

ALSO BY
LAUREL THATCHER ULRICH

*Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives
of Women in Northern New England,
1650-1750*

A MIDWIFE'S TALE

The Life of Martha Ballard,

Based on Her Diary,

1785-1812



Laurel Thatcher Ulrich



*Vintage Books
A Division of Random House, Inc.
New York*

CHAPTER ONE

AUGUST 1787

"Exceeding Dangerously ill"

MS. A. 9. 2. 1. 1787

3 6* Clear & very hot. I have been pulling flax. Mr Ballard
Been to Savages about some hay.

4 7 Clear morn. I pulld flax till noon. A very severe shower
of hail with thunder and Lightning began at half after one continu'd
near 1 hour. I hear it broke 130 pains of glass in fort western.
Colonel Howard made me a present of 1 gallon white Rhum &
2 lb sugar on account of my attendance of his family in sickness.
Peter Kenny has wounded his Legg & Bled Excesivly.

5 8 Clear morn. Mr Hamlin Breakfastd here. Had some pills.
I was calld at 7 O Clok to Mrs Howards to see James he being
very sick with the canker Rash. Tarrid all night.

6 2 I am at Mrs Howards watching with her son. Went out
about day, discovered our saw mill in flames. The men at the
fort went over. Found it consumd together with some plank &
Bords. I tarried till Eving. Left James Exceeding Dangerously
ill. My daughter Hannah is 18 years old this day. Mrs Williams

*The first number indicates the day of the month, the second number the day
of the week. Letters indicate Sundays.

here when I came home. Hannah Cool gott Mrs Norths web
out at the Loom. Mr Ballard complains of a soar throat this
night. He has been to take Mr gardners hors home.

7 3 Clear. I was Calld to Mrs Howards this morning for to
see her son. Find him very low. Went from Mrs Howards to
see Mrs Williams. Find her very unwell. Hannah Cool is there.
From thence to Joseph Fosters to see her sick Children. Find
Saray & Daniel very ill. Came home went to the field & got
some Cold water root. Then Calld to Mr Kenydays to see Polly.
Very ill with the Canker. Gave her some of the root. I gargled
her throat which gave her great Ease. Returned home after dark.
Mr Ballard been to Cabesy. His throat is very soar. He gargled
it with my tincture. Find relief & went to bed comfortably.

8 4 Clear. I have been to see Mary Kenida. Find her much
as shee was yesterday. Was at Mr McMasters. Their Children
two of them very ill. The other 2 recovering. At Mr Williams
also. Shee is some better. Hear James Howard is mending. Han-
nah Cool came home.

9 5 Clear. I workd about house forenoon. Was Calld to Mrs
Howards to see James. Found him seemingly Expiring. Mrs
Pollard there. We sett up. He revivd.

10 6 At Mrs Howards. Her son very sick. Capt Sewall &
Lady sett up till half after 4. Then I rose. The Child seems
revivd.

11 7 Calld from Mrs Howard to Mr McMasters to see their
son William who is very low. Tarrid there this night.

12 8 Loury. At Mr McMasters. Their son very sick. I sett up
all night. Mrs Patin with me. The Child very ill indeed.

13 2 William McMaster Expird at 3 O Clock this morn. Mrs
Patin & I laid out the Child. Poor mother, how Distressing her

Case, near the hour of Labour and three Children more very sick. I sett out for home. Calld at Mrs Howards. I find her son very Low. At Mr Williams. Shee very ill indeed. Now at home. It is nine O Clok morn. I feel as if I must take some rest. I find Mr Ballard is going to Pitston on Business. Dolly is beginning to weave thee hankerchiefs. Ephraim & I went to see Mrs Williams at Evinging. I find her some Better.
*death of W^m McMaster**

14 3 Clear & hott. I pikt the safon. Mrs Patten here. Mr Ballard & I & all the girls attended funeral of William McMaster. Their other Children are mending. James Howard very low. I drank Tea at Mr Pollards. Calld at Mr Porters.

15 4 Clear morn. I pulld flax the fornion. Rain afternoon. I am very much fatagud. Lay on the bed & rested. The two Hannahs washing. Dolly weaving. I was called to Mrs Claron in travil at 11 O Clok Evening.

16 5 At Mr Cowens. Pur Mrs Claron to Bed with a son at 3 pm. Came to Mr Kenadays to see his wife who has a swelling under her arm. Polly is mending. I returnd as far as Mr Pollards by water. Calld from there to Winthrop to Jeremy Richards wife in Travil. Arivid about 9 o Clok Evin.

Birth Mrs Clarons son

17 6 At Mr Richards. His wife Delivered of a Daughter at 10 O Clok morn. Returned as far as Mr Pollards at 12. Walked from there. Mrs Coy buryd a dafter yesterday. Mr Stanley has a dafter Dangirous. William Wicher 2 Children also.

Birth Jeremy Richard dafter

18 7 I spun some shoe thread & went to see Mrs Williams. Shee has news her Mother is very sick. Geny Huston had a Child Born the night before last. I was Calld to James Hinkly

*Italics indicate marginal entries.

to see his wife at 11 & 30 Evening. Went as far as Mr Weston by land, from thence by water. Find Mrs Hinkly very unwell.

19 8 At Mr Hinkleys. Shee remaind poorly till afternoon then by remedies & other means shee got Easier. I tarried all night.

20 2 Clear. Mr Hinkly brot me to Mr Westons. I heard there that Mrs Clarons Child departed this life yesterday & that she was thot Expreing. I went back with Mr Hinkly as far as there. Shee departed this Life about 1 pm. I asisted to Lay her out. Her infant Laid in her arms. The first such instance I ever saw & the first woman that died in Child bed which I delivered. I Came home at dusk. Find my family all Comfortable. We hear that three Children Expird in Winthrop last Saterday night. Daniel Stayd at Mr Cowens.

21 3 A rainy day. I have been at home knitting.

22 4 I atended funeral of Mrs Claron & her infant. Am Enformd that Mrs Shaw has Doctor Coney with her. I calld to see James Howard find him low. Mrs North also is sick. A thunder Shower this Eving.

23 5 I sett out to visit Joseph Fosters Children. Met Ephraim Coven by Brooks' Barn. Calld me to see his Dafters Polly & Nabby who are sick with the rash. Find them very ill. Gave directions. Was then Calld to Mrs Shaw who has been ill some time. Put her safe to Bed with a daughter at 10 O Clok this Eving. Shee is finely.

Birth Mr Shaws Dafter

24 6 Calld from Shaws to James Hinklys wife in travil. Put her safe to Bed with a son at 7 O Clok this morn. Left her as well as is usual for her. Came to Mr Shaws receivd 6/8. Receivd 6/8 of Mr Hinkly also. Came to Mr Cowens. Find his dafters & Jedy ill. Claron & David came inn from Sandy river. People

well there. Arrivd at home at 5 afternoon. Doctor Coney's wife delivrd of a daffer Last Evening at 10 O Clok.

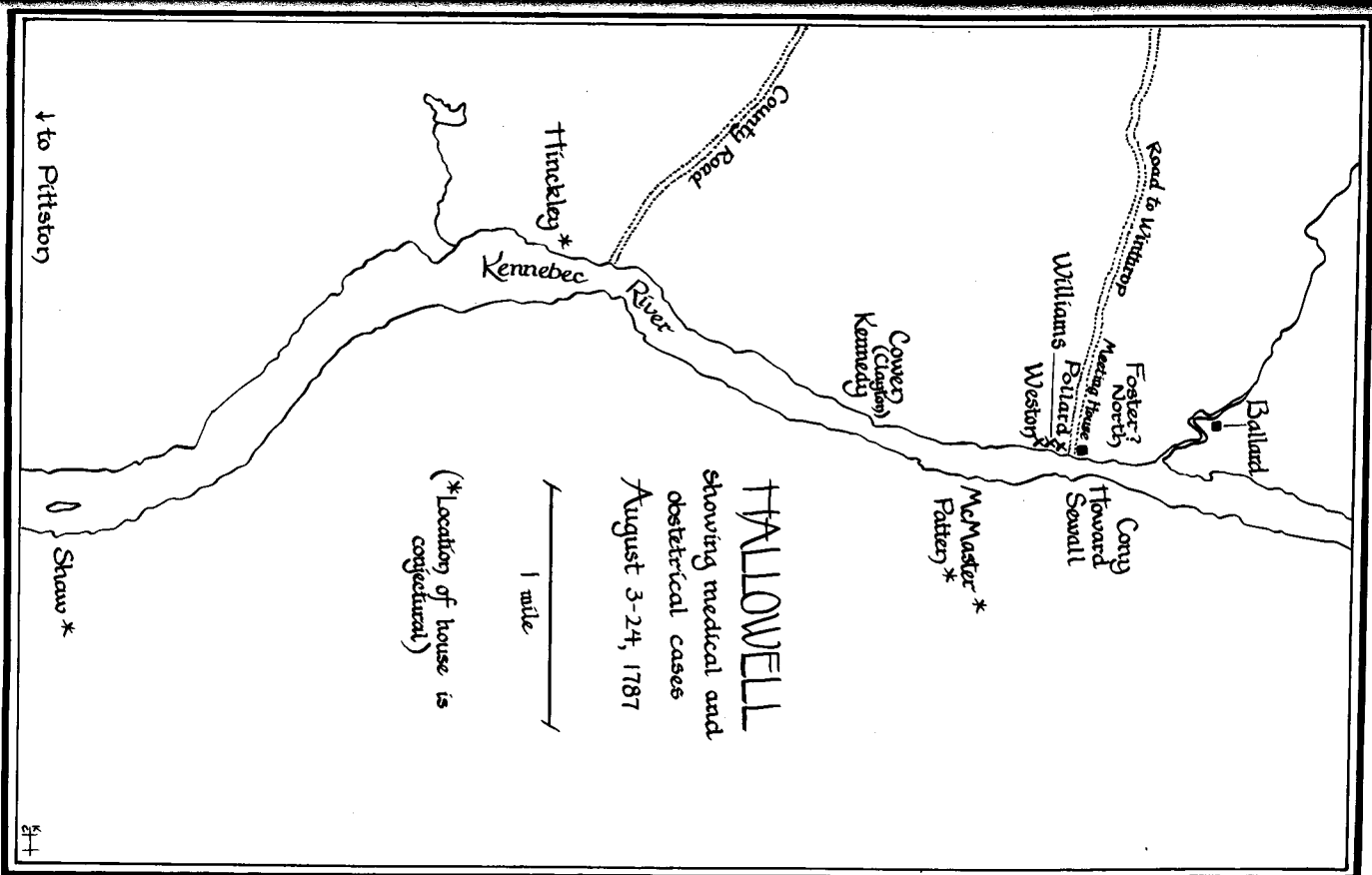
Birth James Hinkley's son



Martha Ballard was a midwife—and more. Between August 3 and 24, 1787, she performed four deliveries, answered one obstetrical false alarm, made sixteen medical calls, prepared three bodies for burial, dispensed pills to one neighbor, harvested and prepared herbs for another, and doctored her own husband's sore throat. In twentieth-century terms, she was simultaneously a midwife, nurse, physician, mortician, pharmacist, and attentive wife. Furthermore, in the very act of recording her work, she became a keeper of vital records, a chronicler of the medical history of her town.

"Doctor Coney here. Took account of Births & Deaths the year past from my minnits," Martha wrote on January 4, 1791. Surprisingly, it is her minutes, not his data, that have survived. The account she kept differs markedly from other eighteenth-century medical records. The most obvious difference, of course, is that it is a woman's record. Equally important is the way it connects birth and death with ordinary life. Few medical histories, even today, do that.¹

In June of 1787, as Martha's flax blossomed in the field beyond the mill pond, scarlet fever ripened in Hallowell. She called it the "canker rash," a common name in the eighteenth century for a disease that combined a brilliant skin eruption with an intensely sore, often ulcerated throat. The "Putrid Malignant Sore Throat," a New Hampshire physician called it. We know it as "strep," scarlet fever being one of several forms of infection from a particular type of streptococci. Although mild in comparison with the scourges of diphtheria that had swept through towns like Oxford earlier in the century, scarlet fever was dangerous. Martha reported five deaths in the summer of 1787, 15 percent of the canker rash cases she treated.²



Six-month-old Billy Sewall, Henry and Tabitha's only child, was the first to die. "What an excellent thing is the grace of submission!" the young father wrote on the day of the baby's funeral. Had he been less certain of his own salvation, he might have interpreted the sickness in his family as a judgment of God upon him for his continuing quarrel with Mr. Isaac Foster, the Congregational minister of the town. But Henry Sewall was not given to that sort of self-doubt. "How happy to feel the temper of holy Job," he wrote, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth."³

The Lord loved the minister too. On July 28, when Sewall came to the Ballard mills to get a raft of slabs, Martha was in a neighbor's field digging cold water root to treat the minister, who was himself "very sick with the rash." By then a dozen families had someone ailing. Martha went back and forth across the river carrying remedies to feverish children, all the while watching for signs of illness in her own family. When a visiting nephew "seemed unwell," she swathed his neck with warmed tow and gave him hyssop tea. When Mr. Ballard and Dolly complained of feeling ill, she bathed their feet and brewed more tea, adding at the end of that day's entry, "I feel much fatigued my self."⁴

At the height of the epidemic, the heat that lay over the Kennebec exploded in a cloudburst of hail. "I hear it broke 130 pains of glass in fort western," Martha told her diary in the August 4 passage. Sewall noted smugly that though the storm "broke all the windows the windward side of houses, mine I saved, chiefly by taking out the sashes." He weighed some of the hailstones and found they topped half an ounce.⁵ Two days later, fire struck at the Ballard sawmill. Martha watched it from the opposite side of the river where she had spent the night nursing four-year-old James Howard, whose sister, Isabella, had already died of the rash. "The men at the fort went over. Found it consumed together with some plank & Bords," she wrote.

For her there was little time to contemplate the loss of the mills. Through August she continued to nurse the sick, tracking their condition in her diary with formulaic phrases that went

from "poorly" through "very ill," "very ill indeed," and "Exceeding Dangerously ill" to "seemingly Expiring" or in the opposite direction from "Dangerous" to "revived" or from "much as shee was yesterday" to "Easier" and then "Comfortable." She recorded all the summer's events, her everyday work as well as the continuing evidence of God's chastening hand, in the same terse style. She "pulled flax," then bathed a child's cankered throat, "worked about house," then found a little boy "seemingly Expiring," picked saffron, then attended another child's funeral, drank tea, then laid out an infant in its mother's arms.

On August 11 she arrived at the McMaster house to find little William "very low." She sat with him all through the day on Sunday and into the night. At about three a.m. on Monday he died. With the help of Mrs. Patten she prepared the body for burial, then, as the neighborhood began to stir, started home, stopping in at the Howards', where James was still "very Low," and at the Williamses', where "shee" (presumably the mother) was "very ill indeed." Although Martha was exhausted by the time she reached her house, she sat down to write in her journal: "William McMaster Expird at 3 O Clock this morn. Mrs Pain & I laid out the Child. Poor mother, how Distressing her Case, near the hour of Labour and three Children more very sick."

"Poor mother." That entry contains the one burst of emotion to appear in the diary all summer. Although Mrs. McMaster was not the only woman in Hallowell to lose a child nor the only mother with two or three children suffering from the rash, something about her situation had pierced Martha's literary reserve. [Perhaps the three-day vigil had brought back that summer of 1769 when she was herself "near the hour of Labour" and diphtheria flourished like witch grass in Oxford. Hannah, the daughter born in the epidemic, turned eighteen on August 6, the day the sawmill burned. Martha remembered the birthday, but for some reason, during this summer of illness, she neglected her usual remembrance of the Oxford deaths. Her daily activities were enough of a memorial.]

Not all the illness in Hallowell in the summer of 1787 can be attributed to scarlet fever. There were the usual accidents on farms or in the woods; Martha poulticed a swollen foot for one of the Foster boys in early June and in August, though she wasn't called to administer aid, noted that "Peter Kenny has wounded his Legg & Bled Excessively." There were also those "sudden strokes" that twentieth-century physicians would attribute to cardiovascular causes. On July 12, 1787, Martha reported that "a man fell down dead in the Coart hous at Pownalboro," a fate that had overcome old James Howard a few months before.⁶

Then there were the troubling deaths of Susanna Clayton and her infant. Martha had delivered the Clayton baby on August 16. The birth was uneventful, with no warning at all of the distressing news she would hear four days later as she was returning home from nursing Mrs. Hinkley, who lived in the southern part of the town opposite Bumberhook. James Hinkley had brought Martha upriver as far as Weston's landing, where she heard "that Mrs Clatons Child departed this life yesterday & that she was thot Expiring." Martha got back in the boat and went back down the river as far as the Cowen farm, where Susanna Clayton had given birth and was lying in.

She arrived in time to help with the last nursing and to lay out the baby in its mother's arms. These deaths brought no exclamation, no "Poor mother" (or "Poor husband"). The mere facts were enough to mark them as singular ("the first such instance I ever saw") and monumental ("the first woman that died in Child bed which I delivered"). Martha had seen newborn infants die, but in the more than 250 deliveries she had performed since coming to the Kennebec, no mother of hers had succumbed.⁷ Susanna Clayton's death appears in the diary as an inexplicable stroke of Providence, an event as unrelated to the canker rash as fire or hail. Martha could not have known that puerperal fever and scarlet fever grew from the same invisible seed—Group A hemolytic streptococci.

No one in the eighteenth century could have related the two phenomena. Not until the 1930s did scientists unravel the mysterious epidemiology of scarlet fever. Depending upon prior ex-

posure, the same toxin that produces a sore throat and a rash in one person may produce a sore throat, a wound infection, a mild and fleeting illness, or no symptoms at all in others. Yet all these persons can spread the infection. Scarlet fever can even be transmitted through the milk of infected cows.⁸ It is not surprising, then, that Martha treated Isaac Hardin's son for an abscess as well as a rash, that Mrs. Kennedy had "a swelling under her arm" at the same time as her children were sick with the fever, or that puerperal infection and the canker rash both appeared at one house.⁹ Susanna Clayton was the daughter of Ephraim Cowen, the man who summoned Martha on August 23 to treat his younger daughters, "who are sick with the rash." She had given birth on her father's farm just upriver from the Kennedys', where Martha had administered cold water tincture.¹⁰ Susanna Clayton was the only one of Martha's obstetrical patients to die, yet other women and their babies may have been infected. Mrs. McMaster, the "poor mother" of the August 13 entry, gave birth on September 8. Her infant, whom Martha described as "very weak and low," lived only two days, and by September 23 the mother was herself so ill that Dr. Cony was summoned. He apparently recommended some sort of laxative. "Mrs Cowen & I administered remedies that Doct Coney prescribd," Martha wrote, adding that when the "physic began to operate," she left to care for another patient. Fortunately, Mrs. McMaster survived.

Focusing on the progress of an epidemic, as we have done here, obscures the fact that most of those infected eventually recovered. Billy McMaster and his newborn brother died, but his mother got better. Saray and Daniel Foster, Polly Kennedy, and the younger Cowen girls were soon up and about, and little James Howard, a child "Exceeding Dangerously ill" in August, was once again "mending" in September. At the end of one of her diary packets, Martha tallied births and deaths for the six years 1785 through 1790. In eighteenth-century terms, Hallowell was a healthy place. Its death rate averaged fifteen per thousand, about what one would find in parts of southern Asia today, but only half of that recorded for eighteenth-century seaports like Salem or Boston. Just as important, in almost

every year the town had four times as many births as deaths.¹¹ Even in a sickly season, there was reason for hope as well as sorrow.

In western tradition, midwives have inspired fear, reverence, amusement, and disdain. They have been condemned for witchcraft, eulogized for Christian benevolence, and caricatured for bawdy humor and old wives' tales. The famous seventeenth-century English physician William Harvey dismissed the loquacious ignorance of midwives, "especially the younger and more meddlesome ones, who make a marvellous pother when they hear the woman cry out with her pains and implore assistance." Yet a popular obitrical manual published in the same century dignified their work by arguing that Socrates's mother was a midwife and that "the Judges of old time did appoint a stipend for those women that did practice Physick well."¹²

In the early years of settlement, some American colonists did in fact provide free land, if not stipends, for midwives.¹³ Yet the most famous midwife in early America is remembered for religious martyrdom rather than obstetrics. Boston ministers commended Anne Hutchinson for the "good discourse" she offered women in their "Childbirth-Travells," but when her teachings threatened to disrupt their authority, they condemned and banished her. The Puritans took their contradictions directly from the Bible. The Book of Exodus celebrates the courage of the Hebrew midwives who when told to destroy the male children of Israel "feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them." But the Apostle Paul, while acknowledging the good works of women who "relieved the afflicted," condemned those who wandered about from house to house, "speaking things which they ought not."¹⁴

English midwifery guides also warned against impiety and gossip. "I must tell you, it is too common a Complaint of the modest Part of Womankind, against the Women-Midwives, that they are bold, and indulge their Tongues in immodest and lascivious Speeches," warned one author who styled himself a sur-

geon. Another echoed the language of the Apostle in arguing that a good midwife "ought to be *Faithful* and *Silent*; always on her *Guard* to conceal those Things, which ought not to be spoken of."¹⁵

Samuel Richardson drew upon midwifery lore in creating the character of Mrs. Jewkes, the terrifying woman who holds the innocent Pamela captive in the novel that gave Martha Ballard's niece her name.¹⁶ Charles Dickens exploited the same body of myth to different effect in his comic portrait of Sairey Gamp in *Martin Chuzzlewit*:

She was a fat old woman, this Mrs. Gamp, with a husky voice and a moist eye.... She wore a very rusty black gown, rather the worse for snuff, and a shawl and bonnet to correspond.... Like most persons who have attained to great eminence in their profession, she took to hers very kindly; insomuch, that setting aside her natural predilections as a woman, she went to a lying-in or a laying-out with equal zest and relish.¹⁷

Martha Ballard had at least one thing in common with Sairey Gamp—she was very fond of snuff. Yet in eighteenth-century Maine, it was not necessary to set aside one's "predilections as a woman" in order to perform what Martha once called "the last office of friendship." Her diary tames the stereotypes and at the same time helps us to imagine the realities on which they were based. Midwives and nurses mediated the mysteries of birth, procreation, illness, and death. They touched the untouchable, handled excrement and vomit as well as milk, swaddled the dead as well as the newborn. They brewed medicines from plants and roots, and presided over neighborhood gatherings of women.

Two nineteenth-century novels by New England women focus on the homely mysteries of village healers, coming closer to Martha's diary than most English literature. Sarah Josepha Hale's *Northwood*, published in 1827, was said to have been based on her own memories of a late-eighteenth-century New

Hampshire town. Hale went out of her way to make clear that, though her gossipy healer Mrs. Watson was a fortune-teller, she was neither a witch nor a hag. No, she was "reputed one of the neatest women and best managers in the village. And many wondered how it happened that though she went abroad so much, she generally contrived to have her own work done in season, and quite as soon as her neighbors."¹⁸

The central character of Sarah Orne Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs* is also a good housewife. In the opening pages of the book, Jewett describes a "queer little garden," green with balm and southernwood, presided over by Mrs. Todd. Some of her plants "might have belonged to sacred and mystic rites . . . but now they pertained only to humble compounds brewed at intervals with molasses or vinegar or spirits." Stopping to visit Mrs. Todd at her garden fence, the local physician "would stand twirling a sweet-scented sprig in his fingers, and make suggestive jokes, perhaps about her faith in a too persistent course of thoroughwort elixir."¹⁹

Hale and Jewett idealized their New England villages—there is no diphtheria or canker rash in either book—yet they grounded their stories in a world Martha might have recognized. One of the central issues for her, as for Mrs. Watson, was how to get her work done at home while spending so much time with her neighbors. Her garden, though less romantic than Mrs. Todd's, also incorporated notions of healing handed down the centuries, and her diary reveals, as does Jewett's novel, the friendly distance between a "village doctor" and a "learned herbalist."

Later chapters will explore Martha Ballard's domestic economy. The remainder of this chapter will pursue Jewett's themes, reaching beneath the story of the August 1787 epidemic for clues to Martha's herbalism and to her relations with the town's other healers, male and female. Hallowell had several male physicians. In the last years of the eighteenth century, these included, in addition to Daniel Cony: Samuel Colman, who arrived at Fort Western in the 1780s; Benjamin Page, who set up practice at "the Hook" in 1791; and Benjamin Vaughan, an

Edinburgh-educated doctor and heir to the Plymouth Company claims, who settled on the Kennebec in 1796, offering himself not as a competitor but as a gentlemanly mentor to the local doctors. In addition, several physicians from neighboring towns—Obadiah Williams, James Parker, and John Hubbard—occasionally treated Hallowell patients. (Martha's brother-in-law, Stephen Barton, practiced in Vassalboro from 1775 to 1787, but spent the next decade in Oxford and died shortly after returning to Maine.)

Martha was respectful, even deferential, toward the men's work, but the world she described was sustained by women—Mrs. Woodward, Mrs. Savage, Mrs. Yose, Old Mrs. Ingraham, Sally Fletcher, Lady Cox, Hannah Cool, Merriam Pollard, and dozens of others, the midwives, nurses, afternurses, servants, watchers, housewives, sisters, and mothers of Hallowell. The diary even mentions an itinerant "Negro woman doctor," who briefly appeared in the town in 1793. Female practitioners specialized in obstetrics but also in the general care of women and children, in the treatment of minor illnesses, skin rashes, and burns, and in nursing.²⁰ Since more than two-thirds of the population of Hallowell was either female or under the age of ten, since most illnesses were "minor," at least at their onset, and since nurses were required even when doctors were consulted, Martha and her peers were in constant motion.

When Martha went to the field to dig cold water root on August 7, 1787, she was acting out the primary ritual of her practice, the gathering of remedies from the earth. Although she purchased imported laxatives and a few rare ingredients (myrrh, "dragon's blood," galbanum, spermaceta, and camphor) from Dr. Colman, she was fundamentally an herbalist. "Harvested saffron," "Cut the sage," "Gathered seeds & Cammomile mint & hyssop"; such entries scattered throughout the diary tie her practice to English botanic medicine.²¹ Three-quarters of the herbs in the diary appear in Nicholas Culpeper's *The Complete Herbal*, published in London in 1649 (and reprinted many times

in America). Almost all can be found in E. Smith, *The Compleat Housewife: OR, Accomplish'd Gentlewoman's Companion*, an early eighteenth-century English compendium.²² Martha administered herbs internally as teas, decoctions, syrups, pills, disters, vapors, and smoke and externally in poultices, plasters, blisters, cataplasms, baths, ointments, and salves. "Find Dolly lame. Poultist her foot with sorril roasted," she wrote on October 11, 1787, and when Theophilus Hamlin came to the house feeling ill, she "made a bed by the fire & gave him some canrip tea." Presumably the warm drink and the fire would cure his cold by contrastes. Sympathetic medicine also worked. When Martha used saffron to treat jaundice in newborn children, she was following the ancient doctrine of "signatures," the yellow plant being the obvious cure for yellow skin.²³

There is no evidence in the diary of direct borrowing—she never mentions reading a medical book—yet Martha's remedies obviously rested on a long accumulation of English experience. When she used dock root to treat "the itch" or applied burdock leaves to an aching shoulder, she was following Culpeper's practice whether she knew it or not. More difficult to determine is her attitude toward the astrological concepts that informed his herbal. She may not have been aware, when she gave a newly delivered woman feverfew tea, that "Venus has commended this herb to succour her sisters."²⁴ But her quiet statement on July 26, 1788, "Dog Days begin this day," associates her with such ancient traditions. Since antiquity, the period in late summer when the Dog Star became visible in the heavens had been linked with illness. The almanacs, which had determined the very form of her diary, perpetuated such beliefs. In fact she had good reason for believing that dog days brought illness, for she consistently made more medical calls in late summer than at any other time of the year. Whether her neighbors were actually more sickly during August and September or simply more disposed to ask for help, we do not know.²⁵

Her remedies are even closer to those in Smith's book. Like the English woman, she accepted the medicinal as well as the culinary virtues of common garden plants like green beans, onions, and currants and of household staples like vinegar, soap,

and flour. On October 14, 1790, for example, she was "Calld in great hast to see Mrs Hamlin who was in a fit. I walkt there, applyd Vinagar to her Lips, temples, & hands & onions to her feet & shee revivd." And on another day, "Mr Ballard is unwell. Has taken some soap pills."²⁶ There is hardly an ingredient in Martha's diary that does not appear in Smith's compendium. Both women routinely used camomile, sage, and tansy. Both employed cantarides and Elixir Proprietas. Both concocted that most famous of all cures—chicken soup. Yet compared to Smith's receipts, Martha's medicines are "simples." The most elaborate remedies described in her diary employ at most three or four plants. In contrast, Smith's recipe for "Lady Hewer's water" contains seventy-five separate plants, seeds, roots, and powders. Nor is there any hint in Martha's diary of the zoological inventiveness that led Smith to recommend setting a bottle of newly made cordial "into a hill of ants for amonth," to combine goose dung, ground snails, and earthworms with saffron, or to wet bandages in the spawn of frogs.²⁷

There is no indication that Martha used cow or sheep dung poultices, as did some New England healers, but she did believe in the curative powers of urine, as on September 23, 1786: "I was Calld Early this morn to see Lidia Savage who was very ill. Gave her some urin & honney & some Liquoris & put a plaster to her stomach. Went up afternoon. Find her Relievd."²⁸ She also accepted the pervasive notion that cat's blood had healing power. When a Mr. Davis came to the house suffering from shingles, she "bled a Catt & applid the Blood which gave him Relief."²⁹ She didn't say whether the cat she bled was pure black without a single white hair, as insisted on by some rural practitioners, but she did record one cure that clearly included the kind of detail which folklorists associate with magic. When her niece was suffering from consumption and all other remedies seemed to have failed, she tried a practice "recommended as very Beneficial by Mr Amos Page." The young woman rose from her sickbed "about an hour by sun in the morn went out & milkt the last milk from the cow into her mouth & swallowed it."³⁰

Even within Martha's practice, however, such cures were ex-

otic. Herbs, wild as well as cultivated, were the true foundation of her practice. She wilted fresh burdock leaves in alcohol to apply to sore muscles, crushed comfrey for a poultice, added melilot (a kind of sweet clover) to hog's grease for an ointment, boiled agrimony, plantain, and Solomon's-seal into a syrup, perhaps following an old method that called for reducing the liquid by half, straining this decoction through a woolen cloth, then adding sugar to simmer to the thickness of new honey.³¹ Most of the wild plants she used had familiar English names, whether they were escapes from early gardens or New World varieties of Old World herbs. There are few distinctly American names in the diary.³² She mentioned poulticing wounds with basswood, a plant not found in the English herbaria, but when she and a grandchild "went to the field and got sennake root," they may have been gathering a local variety of sanicle, a plant Culpeper credited with the power to "stay women's courses," rather than Seneca snakeroot, an American native. (A later entry does, however, refer to "a decoction of snake root & saffron.")³³

The root Martha dug during the scarlet fever outbreak of 1787 was an indigenous plant, however.³⁴ According to a legend recorded in Rochester, Massachusetts (where Martha's brother, Jonathan Moore, was minister), a local man got cold water root from "an Indian named Nathan Hope" during an epidemic of diphtheria in 1754. Eventually it "developed into a wild herb common to all the region."³⁵ Martha may have heard about the root and its uses from Jonathan. Just as likely, the plant had always been "common to all the region," in Oxford as in Rochester, though Indians may well have taught the first settlers how to use it. Its association with diphtheria is suggestive. If Martha had learned about cold water root in Oxford, it is difficult to imagine her preparing her sore throat "vincture" in Hallowell in 1787 without thinking of her own children and the epidemic of 1769.

The eclecticism of English medicine encouraged the incorporation of Indian or African cures. An aura of mystery, if not magic, attached to persons who were otherwise stigmatized in colonial society. Smith's recipe book included "The Negro

Ceasars Cure for Poison" reprinted from *The Carolina Gazette*, and Hallowell patients sought out the "Negro doctress" during her brief sojourn in the town. (Mrs. Parker even borrowed Martha's horse "to go and see the negro woman doctor.")³⁶ There is no evidence that Martha was curious about Indian or Afro-American medicine, however. She noted the presence of the black healer but did not bother to record—or perhaps even to learn—her name. Such attitudes help to explain why her remedies are closer to Culpeper's seventeenth-century herbal than to James Thacher's *The American New Dispensatory*, an early-nineteenth-century pharmacopoeia that attempted to evaluate and incorporate Indian physic.³⁷

In eighteenth-century terms, Martha was an "empiric," a person unconcerned with theory. Her own descriptions demonstrate that her most immediate concern was to make her patients feel better. "I gargled her throat which gave her great Ease," she wrote after preparing the cold water tincture for Polly Kennedy. The same remedy helped her own husband "find relief." The two phrases appear in the diary repeatedly. When one patient was suffering from dysentery, she "administered a Clister which gave her Ease." When Hannah was ill, she gave her camomile and camphor and sent her "into a warm Bed. I hope it will relieve her." Beyond the physical comfort of hot tea or a soothing syrup was the comfort of an idea: Nature offered solutions to its own problems. Remedies for illness could be found in the earth, in the animal world, and in the human body itself. When Martha Ballard applied warmed tow to the neck of little Gideon Barton, she was doing more than assuaging pain, she was confirming the essential order of the universe.³⁸

It would be a mistake, however, to describe her as a fringe practitioner preserving ancient English remedies lost to professional medicine. Most of the therapies we now associate with "folk" medicine were still a part of academic practice in her time. One of the Kennebec's best-educated physicians, Dr. Moses Appleton of Waterville, Maine, left a manuscript collection of recipes that included, in addition to erudite Latin formulas, a cure for dropsy compounded of parsley roots,

horseradish, and mustard seed and a treatment for "the malignant sore throat" that called for applying carded black wool wet with vinegar and salt, ear to ear.³⁹ The most explicit reference to astrological (or, more precisely, lunar concepts) in Hallowell comes from Daniel Cony's family record. One Cony child, the doctor reported, was born on "the first day of the week, the first hour of the day and the first day of the moon," another on "the 5th day of the week, and the eleventh day of the moon."⁴⁰

The technological simplicity of early medicine meant that male doctors offered little that wasn't also available to female practitioners. The stethoscope had not yet been invented. Watches with second hands were so rare that no one as yet counted the pulse (though in a general way most practitioners observed it). Nor did the clinical thermometer exist. Even the simple technique of percussion (tapping the chest and abdomen to discover fluid or masses) was yet to come.⁴¹ A probare inventory taken after the death of Dr. Obadiah Williams included "A Quantity of Medicine & Bortles together with the Amputating Instruments." That brief sentence pretty well describes the medical arsenal available to an eighteenth-century physician—drugs and a few rudimentary surgical instruments. Williams *did* use his instruments. On March 5, 1789, Martha wrote, "There was a young man had his Legg Cutt off at Stirling by Doctor Williams. He brot it to Doctor Coneys & dissected it." Martha didn't observe this dissection, but she did attend four autopsies in the course of her career, carefully recording the results in her diary (see Chapter Seven). That fact alone suggests that Hallowell's physicians considered midwives part of the broader medical community, a subordinate part no doubt (doctors dissected, midwives observed), but a part nonetheless.⁴²

Midwives and doctors shared a common commitment to what Martha would have called "pukes" and "purges." Early medicine merged the two meanings of *physic* as "knowledge of the human body" and as "a cathartic or purge." Because all parts of the body were related, laxatives treated the entire organism, not simply the gastrointestinal system. "I was called to see Lidia White who has had firs this day, but had left her before I arrivd

Shee complaind of an opresion at her stomach and pain in her head, I left her a portion of senna and manna." Senna and manna were mild cathartics. When her daughter Dolly was ill, Martha noted that a combination of "Senna & manna with annis seed and Rhubarb . . . operated kindly." She even used manna with infants.⁴³

The emphasis on expulsion derived from the ancient theory of humors, the notion that health was achieved by a proper balance of the four bodily fluids—blood, phlegm, choler (or yellow bile), and melancholy (or black bile). When Martha wrote that Lidia Bisbe was "sick of a bilious disorder" or that Mr. Savage's daughter "puked up a considerable quantity of phlegm," she was expressing that world view, as was Moses Appleton when he recommended black wool "to keep back the humors."⁴⁴ The notion of humors had been greatly enlarged by the end of the eighteenth century, however. As one encyclopedia explained it, the term "HUMOUR, in medicine, is applied to any juice, or fluid part of the body, as the chyle, blood, milk, fat, serum." Writing of a "Child who had a bad humour on the head and feet," Martha was using the generic term.⁴⁵ Yet the importance of fluids, their condition, quantity, and means of expulsion, remained central.

When Martha noted that a lanced abscess "discharged a Large quantity," she may have been commenting positively on the effectiveness of the cure rather than negatively on the seriousness of the infection. Festering was also a method by which the body expelled troublesome humors. The application of "blisters," local irritants designed to raise a watery discharge, imitated another of nature's remedies. "Calld to see Mrs Weston. Shee being very unwell I aplyd a Blister, Batht her feet, put on a Back Plaster," she wrote on November 14, 1786.⁴⁶ Baths and plasters, like blisters, treated internal problems with external remedies. They cooled or heated, soothed or excited, according to temperature or contents.

Although theoretically a person might lose too much fluid, most remedies seem to have promoted expulsion. Constipation was dangerous, as was an unhealthy accumulation of bile. Men-

situation, too, could prove troublesome if "obstructed," which is why Martha Ballard "prescribed the use of particular herbs" for a young woman named Genny Cool. What those herbs were and whether they might also have been employed to induce abortion, we do not know. There is no mention in the diary of savine, the best-known English abortifacient, though Martha did gather tansy, a plant associated in some herbals with abortion. In her practice, however, tansy seems to have been employed as an *antelmintic*, that is, an agent for expelling worms. (Intestinal parasites were common, as we shall see in Chapter Seven.)⁴⁷

The most dramatic of the humoral therapies was bloodletting, a remedy Martha seldom mentioned and never employed. Along the Kennebec, the lancet was clearly a male implement. "Mr Stoddard seemd to have more feavour," Martha wrote on February 16, 1795. "Doctor Page Bled him in the feet this morning. He has been bled, phisicked and Blistered before in his sickness." She noted that Dr. Colman bled one of her patients in the late stages of pregnancy, though it seems not to have been at her request. One home medical guide recommended bleeding "for pregnant women about the sixth, seventh or eighth month, who are plethoric and full of blood," but added that "children bear purging better than bleeding." Martha seems to have preferred purging for both groups. One of the few descriptions of bleeding in the diary involved a horse. "Mr Ballard went to Mr Browns for his mare," Martha wrote. "Had her Bled in the mouth. She bled all the way home & Continued to bleed an hour or two after coming home. We at length filld the incision with fur & it Ceast."⁴⁸

That male physicians leaned toward dramatic therapies was only to be expected. Their status—and fees—required as much. Dr. Cony used rhubarb and senna, as Martha did, but he also prescribed calomel, the mercurial compound Benjamin Rush called the "Samson of medicine." One historian concludes that in large doses calomel "did indeed slay great numbers of Philistines." The impressive salivation that followed its violent purging was in fact one of the symptoms of mercury poisoning.⁴⁹ Hallo-

well's physicians also used laudanum (a liquid opiate), purple foxglove (*digitalis*), and the bark (quinine), therapies associated with a newer "solidistic" overlay on humoral therapy.

Unlike humoral therapy, which concentrated on bodily juices, solidistic medicine loosely followed Newtonian physics in attempting to regulate the mechanical properties of "solids," usually defined as blood vessels and nerves. Doctors employed tonics to stimulate bodily force, sedatives to induce relaxation. In practical terms, humoral and solidistic approaches overlapped, since both tried to control respiration, perspiration, and excretion.⁵⁰ Thus, a physician might employ cathartics either to "flush out unbalanced humors" or "to relax the abnormal tensions which had constricted his patients' intestinal fibers." For the patient, the consequences were the same.⁵¹

Whether or not Martha understood solidistic theory, she rejected some of the remedies associated with it. (Here she departed from Smith, who added laudanum to cough syrup and recommended "jesuits bark" for ague and fever.) Martha was dismayed when Dr. Page attempted to use laudanum in childbirth (see Chapter Five). She was also convinced that the use of "the bark" contributed to the death of Mrs. Pillsbury during another outbreak of the canker rash. Martha had been nursing the woman ("The Lady was in a fine persperation the most of the night") when an urgent call from another family took her away. When she returned two days later, she discovered Mrs. Pillsbury "in a kind of delirium; her raising had ceast and her mouth very dry. They informed me shee had been much so through the night past. It is my opinion the use of the Bark was in some measure the Cause." Martha seems to have interpreted the "raising"—that is, the rash itself—as a useful phenomenon, an indication that the sweating had been successful in expelling the ill humor. She did not say who had suggested the bark, though it may have been one of Hallowell's physicians. A published pamphlet on the "Putrid Malignant Sore Throat" argued that "the tonic as well as antiseptic powers of the Bark must render it a medicine not only proper, but highly necessary in this disorder."⁵² Martha disagreed. She seemed pleased when

"Old Mrs Kenny Came and advised to giv her a syrrip of vinegar & onions and a decoction of Gold thread and shumake Berries. It was done and shee seemd revird." The revival was temporary. Mrs. Pillsbury died.⁵³

Martha Ballard's dislike of the new remedies did not stem from a general mistrust of physicians—she was quite willing to call them to her own family in serious illness—but from an innate conservatism. She was most comfortable with the doctors when their ideas reinforced the old therapies and the long-standing social arrangements. When one of her own daughters fell ill, she walked to Dr. Colman's to get senna and manna, and when "shee soon became dilarious we sent for Doct Cony who approvd of what I had done—advised me to continue my medisn till it had operation. She was siesd with a severe Puking soon."⁵⁴ In the world of eighteenth-century medicine, midwives and doctors sought—and generally achieved—similar results.

In twentieth-century terms, the ability to prescribe and dispense medicine made Martha a physician, while practical knowledge of gargles, bandages, poultices, and clisters, as well as a willingness to give extended care, defined her as a nurse. In her world, such distinctions made little sense. She sometimes acted under the direction of a doctor. More frequently she acted alone, or with the assistance of other women. It is no accident that Daniel Cony's name appears only at the end of the August entries you have read. When scarlet fever broke out in Hallowell in June, he was in Boston attending the General Court. He was back on July 19 to deliver his sister, Susanna Church, of a son, but was soon off to the interior settlements on business.⁵⁵ On July 26 Martha was summoned to *his* house to treat a servant, Peggy Cool, who was suffering from the rash.

Ironically, when the doctor did show up in the diary it was in the context of delivery. Martha's quiet entry for August 22, 1787—"Mrs Shaw has Doctor Coney with her"—suggests more than a casual interest in the doctor's whereabouts. Mrs.

Shaw was then nine months pregnant, and perhaps in labor, or at least experiencing some of the signs of imminent delivery, when the doctor was called. Why she called him we do not know. Perhaps she was worried about possible complications, perhaps frightened by the recent death of Susanna Clayton. As it turned out, Martha delivered the baby. "Put [Mrs. Shaw] safe to Bed with a daughter at 10 O Clok this Evingg," she wrote on August 23, and on the next day added drily, "Doctor Coneys wife delivrd of a dafter Last Eving at 10 O Clok"—that is, at exactly the same time as Mrs. Shaw. It would seem, then, that if his own child hadn't intervened, Cony might have delivered the Shaw baby. Still, whatever her original intent, Mrs. Shaw was apparently satisfied with her midwife: two years and one month later, she summoned Martha again.

Daniel Cony's presence at the bedside of Mrs. Shaw suggests that reverberations of the new scientific obstetrics had reached the Kennebec. Unlike the surgeons of an earlier era, who were called only in dire emergencies, usually to dismember and extract an irretrievably lost fetus, late-eighteenth-century physicians considered it appropriate to officiate at an ordinary delivery. Yet most of them limited their obstetrical practice to eight or ten cases a year, whatever they could conveniently fit into their practice. Significantly, Martha performed at least one delivery for Cony's sister Susanna Church and another for his sister-in-law Susanna Brooks.⁵⁶

Kennebec doctors were not only part-time midwives, they were part-time physicians. Daniel Cony was a land proprietor and politician as well as a physician—perhaps a politician most of all. A Portland associate complained after a visit, "He had not been in the house half an hour before my head turned round like a top with politics. I would not live in the same house with ... Daniel Coney for ten thousand pounds per annum."⁵⁷ Yet Cony knew how to use one specialty to reinforce another. In a letter to a Massachusetts congressman, he neatly dismissed his political opponents by offering a "chemical" analysis of their behavior. Such men, he wrote, "abound with 'vitriolic acid' with a certain proportion of 'aqua regia.'"⁵⁸ He became a fellow of

the Massachusetts Medical Society not so much because of his medical skills, which by the standards of his own time were ordinary, but because his election to the legislature put him in frequent contact with the gentlemen who ran such associations. He was also a justice of the peace, as were fellow doctors Moses Appleton of Waterville and Obadiah Williams of Vassalboro.⁵⁹

Samuel Colman, Hallowell's second physician, was less involved in public affairs, but almost as distracted. Still single when Martha's diary opened, he lived for a time at Fort West-ern, eventually opening a store where he sold scythes, hoes, and tobacco, as well as pharmaceuticals.⁶⁰ Waterville's Harvard-educated doctor, Moses Appleton, had similar interests: a single entry in his daybook lists debts for an almanac, a half-yard of calico, and a gallon of vinegar; prescriptions for senna, camphor, and an unguent; and fees for sewing and dressing a wound.⁶¹ Dr. Page was more single-minded than the others (and the one most disposed to intrude on Martha's territory, as we shall see in Chapter Five), but he too doubled as a trader. In 1796 he advertised "a very handsome assortment of Drugs and Medicine, among which is a variety of patent articles," including "Andersons, Hoopers, and Lockyers Pills, Bateman's Drops, Turlington's Balsam of Life, and Daffy's Elixer." He also sold smelling bottles, nutmegs, British oil, and cephalic snuff.⁶² That the region's most earnest prescriber of imported drugs was also its major supplier was a conflict of interest no one seems to have noticed—or at any rate been troubled by.

The most successful Kennebec physicians were Federalist gentlemen, organizers of agricultural societies, builders of bridges, incorporators of banks. Their involvement in medical organizations was part of this general commitment to voluntarism and civic betterment. (Colman, Appleton, and Page, like Cony, were members of the Massachusetts Medical Society, as well as promoters of regional organization.)⁶³ They were successful practitioners not only because of their acknowledged status as learned gentlemen but because the town's other healers chose to defer to them in hard cases. There were no laws to prevent Martha or her neighbors from administering calomel or

drawing blood, yet they did not do so. By custom and training, honseering, tooth-pulling, bloodletting, and the administration of strong drugs were reserved for self-identified male doctors. When Martha "misplaced a Bone in the Great toe of my right foot," she was grateful for the help of Dr. Page, but most of the time she and her family got along quite well without him.⁶⁴ It was no doubt part of the men's strength that they supported neighborhood practitioners, offering chemical compounds and venesection only when tansy failed. Even their inaccessibility was an advantage, a sign of their importance in the larger world.

Male physicians are easily identified in town records and, even in Martha's diary, by the title "Doctor." No local woman can be discovered in that way. Hallowell's female healers move in and out of sickrooms unannounced, as though their presence there were the most ordinary thing in the world—as it was. Historians have been dimly aware of this broad-based work, yet they have had difficulty defining it. Physicians who joined medical societies and adopted an occupational title can be recognized as professionals. But what shall we call the women? Persons who perambulated their neighborhoods hardly practiced *domestic medicine*, nor does *folk medicine* accurately describe the differences between them and male professionals. Other commonly employed categories are equally misleading. *Popular medicine* conveys the ferment of the nineteenth century, with its competing sects of herbalists, homeopaths, and hydropaths, but obscures the cooperative, if hierarchical, arrangements of eighteenth-century practice. *Lay medicine* connotes the lack of formal organization in female practice, but fails to suggest its complexity. A better label is *social medicine*, borrowing from the now familiar concept of social childbirth.⁶⁵

Professionals sought to be distinguished from the community they served (hence the need for the title "Doctor"?). Social healers, on the other hand, were so closely identified with their public we can hardly find them. Professionals cultivated regional or cosmopolitan networks, joining occupational associations. Social healers developed personal affiliations and built local reputations. Professional training, even if only in the form of ap-

prenticeship, was institutional, fixed in place and time. Social learning was incremental, a slow build-up of seemingly casual experience.

Florence Nightingale's famous statement that "every woman is a nurse"⁶⁶ captures one element of social practice—its grounding in common duties—but it fails to convey the specialization that occurred even among female healers. Caring for the sick was a universal female role, yet several women in every community stood out from the others for the breadth and depth of their commitment. They went farther, stayed longer, and did more than their neighbors. It would be a serious mistake to see Martha Ballard as a singular character, an unusual woman who somehow transcended the domestic sphere to become an acknowledged specialist among her neighbors. She was an important healer, and without question the busiest midwife in Hallowell during the most active years of her practice, but she was one among many women with acknowledged medical skills. Furthermore, her strengths were sustained by a much larger group of casual helpers.

In the August 1787 passage, she named five persons who in some way shared the care of the sick during the canker rash epidemic. Hannah Cool was at the Williams house on August 7, Mrs. Pollard at Mrs. Howard's on August 9, "Capt Sewall & Lady" at the same house on August 10, and Mrs. Patten at the McMasters' on August 12. Although each person appears in the diary in much the same way, there were important differences between them.

Hannah Cool was living with Martha Ballard in the summer of 1787. She actually appears twice in the August segment: on August 6, when she "gott Mrs Norths web [of cloth] out at the Looms," and on August 7-8, when she was at Mrs. Williams's, where there was illness. Whether she was doing nursing or housework at the Williamses' we do not know, nor does it matter. In this period the occupations of nurse and maidservant overlapped. Hannah was probably a sister of Mrs. Williams, whose maiden name was Cool. Like most single women, she moved frequently between the homes of relatives and neigh-

bors, performing whatever sort of work was needed. (Her sister Peggy died of the canker rash at Dr. Cony's, where she was also a servant.) Hannah was older and more skilled than most household helpers, however, capable of wrapping a loom as well as nursing. Living with Martha Ballard, she may have picked up some medical skills as well. In the spring of 1788, when Joseph Williams was critically ill and "went to Dr Williams to be Doc-tered," Martha noted that "Hannah Cool went to be his nurse."⁶⁷

"Mrs Patin" and "Capt Sewall & Lady" were married folks fulfilling basic obligations of neighborliness. Sally Patten was the wife of Thomas Patten, the blacksmith. Martha Ballard had delivered their first child a year earlier. "Capt Sewall & Lady" were, of course, Henry and Tabitha, whom we have met before. In watching with little James Howard, they were returning the help they had received earlier that month when their own child was dying of the rash. Their obligation wasn't to Mrs. Howard in particular—she had been too busy nursing Isabella to have helped with the care of Billy—but to the common fund of neighborliness that sustained families in illness. Neither poverty nor wealth nor a recent bereavement excused one from helping where there was need. Henry's presence at the Howard house was somewhat unusual, however. Usually men sat with men, women with women or children. There is no entry in his diary for August 10, though he did note on August 14 that "Mr. McMaster buried a son, in his 4 year. It died of a canker rash."⁶⁸

Merriam Pollard represents a different form of social healing. The wife of Amos Pollard, the tavern and ferry keeper, she was the mother of at least seven children, most of whom were grown. She represents a group of perhaps ten women who served as general care-givers to the town. A frequent watcher at bedsides and attendant at deliveries, she was particularly skilled in laying out the dead. She was not a midwife, at least not yet, though she did deliver one child when Martha was delayed.

Seeing Hannah Cool, Sally Patten, and Merriam Pollard at a single instant, an experienced observer could easily have distin-

gushed between them. One was simply a servant, the second a helpful neighbor, the third a recognized healer. The tasks that they performed were also distinct. Given the dominant therapies, Hannah Cool must have spent her time brewing tea, spooning gruel, and emptying chamber pots. Sally Patten had the most passive role. As a watcher, her job was to sit beside the patient, offering comfort or conversation, noting alterations in breathing, color, or demeanor, summoning help when it was needed. Merriam Pollard had more specialized tasks to perform. Like Martha Ballard, she knew how to swab swollen tonsils, change dressings, apply plasters, and administer a clister. She was also prepared, when the time came, to wash and dress the dead, easing eyelids and limbs into sleeplike dignity.

Yet each of these women could, over the course of a lifetime, encompass all these roles—and others besides. The social construction of healing allowed the free flow of information from one level to another. Administering a doctor's or midwife's prescription, feeding the fire under a bubbling syrup, shifting and turning a sister in bed, helping with the stitching on a child's shroud, watching, listening, soaking in attitudes of hand and eye, susceptible helpers found their callings. Martha Ballard probably started out very much like Hannah Cool, doing nursing as well as housework for her relatives or neighbors. Once married, she would have had less freedom for general nursing but more scope for perfecting the gardening and cookery that were so closely associated with herbal medicine. As a young matron she no doubt watched with sick neighbors and assisted at births, until in midlife, with her own child-rearing responsibilities diminished, she became a more frequent helper and eventually a healer and midwife. Midwives were the best paid of all the female healers, not only because they officiated at births, but because they encompassed more skills, broader experience, longer memory. "Mrs Patin with me." The social base of female medicine is apparent in the very casualness of the entry. A midwife was the most visible and experienced person in a community of healers who shared her perspective, her obligations, her training, and her labor.