

THE BIOGRAPHY OF DOCTOR CHARLES LAUGIER (1875- 1830)

ELENA STELUȚA DINU

PhD. in History, Faculty of History and Philosophy, “Babes-Bolyai” University,
Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Abstract

This paper presents the life and works of the famous doctor, hygienist, folklore researcher and sanitary mentor, Charles Laugier, whose contribution to the development of the medical system of Oltenia marked the beginning of the 20th century. He is noted for his research in hygiene, in the treatment of some diseases like: tuberculosis, malaria, pellagra, and also as the founder of numerous societies which contributed to the cultural and scientific development of the region of Oltenia and even of its small localities.

Keywords: Craiova, medical elite, hygiene, diseases, treatment.

Son of Victor Laugier- constructor engineer and town planning, of French origin, who left his country together with his wife to settle in our country and who was later adopted by Romania- Charles Laugier was born on the 21-st January 1875 in the locality Cernele, near Craiova [1]. He attended the secondary school in Craiova and in 1892 he graduated from Carol I Highschool. He finished the Medicine Faculty in Bucharest, obtaining a PhD in medicine and surgery of the University of Bucharest [2] in 1898.

He served his apprenticeship at the children hospital in Bucharest for 3 years and then working for *Mărcuța* Hospital for one year and a half; doctor Charles Laugier was drawn from the very beginning to the social medicine, dedicating himself to the study of Hygiene, as his wish was to become hygienist [3].

In 1900, he was appointed doctor in Oltețu de Sus and Oltețu de Jos regions from Romanați County and in the same year on 27-th September, he was relocated in the same position in the Ocolu region of the Dolj County [4].

From January 1903 he worked as a general physician of the Gorj County on a temporary basis until April 1904 when he was appointed sanitary deputy inspector. In 1905 he passed a professional test and was permanently confirmed in the position of general physician of the Gorj County [5]. It is here that the young doctor carried out activities related to the organization of hygiene methods and was



Charles Laugier*
(1875-1930)

**Portrait made by Sabin Nanu, representing
Charles Laugier (1875-1930)*

remarked for the preparation of personnel composed of sanitary agents who were very few and who, according to the law issued in April 1904 by Vasile Lascăr, were asked as auxiliaries of district doctors in the countryside, Laugier being preoccupied by their instruction. Together with these sanitary agents Laugier led the fight for the early discovery of infectious-contagious diseases having an epidemic character. He ordered that in contaminated villages the

Manuscript received: 12.07.2014

Received in revised form: 22.09.2014

Accepted: 08.10.2014

Address for correspondence: elena_dinu2010@yahoo.com

dwelling should be disinfected in his own presence. Starting with April 1908, doctor Laugier was transferred as a general doctor at the Dolj County. Here he found that the entire system was disorganized so that he had to reform the entire medical system.

According to Cantacuzino's law, which stipulated that all public health funds be centralized, the entire sanitary personnel was transferred from the local to the state jurisdiction. An improvement in the training of sanitary workers was noted after the 1st of October 1908, when the School of Sanitary Agents was established in Craiova [6].

The graduates of this school spread all over the country due to their high level of education and instruction. One of those students was the sanitary agent from Gorj, Nicolae Popescu. This disciple of doctor Charles Laugier became teacher in this school and competent collaborator of his chief in Gorj, then he followed in Craiova in the capacity of superior civil servant of the Sanitary School Inspectorate of Oltenia. Laugier generally collaborated with doctors whom he coordinated and supervised.

Following a well-contrived plan because he had a synthetic mind, being gifted with intelligence and determination at the same time, after he had familiarized with the general state of the county, based on the collection of striking statistics, he started organizing the fight against all social epidemics and diseases. Thus in 1911 he successfully managed to combat the epidemic of cholera from the Dolj County, an enemy which he confronts as a military doctor and during the military campaign from Bulgaria in 1913.

During the first stage of World War I, doctor Laugier occupied a position in Transylvania, providing aid and evacuated the wounded, daring to advance as far as the battlefield, then during the second part of the war he set up a hospital for the typhus patients from Socola [5].

Starting with the 1st January 1919 he was delegated sanitary general inspector of Oltenia, devastated during the war by the recurring typhus and more commonly in the form of severe fever.

Definitely confirmed in this position in July 1919, which he occupied until the end of his life - chief of the sanitary Region I, his activity as a good manager and organizer manifested itself in the attention he displayed for village hospitals as well as of the contagious hospitals and *Philantropia* from Craiova. This last hospital was transformed into a modern medical establishment with six departments: surgery, maternity, internal medicine, dermatology and venereal diseases, radiology and pediatrics, bringing about technical and administrative improvements [3]. He created jobs and sanitary units everywhere, built new hospitals, among which that of Strehăia. He proposed and fought to exchange the district doctor with the official rural doctor, appointed on the spot.

His well-known campaign directed against malaria caused by mosquitoes bites and health assistance of those

suffering from syphilis added to the good deeds carried out by the diligent leader of Region I of Oltenia. In 1924 the rate of mortality of those suffering from malaria in Oltenia, thanks to his powerful and well-contrived offensive plan designed after his personal method to which he lent his name, dropped from 28% to 2.3%.

As president of the local branch of the Society for treating tuberculosis, he transformed The Hospital of Cărbunești in a tuberculosis-based clinic, he laid a foundation for the sanatorium of Leamna, in the vicinity of Craiova, he also set up a campaign to vaccinate the newly born with BCG vaccine, this action being led by doctor Metzulescu, assisted by doctor expert Cănciulescu. He closed the sanatorium of doctor Puțoreanu from Olănești, proving the inefficiency of his serum against tuberculosis. Highly appreciated by the important representatives of authority, doctor Laugier was often called to Bucharest, in order to be consulted concerning matters of hygiene [5]. Under his undeniable supervision the Society of Hygiene from Bucharest was founded. As an expert in his domain, capable of coming up with practical solutions he played an important part in the elaboration of the Sanitary law at the time.

On the scientific and medical level he set up together with doctor Vernescu the Medical Pharmaceutical Society of Craiova in 1902, whose activity ceased four years later, but it was revived afterwards.

He wrote numerous books, monographs, scientific articles for school use - *Basic notions of hygiene for schools (Noțiuni de igienă pentru școli)*, for the use of medical staff - *The guide of the medical orderly (Căluza sanitarului)*, in two volumes, he wrote about malaria, pellagra, tuberculosis, among which: *Hygiene and social norms (Igienă și prevederi sociale)*, *Cholera in Dolj (Holera în Dolj)*, *The Medical Geography of Oltenia (Geografia medicală a Olteniei)*, *Pasteur and his works (Pasteur și opera sa)*, *Health in Dolj (Sănătatea în Dolj)*, which constituted inexhaustible sources of information for historians, sociologists, economists and hygienists.

He collected and published medical folklore in connection with local customs traditions, superstitions and charms methods, gathering them in his major work *Contributions to the Medical Ethnography of Oltenia (Contribuții la etnografia medicală a Olteniei)* a 140 page monograph which was awarded a prize by the Romanian Academy.

In the cultural field on 29th January 1915 he founded the Friends of Science Society, being chosen and maintained as its president from the beginning till the end due to his rare qualities. From the grandstand of this society hundreds of conferences were held by scientists and lectures, all famous in Romania [3]. Charles Laugier created village branches of the *Friends of Science Society* in many localities in Oltenia, providing a library and reading room [6].

He also established a private university which started functioning in 1922. To his mind this institution was supposed to be the precedent of an official university because doctor Charles Laugier was the first one who supported the idea of creating an institution of high education in Craiova.

Neither high school left him indifferent. He reintroduced the old prizes in books for the hard-working students in all the secondary schools in Craiova. For these schools he wrote a textbook of hygiene and created jobs for school doctors who were to teach hygiene instead of the teachers of natural sciences as it used to be up to that moment. In 1923 he founded the magazine *Oltenias Archive*, a publication preceded by the conference held in 1919, entitled *Notes sur l'origine du peuple roumain*. In the pages of this publication there is enormous documentation on Oltenia.

He also built the printing press *Science Friends*, in which he issued a lot of advertising brochures and science books.

In 1928, here was printed Craiova's magazine *The Medical Movement* in whose pages the entire medical life in our country is reflected.

Doctor Charles Laugier fought like a soldier and died like a hero on 16th August 1930 from the aggravation

of an untreated ailment for which he had not enough time after he presided an official delegation of the United Nations [3] for 15 days.

Although he was French of origin, Romania had through the adoption of doctor Charles Laugier a second Carol Davilla, and Oltenia had its greatest cultural representative at those times. At present a highschool in Craiova bears his name.

In conclusion we might say that doctor Charles Laugier was a valuable hygienist, folklore researcher and scientist mentor.

References

1. Leferman M, Braun G, Năstase A, Nedelcea T, Urziceanu F. (eds). Repere spirituale românești. Un dicționar al personalităților din Dolj. Craiova: Aius, 2005, 180.
2. Michiduță A. CHARLES LAUGIER medic și etnograf. Craiova: Aius, 2013, 7.
3. Firescu P. Centenarul spitalului unificat de adulți „Filantropia” din Craiova 1856- 1896, Craiova, 1956, 52: 53:54.
4. National Archives, Department of Dolj County, Prefectura fund, Administrative Department, File 276/1900, 2.
5. *** Doctorul Charles Laugier, in „Arhivele Olteniei”, IX, (51-52), september- december 1930, Craiova, 446: 447.
6. Cănciulescu M. Chipuri și momente din istoria educației sanitare. Bucharest: Editura Medicală; 1964, 223-224: 225.