

390 Summit Street
Kingsport, Mass.
22nd October 1844

To my esteemed colleague Dr Montgomery St. John Lowell,

Good day to you sir, and please forgive the impertinence of an unsolicited letter. My name is Dr Adrian Talbot. I had the pleasure of serving the United States Navy as a surgeon for ten years. Having been forced from service by an unfortunate medical condition, I now reside in Kingsport, the city of my birth. Having yet to establish a private practice, I assist Dr William Warren at Mercy Hospital. You may be familiar with Mercy, as it has a connexion with the University's new Medical College. I also make charity calls at St. Erasmus, a shelter for invalided seamen supported by local donations. My area of expertise is amputations, something I assure you is all-too common in the Navy.

Although I am only a humble physician, I pride myself in remaining au currant in Natural Philosophy. I subscribe to the Miskatonic Journal of Medicine as well as the Miskatonic Natural Philosopher. I confess, I have been following your career since you were appointed to my Alma Mater, and I consider you one of the stars in a constellation that includes Cuvier, Lamarck, and Darwin. I have read your New Theory of Pelagic Revolution and Terrestrial Development no less than three times! While I am certain its more subtile minutiae have escaped my grasp, your work profoundly changed my understanding of the Creator's natural world. Indeed, my companions have become accustomed to my frequent references to your theories, from your conjectures on molecular memory and discrete influencing fluids to your proposition of pelagic retrogression. Imagine my delight upon opening this month's Philosopher and reading of your plans to 'ship out' on a Kingsport whaler!

Before you think me more prattling Polonius than fellow Faust, let me proceed to the point. I have come across a unique medical case perfectly suited for your esoteric studies. This October, the Virgin arrived in port after a two-year whaling expedition. Among those deposited on our shores was one Diego Salva, a harpooneer originally from Imboca, a small fishing village in Spain. This fellow was injured during the Virgin's final hunt, and spent the return voyage with an inflamed forearm and dangerous fever. When I first encountered him at Mercy, Salva claimed to have been flung from his whale-boat and stung by an octopus. I assumed the febrile Iberian had mistranslated the Spanish word for jellyfish. I prompted, 'la medusa', but the poor fellow kept insisting, 'el pulpo.' Salva's arm displayed unusual scarification and a curious turgidity of flesh. He assured me it was the agent of unbearable agony.

With no family in Kingsport, Salva spent nearly a week at Mercy, frequently in stupor. Despite the causal event being months antecedent, his arm continued to swell, the skin blistering and tumors forming under the muscle tissue. Following my instincts, I opened Salva's arm for deeper examination. It appeared that Salva's bones were undergoing some form of rapid and uncontrollable growth! I also discovered a curious object lodged between his radius and ulna—a barbed caltrop recalling a small sea urchin, clearly natural in origin. I removed the foreign object and stitched up his arm. When I demonstrated the object to Salva, his face widened in recognition. Apparently, 'el pulpo' had violently discharged such barbs! Perhaps a form of natural defense, such as the porcupine flinging its quills?

*Now that the obstacle to recovery had been removed, I expected our harpooneer to convalesce. Alas, his condition continued to deteriorate. As of yesterday, Salva's arm has acquired a most alarming appearance. I was immediately reminded of your theory of *Tératologie Catastrophique*. I am afraid my only recourse is to amputate.*

My dear Dr Lovell, if this case intrigues you—and I suspect it has—you will be pleased to know I have preserved the barb for your inspection. I anticipate you may also wish to examine

Salva yourself. I have arranged for his continued residence at Mercy Hospital, and have taken his case upon myself as something of a personal project. I am sorry to report that his worsening condition may force me to amputate before your arrival in Kingsport. There is also the impolitic fact that Salva's bizarre malady has begun troubling the nurses, and we depend upon their good-will as much as we rely upon the largesse of distant academies! Naturally, I shall preserve the severed limb for your examination.

I eagerly await the pleasure of meeting you in person. You may find me at Mercy Hospital, or call upon my private residence on Summit Street. Indeed, I would consider it an honor to host you for dinner at Adrianopolis, which shall soon have the distinction of being Kingsport's first residence to feature modern illumination! A delightful metaphor for our anticipated conversations, don't you think?

I am your obedient servant, etc.

Adrian Talbot