for publication in this broadminded age. We also learn that:

They're wellcome all to Mary—all that will
May in her Warren for a rabbit feel.

There are twelve verses in this vein before unhappy Molly is carried off to Bridewell, the last verse ending:

Poor Andrew sits upon Repenting Stool
Cursing his fate in being made a fool.

One particularly scurrilous publication purported to be Mary Toft's confession in which Sir Richard Manningham was described as an ugly old gentleman with a great black wig; Mr. Molyneux as a poor blind gentleman who was for surveying her with his telescope; St. André was a pretty gentleman who played

* By Alexander Pope, who immortalized Douglas in *The Dunciad*.

sweetly on the fiddle; Dr. Mowbray, the squab man that cried out a Sooterkin, a Sooterkin; Dr. Douglas, the worst of them all, was a fair-faced long-nosed gentleman with a neck like a crane; Cyriacus Ahlers was an outlandish surgeon, a fumble-fisted fellow as was never cut out to handle gentlewomen. Sir Richard's proposal which had led to her undoing was described as that barbarous experiment which they intended of sending a chimney-sweeper's boy up her Fallopian tube.

As well as these there were cartoons on the subject, the most famous being *Cunicularii*, or *The Wise Men of Godliman In Consultation*, by Hogarth and for which some of the leading surgeons of the day each subscribed one guinea, that the occasion should continue to be remembered.

To end, one cannot do better than to quote the words of Lemuel Gulliver, Surgeon and Anatomist to the Kings of Lilliput and Blefescu and Fellow of the Academy of Sciences in Balnibari.

But I can't conclude without seriously lamenting the great detriment like to accrue to our Nation by the stir which has been made about this foul imposture, both by the actors and examiners of it; and that as well in regard to the Warreners and Poulterers (who complain that the consumption of rabbits, within this Metropolis, is become, by two-thirds, less than it was formerly;) as in relation to those obscene and indecent images, which for more than these nine days last past, beyond all example, have filled the minds, and furnished out the conversation of people of all ranks, ages and conditions. And whether ideas of this nature are fit to be put into the heads of rude boys, boarding-school girls, and old maids, I leave every discreet and prudent Matron to judge.

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