

# Texts and Documents

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## ROBERT TALBOR, CHARLES II, AND CINCHONA A CONTEMPORARY DOCUMENT\*

by

RUDOLPH E. SIEGEL and F. N. L. POYNTER

WHILE pursuing studies on Galen, one of the writers of this note (R.E.S.) purchased a copy of Leclerc's *Histoire de la Médecine* (1702) and was interested to find that it bore the signature of 'J. C. Carpue', probably Joseph Constantine Carpue (1764-1846). Three fly-leaves of the volume also contained a long MS note in French and in an earlier hand than Carpue's relating the circumstances in which King Charles II first became acquainted with Robert Talbor and his remedy for the ague (malaria). The writer of the note was apparently moved to record this personal reminiscence by an allusion to cinchona in the second part of Leclerc's book (p. 68), where its discovery is cited as proof of the superiority of the Empiricists over the Dogmatists. The conflict of methods and ideas between the two schools was still very much alive in the seventeenth century and was a great handicap to men like Malpighi and others. The early—and almost accidental—success achieved with cinchona may well have been responsible for the tolerance accorded to all kinds of empirics and quacks in the following century, especially in England, where the notorious Joshua Ward (also under royal patronage, for he was favoured by George II) secured personal exemption from an Act of Parliament regulating the preparation and sale of drugs.

A close study of the note (by F.N.L.P.) revealed that the episode of which it tells could be dated precisely, and that the account it gives of the manner in which Charles II first met Robert Talbor and subsequently gave his royal patronage to the celebrated bark and its English promoter gives us a more reliable and intimate picture of that event than any available hitherto.

The King's visit by water to Sheerness, a coastal fort which had just been completed to protect the naval base of Chatham and the Thames estuary against the Dutch, took place on 7 June 1672 (see Evelyn's *Diary*). The naval battle of Solebay had been fought with the Dutch only a few days earlier and the Earl of Sandwich had been killed in action. The British and French fleets, then in alliance against the Dutch, were being prepared for an attempted landing in the Netherlands, where the French armies had advanced rapidly. During the war, many French nobles visited Charles at Windsor to establish liaison and co-ordinate their plans. The writer of the note, who had caught malaria while fighting with 'our' (i.e. the French) army in the Low Countries was apparently in the early summer of 1672 landed with other sick from the French fleet in Essex, where news reached him that he was to accompany the King to Sheerness.

Robert Talbor, who was born in 1642, had been apprenticed to an apothecary in Cambridge, where he later spent five years at St. John's College. Cinchona (Peruvian Bark, Jesuits' Bark), from which quinine was first obtained by Pelletier and Caventou in 1820, had been available in England since at least Cromwellian times, but few had

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Je me crois obligé de raconter comment le Kinquina  
 devint enfin établie par toute l'Europe, après avoir  
 esté ~~(il le faut dire)~~ <sup>pour 30 Anns</sup> comme caché par l'industrie et  
 l'Avarice des certains gens indignes d'une profession  
 si honorable. Estant fort malade d'une Fièvre  
 intermittente que j'avois attrappé en Flandre, et dont  
 presque toute nostre Armée fut infectée cest Année là;  
 La concierge du logis m'apporta un fort pauvre homme  
 qui avoit guérie plusieurs de mes Domestiques, et qui  
 me paroissoit si assuré de son fait que, ne le voyant  
 pas en aucune manière fantasque, Je ne hesitois nullement  
 à prendre son remede, quoy qu'inconnu <sup>alors</sup> aussi bien que lui  
 mesm. Cestoit du Poudre trempé dans un gros verre de  
 vin blanc qu'il m'ordonnoit de boir tout entier trois fois  
 en 24 heures. Mais il estoit si espais que mon estomac ne  
 pouvoit souffrir la pesanteur de plus de deux reprises,  
 lesquelles ne laisserent pas de me garentir de mon  
 acces d'une telle maniere, que j'entroy librement en  
 une semaine de service auprès du Roy Charles 2; qui pourtant  
 devant aller par eauz à Sheer-Nest, l'endroit de tout l'Angleterre  
 le plus Fievreux, Je le dit à mon petit medecin qui me  
 donna la permission non <sup>seulement</sup> pas d'y aller là, mais de me  
 divertir à la Nage, ou en debauches, si Je voulois: Tellement  
 qu'en allant dans le ~~Barreau~~ Je ne pouvois pas manquer  
 de conter tout ceci au Roy le plus curieux du monde; et le  
 plus grand amateur des Empiriques. Enfin il me donna  
 ordre de l'amener, et fit tant d'essais du Poudre que son  
 medecin n'ayant pas peu deviner ce que cestoit, il lui <sup>donna</sup>

First fly-leaf of Dr. Siegel's copy of Leclerc's *Histoire de la Médecine* (1702) with the beginning of the contemporary note.

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success with it because of ignorance of dosage and methods of administration. Talbor seems to have solved this problem in his early twenties and become a specialist in the treatment of agues. In 1671 he settled in Essex, a low-lying coastal district where malaria was endemic. As he tells us in his *Pyretologia, a rational account of the cause and cure of agues* in 1672, 'I planted myself near the seaside where agues are the epidemical diseases'. Despite the remoteness of his retreat it was there that he met and successfully treated the man who was to present him to the King and set him on the highway to fortune. Only a few weeks later, on 27 July 1672, he was appointed Physician to the King and, later, knighted. He died in 1681 and was buried in Trinity Church, Cambridge.

The remainder of the document accords with the known facts of Talbor's subsequent career. Any doubts we may have about the authenticity of the note or the reliability of the writer's memory are dispelled when we compare what it tells us about the reaction of the physicians who were consulted with the account of the same episode as related by Evelyn in his *Diary*. On 29 November 1694, Evelyn writes:

I visited L: Marques of Normanby, & had much discourse concerning the King Chas 2d being poisoned: also concerning the *Quinquan* which the Physitians would not give the King, at a time when in a dangerous Ague it was the onely thing could ever cure him, out of envy, because it had ben brought into vogue by Mr. Tabore an Apothecary; Til Dr. Short (to whom the K. sent to have his opinion of it privately, he being reputed a papist, but was in troth a very honest good Christian): he sent him word, it was the onely thing could save his life, & then the King, injoynd his physitians to give it him, & was recovered: Being asked by this Lord why they would not prescribe it: Dr. Lower said, it would spoile their practise or some such expression: & at last confessed it was a Remedy fit onely for Kings: (V, 197-8).

It has unfortunately not been possible to identify the writer of the note. The handwriting bears no resemblance to that of Lord Normanby (later the Duke of Buckingham) who told part of the story to Evelyn. That he was French is shown not so much by the language in which he wrote (for it could well have been written by an Englishman of that time) as by the reference to 'our army in Flanders'. He must certainly have been a nobleman to have been in the King's immediate circle where he was in a position to tell the King about Talbor and then to present him.

#### TRANSCRIPT

Je me vois obligé de raconter comment le Kinquina devint enfin établie par toute l'Europe, après avoir esté (il la faut dire) pour 30 Anns caché par l'industrie et l'Avarice des certains gens indignes d'une profession si honorable. Estant fort malade d'une Fievre intermittente que j'avois attrappé en Flandre, et dont presque toute nostre Armée fut infecté cest Année la; La concierge du logis m'amene un fort pauvre homme qui avoit guerrie plusieurs de mes Domestiques, et qui me paroissoit si assuré de son fait que, ne le voyant pas en aucune manière fantasque, je ne hesitois nullement a prendre son remede, quoy qu'inconnue alors aussi bien que lui mesm. Cestoit du Poudre trempé dans un gros verre de vin blanc qu'il m'ordonnoit de boir tout entier trois fois en 24 heures. Mais il estoit si espais que mon estomac ne pouvoit souffrir la pesanteur de plus de deux reprises, lesquelles ne laisserent pas de me garentir de mon acces d'une telle maniere, qui j'entrois librement en ma semaine de service auprès du Roy Charles 2<sup>de</sup>; qui pourtant devait aller par eaux a Sheer-Nest, l'endroit de tout l'Angleterre le plus Fievreux. Je le dit a mon petit medecin qui me donna la permission non pas seulement d'y aller la, mais de me divertir a la Nage, ou en debauches, si je voulois. Tellement qu'en allant dans le Bateaux, je ne pouvois pas manquer de conter tout ceci au Roy le plus curieux du monde, et le plus grand amateur des Empiriques. Enfin il me donna ordre de l'amener, et fit tants d'essais du

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poudre que, les medecins n'ayants pas peu deviner ce que cestoit, il lui donna trois cents pieces de Pension, le fit Chevalier, et l'un de ses medecins, pour scavoir, afin de publier le secret d'une telle importance au salut des Hommes. On estoit bien surpris de le trouver rien que le Quinquina beaucoup deguisè, et donnè seulement, au contrair de la Methode des Medecins, iustement apres l'accès. On ne scauroit imaginer la confusion des medecins du Roy auxquels, selon sa coutume, il fit bien des railleries a cause qu'ils m'avoient defendue le Quinquina expressement comme inutile et dangereux. Mais ce qui estoit plaisant, le Roy mesme tombant dangereusement malade a Windsor d'une fievre intermittente quelques Annèes apres, le Conseil d'Etat contraignoit une Douzaine des Medecins de declarer si le Quinquina qu'ils allerent donner au Roy, n'estoit pas quelques fois nuisible, ou au moins inutile; sur quoy estant obligèes de repondre promptement, et sans pouvoir concerter ensemble, chacune asseuroit franchement quil'avoit souvent esprouvè sur des petits enfants mesmes, et tousiours avec succes. Apres quoy, le Roy a moitiè guerie poussa Dr. Lower malicieusement, lui demandant comment la mesme chose si mauvaise pour mois, devenoit si admirablement bonne pour lui? le D<sup>r</sup> embarrassè ne scavoit que repondre qu'en raillant a son tour, et iurant que c'estoit une Remede donc les Rois seuls furent dignes d'en profiter.

Mon petit bon homme s'appella Taber, fort ignorant, mais si attachè a son proiet, quil avoit demeurè expres dans une Province malsain pour essayer et emeliorer son Remede; et ayant estè fort pressè par les Medecins de France (ou le Roy l'envoya pour guerir sa Niece) d'exposer son ignorance en expliquant l'origine des Fievres, fit cest celebre reponce. Messieurs, je ne pretende pas scavoir aucune chose de la Fievre horsmis que c'est une Maladie que vous autres ne scavent pas guerir, et que je gueris infailliblement.

Il s'enricha beaucoup a Paris aussi bien qu'a Madrid, d'ou estant retournè a Windsor, et la Reine lui presentant sa main pour estre baisè a la mode de nostre pays, au lieu de se mettre a genoux, il estendit la sienne toute couverte des riches bagues qu'on lui avoit donnè dans ces pays la; par lequel on peut iuger egallement de son arrogance et sa stupiditè. En voila une grande victoire pour les Empiriques, il me semble; quils seront obligèes a me defendre astheur contre les Maladies et, ce qui est encore plus dangereux, contre les Medecins aussi.

### TRANSLATION

I feel obliged to report how Quinquina became finally established all over Europe after it had been (it must be admitted) practically concealed for 30 years by the efforts and the greed of certain people unworthy of such an honorable profession. Being very ill with an intermittent fever which I contracted in Flanders and which afflicted almost our entire army during that year, the woman attending our quarters brought to me a very poor man who had cured several of my servants. He appeared to me so assured of this fact that, seeing that there was nothing of the charlatan about him, I had no hesitation whatever in taking his remedy, although both it and he were quite unknown to me at that time. It was a powder steeped in a large glass of white wine, the whole of which he ordered me to drink three times in 24 hours. But the mixture was so thick that my stomach could not tolerate the weight of more than two repeated doses. This however was sufficient to protect me from the fit in such a manner that I was able to embark on my week's service at the Court of King Charles II, who however had to go by water to Sheerness, the most fever-ridden place in the whole of England. I told this to my little doctor, who gave me permission not only to go there, but also to amuse myself swimming, and even in debauchery if I felt inclined. Thus, when I went on board ship I could not avoid telling the whole story to the most inquisitive King in the whole world, who is also the greatest patron of empirics. At length he ordered me to bring the man to him and he made many experiments with the powder. Since the physicians could not guess what it was, the King gave him a pension of 300 pieces and a Knighthood and made him one of his personal physicians, solely in order to find out and eventually to publish a secret of such importance for the health of all mankind. It was very surprising to find that it was nothing but Quinquina well disguised. It was only given, in contrast to the method of the physicians, immediately after the fit. One cannot imagine the confusion of the King's physicians, whom he made great fun of, as was his way, because they had expressly forbidden me Quinquina as a useless and dangerous drug. But the joke was that,

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some years afterwards [1679], the King himself being dangerously ill at Windsor with an intermittent fever, the Council of State forced a dozen physicians to declare if Quinquina, which they were about to give the King, was not sometimes harmful or, at least, useless. To this they were obliged to answer promptly, and without an opportunity of consulting amongst themselves beforehand, and each one frankly assured them that he had often tried it, even on small children, and always with success. After which, the King, already half cured, pressed Dr. Lower maliciously, asking him how the very thing which was so bad for me had become so wonderfully good for him. The embarrassed doctor could only reply in a similar tone of raillery, that this was a remedy from which only kings were worthy of profiting.

My little fellow called himself Taber. He was quite ignorant, but so devoted to his project that he stayed especially in an unhealthy district in order to try out and improve his remedy. Having been hard pressed by the physicians of France (where the King had sent him in order to cure his niece) so that he might expose his ignorance in explaining the origin of fevers, he made this celebrated reply: 'Gentlemen, I do not pretend to know anything about fever except that it is a disease which all you others do not know how to cure, but which I cure without fail.'

He became very rich in Paris as well as in Madrid. Having returned from there to Windsor where the Queen presented him her hand for the kiss according to the custom of our country, instead of kneeling down he stretched out his own hand which was completely covered with valuable rings given to him in those countries, from which one can judge both his arrogance and his stupidity. There, it seems to me, was a great victory for the empirics that they should be obliged at the same time to defend me against disease, and, what is still more dangerous, against the doctors too!

## A NEW METHOD OF EDUCATING THREE-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN (1695)

*by*

WILLIAM BROCKBANK

WHICH would you rather have, one thousand pounds or your three-year-old child taught to learn languages and most arts and sciences? The money should be assessed at its value at the end of the seventeenth century when it was worth far more than it is at the present time and there was no income tax.

The question is prompted by the title page of a fascinating duodecimo volume published in 1695. As was the custom its title was lengthy and ran to some 150 words:

A New Method of Educating Children: or Rules and Directions for the Well Ordering and Governing Them during their Younger Years. Shewing that they are capable, at the Age of Three Years, to be caused to learn Languages and most Arts and Sciences; which if observ'd By Parents would be of greater Value than a Thousand Pounds Portion. Also What Methods is to be used by Breeding Women and what Diet is most proper for them and their Children to prevent Wind, Vapours, Convulsions, etc.

Written (to disengage the World from those ill Customs in Education, it has been so long used to) by Tho. Tryon; Author of 'The Way to Health', 'Long Life and Happiness'.

Recommended to Parents, Nurses, Tutors and all others concerned in the Education of Children.

London: Printed for J. Salusbury at the 'Rising Sun' in Cornhill; and J. Harris at the 'Harrow' in the Poultry, 1695.

Price bound One Shilling.