Kings, Bastards, and Enthusiasts

Touching for the Evil in Restoration England

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Introduction

A crowd of several hundred had gathered outside the Banqueting House of Whitehall Palace. It was the morning of June 23, 1660. The building stood impressively against the sky, its white stones almost shining, its classical pilasters and pediments a stark contrast to the eclectic architecture that surrounded it. It was not the first time such a throng had been seen outside the building. Eleven years before, King Charles I had been marched onto a scaffold erected in front of the Banqueting House, and before a crowd of his own subjects, he was beheaded, initiating a decade of non-monarchical rule in England. The crowd that gathered now, however, had come to see his son, King Charles II. England’s experiment in republicanism had been short lived, and after the near political anarchy that followed Oliver Cromwell’s death in 1658, the monarchy was quickly restored, to widespread relief among the English populace. In fact, Charles had returned less than a month ago, in grand style, and Whitehall had again become a hive of activity as nobles poured in from all corners of the country to prove their loyalty, and commoners gathered to catch a glimpse of their new monarch. The people that had gathered this day were no mere idlers or sightseers, however. The group, a motley collection of men, women and children from across the British Isles, stood expectantly, as if waiting for something, their nervous energy palpable. A closer inspection, though, would reveal that their faces were not contorted with excitement, but pain—ulcerous and weeping wounds covered the necks and heads of many, some were blind, some clung to crutches or were carried by their family and friends. Thick storm banks set in as this wretched crowd stood patiently, and as if to confirm the English cliché, it soon began to rain. Most people retreated indoors to avoid the sudden onslaught, but our crowd
stood stubbornly in front of the Banqueting House, waiting, waiting for the appointment they so
desperately desired.¹

What drove these people to travel hundreds of miles across the country, to risk their fortunes and their lives in the treacherous maze of London, and to wait for hours in a downpour, all while afflicted with the most miserable diseases? It was a hope, a belief; a belief that had once exercised a powerful hold over the English imagination. These people had come to receive the touch of the king—the royal touch. For centuries, it was widely believed that the English monarch possessed a sacred gift, a healing power that allowed him to cure the disease known as scrofula or the ‘king’s evil’ by the touch of his hand alone. From its obscure origins in the twelfth century, the royal touch became perhaps the most famed of all the ceremonies of the English monarchy, the archetypal royal ritual. It was practiced universally by all the rulers of England for years, and enjoyed immense popularity throughout its history. Charles II alone touched nearly seven thousand of his subjects in 1660, and by the end of his twenty-four year reign, he had stroked around one hundred thousand people.² However, despite this popularity, within thirty years of Charles’ death the royal rite of healing was totally abandoned by the English monarchy.

Today, most people have never even heard of the royal touch or the English king’s supposed healing gift, and none would lend the belief any credence. Yet once it was one of the greatest symbols of English royal rule, both at home and abroad, and millions believed wholeheartedly in the wonder working power of the king. Why? What drove so many people to accept that their sovereign possessed a healing touch? And why did this belief die out so rapidly

¹ Samuel Pepys attended the ceremony on June 23 and recorded it in his diary. Samuel Pepys, “June 23 1660”, Diaries; http://www.pepysdiary.com/archive/1660/06/.
and completely? Though the origins of the rite lie deep within the Middle Ages, both its ceremonial peak and its precipitate decline occurred under the rule of the later Stuart monarchs, a period of incredible intellectual and social ferment in English history. The nature of the rite during the reign of Charles II and his successors sheds light, then, on the beliefs that both informed the royal touch and that led to its rejection. However, these beliefs did not develop in isolation, and the evolution of the rite through the years is essential to understanding its role at the turn of the eighteenth century. It is to this history that we must first turn.

Scrofula or struma, known as the king’s evil in the seventeenth century, is a painful disease, debilitating and disfiguring. Today we know it is caused by tubercular infections of the cervical lymph nodes, but medical diagnosis in the 1600s was vague and imprecise, and the term was used to describe a wide range of maladies, from tumors to cancers to infected wounds to blindness. Its chief symptoms are large swellings that form in the neck and face, which, if left untreated, as they inevitably were in the seventeenth century, suppurate and fester into large, open, pus filled wounds. The mark of such a disease naturally evoked revulsion in many people, and the “Running Sores [that]… issued out much stinking matter” isolated the sufferers from the companionship and the help of their fellow man. Apart from offensive swellings, scrofula sometimes led to death. Though not on the level of the great killers like smallpox and plague, a steady stream of casualties from the disease are recorded in the London Bills of Mortality throughout the 1600s, and so the fear of death was added to the discomfort and disfigurement of the illness. Scrofula, however, has the frequent, and convenient, tendency to go into remission for long stretches of time, and so it is perhaps easy to see why this disease in particular became

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the sovereign remedy of the monarch. Still, we must always keep in the back of our minds the
crowd that stood in front of the Banqueting House on that rainy morning, desperate in the truest
sense of the word for any relief from the suffering they endured.

The precise intellectual genesis of the royal touch is shrouded by both time and the
impenetrable depths of the human psyche. However, we can be fairly certain when the touch
began. The royal rite of healing probably arose in England around the twelfth century, during the
reign of Henry I (r. 1100-1135), though was not formalized until the reign of his grandson Henry
II, who ruled from 1154-1189. The ceremony was gradually expanded and refined throughout
the years until it reached its ultimate ceremonial expression under the Stuarts.5 However, the
English monarch was not the only ruler in Europe to touch for scrofula. The French too,
practiced the rite as fervently as the English kings, and continued to do so for years after the end
of the touch in England. The origins of the rite in France can be definitely dated to the reign of
Philip I (r. 1059-1108), under whom the French cure first became institutionalized. However, in
both the French and the English case, the origins of the rite were frequently traced back further,
to two saintly and pious kings of the past. Saint Edward the Confessor and Robert the Pious, of
England and France respectively, were widely recognized as the originators of the healing power
in French and English accounts up until the modern era. During and immediately after their
reigns, legends grew around both rulers of cures they supposedly wrought through their touch
alone, and both Henry I and Philip I apparently appropriated these vague legends in their initial
efforts at royal healing.6 It is notable that both of these mythical founders of the royal touch were
famed for the religiosity, and became holy and saint like figures to latter generations. Kings have
long been regarded as semi-religious figures, and the monarchs of England and France were no

5 Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, 193.
exception. In particular, the anointment of the French and English kings with holy oil, a rite that had it origins in the eighth century, but was based on biblical precedent, was quickly seized upon as a powerful confirmation of legitimacy, and further emphasized the sacred quality of kingship in the Middle Ages. The origin of the healing rite, then, lay in a religious conception of monarchy from the very start.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that the rite had its origins solely in manipulations from above, that it was merely a cynical propaganda tool. The evidence on the creation of the rite is too meager to draw any definite conclusions about its birth, but the popular religious attitudes of the era were essential in its development. In the secular world we live in now, it is easy to forget how central the religious mindset was to our ancestors. The Bible was almost universally regarded as absolute fact, and the stories of Jesus and the apostles were repeated endlessly. Essential to the biblical histories were the miracles of the holy men and founders of the church. Christianity was a healing religion, and throughout the Bible Jesus constantly healed the diseased and the sick. His apostles carried on the work, and the miraculous feats of Catholic saints throughout history were widely known to the European population.7 Added to this intense religiosity was a general acceptance of the miraculous and the supernatural. Ghosts, spirits, witches and demons were an everyday part of the fabric of life, as was faith healing. In such an environment, it was perhaps not so great a leap to conceive that a king, divinely sanctioned and anointed with holy oil, would possess the healing power of the apostles and saints, particularly when the king’s own ancestors were regarded as saintly. In any case, a culture nourished on the stories of religious miracles, and of other, more pagan supernatural occurrences, might have looked in awe and religious reverence at a king regardless. It would be

wrong, then to conclude that the royal touch arose solely as a propaganda effort from the ruling class. After all, rulers shared in the same religious culture as commoners did. The origins of the royal touch then, lie in a heady mix of religion, supernaturalism, and politics, and were just as much the natural outgrowth of popular beliefs and ancient customs as of direction from above.  

From its admittedly vague origins in the twelfth century, the royal touch continued to be practiced by the monarchs of both England and France. It was not until the late fifteenth century, when monarchical government itself became more institutionalized, that the healing rite became an essential part of the legends of both countries, and began to be formalized into the elaborate ritualized form that we associate with royalty today. During the English Wars of the Roses, the competing monarchs of the House of York and House of Lancaster started to use the touch in an explicitly propagandistic way, claiming their rivals could not really heal the scrofulous because they were not legitimate. It was also during the war that the monarchs began offering coins to the sick petitioners in an effort to win more support. However, Henry VII, who took the crown after his defeat of Richard III in 1485, was instrumental in restoring the power and stability of the English monarchy after the years of war, and in doing so, he set down the basic ceremony for the healing rite that was followed for the rest of its history. It was during the reign of the Tudors that the rite began to take its ultimate shape, but it was also when the French and English ceremonies began to diverge. During all of this time, however, both the English and French miracles were widely accepted, and there are very few examples of complete skepticism toward the royal touch. However, it was also under the Tudor’s that the first seeds of the rite’s downfall were planted, for during the reign of Henry VIII, England broke away from

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Catholicism and embraced the Reformation, initiating the religious revolution that eventually turned England into a largely Protestant nation. The Protestant religion had a markedly different conception of the miraculous than Catholicism did. Protestant theologians rejected the contemporary miracles of the saints, arguing that miracles had ceased with the establishment of the Church. As we shall see, this religious conversion became an issue that plagued the royal touch for the rest of its history.

It was with the ascendancy of the Stuarts, beginning in 1603 with the reign of James I, that the rite became a universal symbol of the English monarchy. James I was not born to be the English king. The Stuarts were a Scottish royal dynasty, but when Elizabeth I died without any heirs, the English crown passed to James, who ruled as James VI of Scotland and I of England. James was a devout Protestant brought up in strongly Calvinist Scotland, and when he took the throne, he was reluctant to continue the rite of healing, considering it too Catholic and against Protestant teachings on the miraculous. However, James was perhaps the greatest champion of the belief known as the divine right of kings. His books *The True Law of Free Monarchies* and *Basilikon Doron* remain the quintessential expressions of divine right theory. This theory was perhaps the ultimate expression of a religious conception of kingship, a conception that as we have seen shaped the early formation of the rite. Divine right theory held that monarchy was a divinely ordained form of government, the only legitimate government in fact, and that the king was chosen by God to serve as His representative on earth, his vicegerent. The king, then was divinely sanctioned, and thus, unchallengeable. He answered only to God, and was sovereign and absolute on earth. The royal touch with its obvious message that the king was a semi-sacerdotal figure, set apart from common man, was perhaps the ultimate ceremonial representation of this

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belief. Despite James’ Protestant religious scruples then, the desire to promote the divine right
to of monarchy, and the weight of history and popular demand, led him to continue the rite
unabated, though he did stop giving the sign of the cross to the sick petitioners, which was
simply too Catholic for him to countenance. However, the Protestant scruples that had
preoccupied James were spreading throughout society, and doubts about the rite began to surface
regularly among the more Puritanical of his subjects.\footnote{Bloch, \textit{The Royal Touch}, 188-9.}

Nevertheless, James’ son Charles was brought up with the rite, and favored a High-
Church Anglicanism that was notably less intransigent towards ceremony and the miraculous
then James’ Calvinism had been. Charles himself was perhaps even more wedded to the idea of
absolute, sacred kingship than his father was, and he continued the rite unabated, though Charles,
who was not particularly fond of interacting with the people, did not touch with any particular
enjoyment.\footnote{Bloch, \textit{The Royal Touch}, 192.} Events were to catch up with Charles I, however, and his absolutist theories were
soon to lead him, and the country, into Civil War in 1642. Opposition to the monarchy, and to
divine right theory, became a major force in society, such a force, in fact, that Charles and his
royalist army lost the war, and Charles himself was executed by his own subjects. For eleven
years, parliament ruled under Oliver Cromwell. Monarchical rule, and consequently the royal
touch, had apparently come to an end. However, Charles II remained in exile, biding his time,
and during his stay in Europe, he continued to enthusiastically touch the scrofulous, even going
so far as to give out the coin touch pieces at the small ceremonies he held, despite the extremely
precarious monetary position of the exiled court.\footnote{Sir William Lower, \textit{A Relation in the form of journal of the voyaige and residence which the most mighty Prince Charls the II King of Great Britain}, (Hague: Printed by Adrian Vlack, 1660), 75.} Charles was right to bide his time, however,
for after Cromwell’s death, the Commonwealth fell apart, and both elites and commoners
welcomed Charles back with open arms. Immediately upon his return in 1660, as we saw, he enthusiastically, even frantically, resumed the full rite, and he touched almost every month for the remainder of his reign. However, the Restoration polity that Charles had inherited, despite the initial widespread rejoicing at the return of the king, was inherently fragmented and unstable. Dissenting religious sects and political factionalism boiled beneath the surface, and revolutions in science changed the way people understood the natural world. These beliefs could not be suppressed, and during Charles’ reign, they forever changed society, and inevitably, the royal touch as well. It is the nature of these beliefs, their impact on the touch, and the touch’s impact on society that this thesis seeks to examine.

The royal touch does not have a particularly extensive historiography, but it has attracted some of the most eminent historians of all time. The influential French historian Marc Bloch, the founder of the annales school of history, wrote the classic study on the royal touch, Les Rois Thaumaturges. Published in 1924, Bloch’s book forms the basis of all modern studies of the rite. Bloch, who pioneered a highly interdisciplinary study of history, wrote a sweeping account of the touch, from its remote origins in the Middle Ages to its end in the eighteenth century. He studied the development of both the French and English rite concurrently, popularizing comparative history in the process. Bloch delved into a detailed examination of the beliefs that informed the touch, the evolution of its practice, and the impact it had on society. A few decades later, another important historian, the British scholar Keith Thomas, wrote the second major study of the touch in his seminal 1971 work Religion and the Decline of Magic. Thomas’ study was essential in reestablishing and shaping the study of religion and magic in Early Modern England. His examination of the entire cultural landscape that informed the supernatural is the
touchstone for all modern scholarship into such beliefs in England. His study then, and his section on the rite itself in his chapter on the phenomena of magical healing, is essential to understanding the attitudes and ideas that girded the healing gift. My study of the touch would have been impossible without the work of Bloch and Thomas.

Both Bloch and Thomas presented wide, sweeping studies of the touch throughout its history. I have narrowed my view in order to focus on the nature and practice of the rite in the reign of Charles II, and somewhat after, to its end in the early 1700’s. The beliefs that had informed the rite throughout its history, and the new attitudes that lead to its end, both clashed in the period, and so a detailed study of the rite in the era is particularly useful in uncovering the varied beliefs and ideas that informed the rite throughout its history. I have taken a somewhat unorthodox path in combining both narrative and analytical studies in my attempt to discover and understand those attitudes. Beliefs in the seventeenth century, as in any time, were inextricably woven through the fabric of society, and trying to separate them out from each other, and from the world in which they existed, would be an exercise in futility. The royal touch therefore, cannot be understood in isolation, but must be studied in the society in which it existed. The touch in particular is unique, in that so many strands of thought, from the scientific to the political to the religious, were intimately bound up in its practice and in popular attitudes towards it. Finally, we must remember that the royal touch was not only an idea, but also an actual event that affected the lives of thousands of people in uncountable ways.

To fully uncover the complexity and reality of the healing gift then, I have focused on three individual case studies. Each study builds off the previous one, but each also provides a different perspective on the touch, the form of (and contradictions among) its supporting beliefs, and the impact of and debate about its practice. These interconnected studies are focused on
three men: Valentine Greatrakes, the 1660’s Irish healer whose allegedly miraculous cures mirrored the king’s own; John Browne, the well connected but controversial surgeon who early in the 1680s published a lengthy defense and study of the rite; and Charles II’s illegitimate son the Duke of Monmouth, whose ambivalent and abortive efforts to touch for the evil were caught up in the furious politics of the Exclusion Crisis. The arguments and debates that these men provoked and engaged in reveal a great deal about the role of the royal touch at the close of the seventeenth century; and their lives provide crucial evidence on contemporary attitudes towards the rite and its function and impact on the society in which they lived. Through a study of these disparate lives we can begin to shed some light on the mysteries of the royal touch.
Part One

Valentine Greatrakes and Popular Attitudes towards Miraculous Healing

Miraculous healers were a common sight throughout the seventeenth century, particularly during the turbulent years of the Interregnum and the Restoration. They peddled their cures throughout the British Isles, promising relief from the debilitating and deadly illnesses so common in pre-modern Europe. Some were tied to various sectarian groups, their healing activities an elaborate political or religious protest. Others were simply charlatans, who sought to take advantage of the credulity of the age, extorting money from the masses that desperately sought a cure for their illnesses. Still more were simply madmen, suffering from an overwrought ‘fancy’, who ranted and raved in the streets, and who today would be diagnosed with a variety of psychological ailments. Most of the healers disappeared as suddenly as they appeared, simply one among the hundreds who had come before, and are lost to the past. One healer in particular, however, managed to avoid the oblivion of history. Valentine Greatrakes, the ‘Irish Stroker’, was a veritable seventeenth century celebrity, a faith healer whose apparently miraculous cures rivaled those of the king himself. By all accounts, Greatrakes healed thousands of sick petitioners, and was wondrously successful in his cures. “The great discourse now at the Coffee-Houses, and every where” in 1666 was Valentine Greatrakes, and all manner of men and women traveled across the British Isles for a chance to receive his touch.¹ Even King Charles II, clearly fascinated by this rival stroker, could not resist the spectacle and had Greatrakes summoned to Whitehall to perform his cures before the entire royal court.

¹ Joseph Glanvill, A blow at modern Sadducism in some philosophical considerations about witchcraft (London: Printed by E.C. for James Collins, at the Kings Head in Westminster-Hall,1668), 90.
Greatorakes was known throughout England and Ireland, and his activities aroused great puzzlement and argument. Physicians, philosophers, and theologians all weighed in on the debate, writing letters and pamphlets outlining their own theories on the nature of the Irishman’s wondrous cures. The Greatrakes’ case excited numerous questions. Was Greatrakes’ healing touch genuinely miraculous? Was he a fraud or a sectarian rebel? How could his apparently miraculous performances be explained within the framework of rational theology and the ‘new science’ of the Royal Society? The Greatrakes’ affair gives the historian an invaluable look at unfettered contemporary opinions on faith healing. Writers did not have to treat the subject of Greatrakes’ activities with the circumspection and reverence they exercised toward the king’s touch, and so their reports on the stroker contain uniquely candid accounts of the varied beliefs and debates on miracle cures in the seventeenth century. The Greatrakes’ case helps expose and encapsulate the major strands of thought that informed contemporary opinions on the whole phenomena of miraculous healing, and as such, is worth our study.

**Career**

Valentine Greatrakes was born on 14th February 1628 at his familial estate in Affane, in Waterford County, Ireland. His family was a relatively recent addition to the area, having established itself when Greatrakes’ grandfather William had followed Sir Walter Ralegh from England during the campaigns to put down the Irish rebellions in the 1580’s. The elder Greatrakes had obviously benefited from the military adventure, and managed to obtain land in Ireland. Greatrakes’ family was minor gentry, with a “competent estate” under the patronage of
the Earl of Cork, Richard Boyle. Only the bare facts are known about Greatrakes early life. His father died while he was a young child, but his mother ensured that he still received an education. He was sent to the Free School of Lismore, where he claimed he performed well enough to warrant a seat at Trinity College in Dublin.

However, he never made it to Trinity College, for his education was interrupted when turmoil and rebellion broke out in Ireland 1641, and at thirteen, Greatrakes and his family fled to England. However, Greatrakes’ mother apparently valued education highly, for even in exile she ensured her son was tutored. Greatrakes was first sent to his uncle Edmund Harris to continue his schooling. In his autobiographical account, Greatrakes stressed the piety and godliness of his uncle, under whom he was given the “Principles of religion.” After his uncle’s death, Greatrakes continued his religious education, and was sent to the private tutor, John Daniel Getseus, a German protestant and Church of England clergyman, who further educated him in “humanity and divinity.” Getseus was a moderate royalist and Anglican, who stressed conformity to the Church and crown throughout his life, and was almost arrested in 1643 for giving an anti-parliamentarian sermon. Greatrakes was apparently quite influenced by Getseus, for he awarded Getseus a small life annuity in the 1660’s. In his own account of his early years, Greatrakes emphasized both the extent of his education and his proper Protestant upbringing. Social class and religious orthodoxy were essential in establishing one’s reliability in the seventeenth century, and so it is no surprise that Greatrakes sought to portray himself as a learned Protestant.

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3 Greatrakes, *A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks*, 16.
It is important to note that Greatrakes did in fact receive a largely orthodox education, however, and his clear appreciation of Getseus, the royalist and Anglican clergyman who sought moderation and reconciliation in his preaching, is significant.

After completing his education, Greatrakes, now a young man set on making his fortune in the world, resolved to return to Ireland and reclaim his patrimony. He crossed the Irish Sea in 1647 or 1648, during the height of the Civil War and the rebellion in Ireland. Apparently, the chaos and brutality of the war was too much for Greatrakes, for he claimed to have suffered a fit of melancholy upon his return to his homeland. He withdrew to Caperquin Castle for a year, and scarcely left his bedchamber, overcome by the “madness and wickedness of the world” and the “strange divisions throughout the Kingdom.” His “life became a burthen”, and he despaired of the age.\(^6\) It was during this time that Greatrakes reputedly became fascinated by the great Christian mystic, Jacob Boehme, whose seminal works had just been published in England.\(^7\) This fit of melancholia, a classic prelude to the enthusiastic excess of faith healers, and his interest in the occult and mystical qualities of Christianity, provide some foreshadowing for his later healing activities. However, he seems to have overcome his fit fairly quickly and gained a taste for the bloodshed of the war, for in 1649 he had joined the Cromwellian army as a Lieutenant.

Greatrakes’ Cromwellian past and his political leanings were some of the most problematic parts of his background for a Restoration audience, and in his autobiography, he sought to recast the issue in an obvious effort to counter those who claimed he was a republican radical. However, not much is known about Greatrakes’ time as a soldier. He served under the Command of Roger Boyle and Colonel Robert Phaire, one of the officers who presided at

\(^6\) Greatrakes, *A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks*, 17-18.

\(^7\) Elmer, ‘Greatrakes, Valentine (1629–1683)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 
Charles I’s execution. In order to counter those who would use his past to attack him, he claimed he enlisted with Cromwell’s army, not out of parliamentary sympathies, but because of the Irish Catholic revolt in Munster against the Protestant English. In a clever reversal, he used his checkered history to prove his religious orthodoxy. He had taken up arms to defend his coreligionists, not parliament. According to Greatrakes, nearly all of the English Protestants in Ireland had joined the Cromwellian army in order to suppress the dangers of the Irish Catholic rebellions, a claim that held some truth, as Protestant landowners depended on the Parliamentary army to fight the rebel Catholics, who in turn loosely aligned themselves with the royalist cause.

While Greatrakes sought to cast himself as a defender of the faith, there was a more material aspect to his motivation that he understandably wished to obscure. Greatrakes’ ancestral estate lay within the province of Munster, the ultimate prize for the exiled and dispossessed young man who was probably motivated more by the promise of his land than anything else.

Unfortunately, we do not know the nature of his actual role on the battlefield. He served as a Lieutenant, so he was in command of a number of soldiers. Though we do not know the role he played in any battles, Greatrakes sought to make it abundantly clear that he never engaged in, or allowed those soldiers in his charge to engage in, violence or massacres against surrendered enemies or women and children, an obvious attempt to distance himself from the ill repute that surrounded the massacres at Drogheda and Wexford. Clearly, Greatrakes was eager to paint his service to Cromwell in the most positive light possible, divorcing politics from the issue, and painting it as a religious battle between Protestants and Catholics. To his enemies and detractors

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9 Greatrakes, A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks, 17-18.
10 Greatrakes, A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks, 18-19.
of course, the justification was in vain, and his Cromwellian history loomed large in the consciousness of Restoration England.

Greatrakes served in Cromwell’s army for nearly seven years, and when the army was disbanded in 1656, he at last returned to his ancestral estate at Affane and took up the life of a country gentleman. However, his duties to the Cromwellian regime did not end, and he served in a series of governmental roles, including Register for Transplantation and Justice of the Peace. Greatrakes again sought to use his controversial past to demonstrate his unblemished life. He claimed that as an officer he never took any bribe or forced the indigent to pay fees, and never let the guilty go unpunished. He attempted to portray himself as an upstanding, generous, and pious citizen, free from radicalism or agenda. Greatrakes’ desire to expunge political motivation from his life is clear; however, he was not able to remain entirely apolitical, and in his description of his role as Register for Transplantation, where he was responsible for evicting and resettling Irish Catholics, he could not stop himself from professing rather ambiguous political and theological sentiments. Greatrakes, exposing his Latitudinarian religious sympathies, claimed he never persecuted anyone for their private religious beliefs. While he encouraged the Catholics to attend Protestant services for the good of their souls, he was able to “truly say I never injured any man for his Conscience.”

Greatrakes’ Latitudinarian leanings are evident, and despite his previous efforts to appear as orthodox and uncontroversial as possible, his religious ideology was clearly at odds with the intolerant political climate of the 1660’s, one in which the Cavalier Parliament passed the Clarendon Code to enforce strict uniformity to the Church of England. His unorthodox religious

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views were followed by his further controversial political pronouncement on the danger of tyrannical government…

“Besides (Sir) I have so far observed the immoderate courses of several that were in Power and Authority in those days, amongst those different Judgments who have had their several turns at the Helm, That they have driven Jehu-like\(^\text{12}\), when they have had the Reins of Authority in their hands, and by their own fury destroyed themselves and interests, God abhorring the violent and cruel-minded man.”\(^\text{13}\)

G greatrakes feared the exercise of arbitrary rule. The allusion to Jehu, the king of Israel who took over the crown in a bloody coup and encouraged the worship of the Golden Calves, could potentially be a reference to Cromwell, who too took over the crown in his own bloody revolution. However, there were many candidates for this pronouncement in the seventeenth century, and Greatrakes could just as easily be referring to Cromwell and his military dictatorship as the monarchy that it replaced, and that in turn came to replace it, and so it is inappropriate to read any explicit political ideology or agenda into the statement, except perhaps for the widely held desire for moderation and stability after the turmoil of the previous years.

However, throughout most of his autobiography, Greatrakes managed to downplay his religious and political sentiments, seeking to emphasize his unblemished and pious life. While his detractors obviously disagreed that he was either pious or unblemished, his life in Ireland was that of a standard country gentleman. Aside from the maintenance of his estate, Greatrakes began investing heavily in the Irish land market in the 1650’s, a lucrative business with the influx of displaced English hoping to make a new start in Ireland and dispossessed Catholics who Greatrakes held some sway over as Registrar for Transplantation.\(^\text{14}\) However, despite his successful reintegration into Irish society, his Cromwellian past came back to haunt him, and

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\(^{12}\) Jehu was King of the Israelites in the seventh century BC. He was criticized for his bloody takeover of the crown, his cruelty and desire for power, and his acceptance of the idol worship of the Golden Calves.

\(^{13}\) Greatrakes, *A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks*, 21-22.

after the Restoration in 1660 G greatrakes was removed from his offices. However, it was only a temporary setback, and within the year his familial patron, Roger Boyle, gained a pardon for Greatrakes from Charles II. While Greatrakes’ continued interest in the occult is evidenced by his participation in the trial of a Youghal woman accused of witchcraft in 1661, on the whole, Greatrakes lived the ordinary life of the minor gentry.

It was in 1662 that Valentine Greatrakes’ life took a turn to the unexpected, the strange, and the marvelous- he discovered that his touch alone had the power to heal the sick. However, the origin of his sudden healing virtue is shrouded in controversy. Greatrakes was circumspect in his description of the origin of his gift, and like his defense of his Cromwellian past, he obscured the true nature of his initial calling. In his pamphlet, Greatrakes claimed that he was suddenly seized by an “impulse… a strange perswasion in my own mind” that he had the ability to heal the king’s evil with his touch. This impulse came like lightning from a clear sky, and by Greatrakes own admission, he could give “no rational account” of the strange desire, an ambiguous explanation at best. Greatrakes referred to the cause only as an “impulse” throughout his autobiography, and was careful to differentiate it from disembodied voices or visions, which “savouring of Phanaticism”, he was quick to reject. Greatrakes’ vague explanation of the origin of his calling is unsatisfying, but when paired with other accounts of his history, a more complete picture of this seminal event in his life can be arrived at, and it is clear that the realities of his early healing experiences were more mystical and controversial than Greatrakes wished to reveal.

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16 Greatrakes, *A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks,* 22-23.
17 Greatrakes, *A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks,* 7.
David Lloyd, the greatest critic of the stroker, claimed that Greatrakes was spurred on by disembodied voices, a product of his overwrought fancy and evidence of his enthusiasm. While Lloyd would have tried to discredit Greatrakes in any case, Henry Stubbe corroborated his claim. Though Stubbe was a defender of Greatrakes, his description of the origin of the healing touch reveals the deeply mystical nature of Greatrakes’ early experiences.\(^{18}\) Stubbe wrote that, in early 1662, Greatrakes had frequently heard a voice “audible to none else” that encouraged him to heal scrofula. While Greatrakes had at first ignored the calling, a sign was sent by the voice to correct his unbelief. His own right hand fell stricken and dead, and only with the stroking of his left hand did it come to life again. Understandably, Greatrakes was convinced by these mysterious and apparently supernatural events.\(^{19}\) While this anecdote appears only in Stubbe’s account, there was no motivation for a defender of Greatrakes to invent such a problematic story. Furthermore, Stubbe’s account came directly from his meetings with Greatrakes at Ragley Hall. Greatrakes had come to Ragley before he had set foot in London, and before his case had reached truly national proportions. The order of the accounts suggests then, that Greatrakes initially claimed to have heard divine voices that instructed him to heal, and related that story to those he met, including Henry Stubbe. It was only when his notoriety had peaked, and attacks on his character and healing power grew, that he edited his story to remove the voices and the mysterious sign, and ambiguously referred to his calling as an “impulse” in an obvious effort to counter accusations of fanaticism and enthusiasm.

Whatever the initial cause of his healing desire, he hid his belief from everyone but his wife, who initially thought it simply a strange bout of fancy. However, seemingly by fate, a local man happened to bring his son, who had the king’s evil, to Greatrakes’ estate, hoping that

\(^{18}\) Henry Stubbe, *The miraculous conformist, or, An account of severall marvailous cures performed by the stroking of the hands of Mr. Valentine Greatarick with a physicall discourse thereupon* (Oxford: Printed by H. Hall, 1666), 3.

\(^{19}\) Stubbe, *The miraculous conformist*, 3.
Greatrakes’ wife, who had some skill in household medicine, might relieve his suffering. It was then that Greatrakes first tried his hand at healing. He stroked the boy, who had scrofula throughout his face, eyes, and neck, and then sent up a prayer to God to heal the boy for Jesus’ sake. Within a few days, the boy had improved tremendously, and within the month he was “perfectly healed.” Clearly, something extraordinary had happened. After this initial success, Greatrakes was approached by another victim of the evil, a woman who had suffered from scrofula for seven years, and was so diseased “that she would have affrighted and poisonedit almost that saw or came neer her.” Greatrakes queried the local physician, Doctor Anthony, about the case, who claimed the poor woman was beyond all help. Greatrakes was more confident in his own abilities than the physician was in his, however, and he stroked the woman, who completely healed within six weeks. Doctor Anthony was persuaded, and agreed that Greatrakes was truly a miraculous healer. After his astonishing successes, the story of the Irish Stroker slowly grew, and Greatrakes stroked more and more people throughout the early 1660’s. He was soon visited by another impulse that he could cure the ague (conveniently during an outbreak of the disease), and within a few months another impulse arrived that informed him he could cure all diseases without discrimination. He was easily able to confirm the veracity of his impulse by exercising his talent on the varied ill who now flocked to him. Thus the career of the Irish Stroker began in earnest, and very shortly his fame had spread throughout Ireland.

Greatrakes traveled across Ireland, visiting friends in towns across the country, and in each place he healed numerous people, spreading his story throughout the island. By 1665 his touch was in such great demand that the sick now flocked to his home in Affane. Indeed, he was so inundated by petitioners that he had to set aside three days of the week, from six in the

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20 Greatrakes, A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks, 23.
21 Greatrakes, A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks, 24.
morning to six at night, for healing, otherwise he would never have had any peace or time for his own business. The strain of the huge volume of visitors on the small estate of Affane became so great that Greattrakes was forced to move his healing to the nearby town of Youghal, where he had previously testified in the trial of a suspected witch. Youghal was an important port for trade with England, and so Greattrakes’ story traveled across the Irish Sea, and English sufferers now added their entreaties to the Irish as they made the journey for a chance to be cured by the Stroker. It was at Youghal that Greattrakes ran into his first troubles with the government. The local magistrates, fearful of the spread of disease and the strain put on the town’s resources by so many visitors, ordered Greattrakes to leave the port immediately, testimony to the sheer number of people who flocked to the Stroker. He returned to Affane, but further evidence of his burgeoning notoriety, and the disquiet that surrounded him, came when he was summoned by the Dean of Lismore to appear before the local ecclesiastical court to answer for his healing activities. The Anglican hierarchy, suspicious and jealous of any assaults on its authority, ordered Greattrakes, with his miraculous and semi-religious claims and his troublesome past, to cease healing the sick. Greattrakes, however, was not so easily cowed, and argued that he had broken no laws of “God or man”, and accepted no payment for his cures, and so should not be punished. His appeal to conscience, an obvious Latitudinarian position, must have rankled the strictly Anglican clerical hierarchy. The court ruled that Greattrakes had to immediately desist from healing, on the grounds that he had no license to practice medicine. The stricture lasted for two days- Greattrakes was overcome by his

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24 Greattrakes, *A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greattraks*, 36-37.
conscience, or so he claimed, and healed two sick Englishmen begging for his help. G greatrakes clearly could not stay out of trouble, and after he resumed his healing activities, was summoned before the Lord Bishop of the Diocese himself, who ordered Greatrakes to stop touching the sick. However, Greatrakes ignored the ruling, offering the same argument he had previously- that he had transgressed no laws and was obeying only the dictates of his conscience. The court let Greatrakes go, and he continued to heal any petitioners who came to his home in Affâne. Apparently, the ecclesiastical court gave up on trying to stop the willful Irishman, perhaps fearful of the backlash from his large following, for he was not brought before the court again.

By the end of 1665 the Irish Stroker was known throughout Ireland and England, and he had reached the attention of the Conway family. The Conways were a notable political family in England, though the Lord Conway’s chief influence was in Ireland, where he was on the Privy Council and was a chief confidante of the Duke of Ormond. However, the Conways are best known today for the extensive correspondence kept by the Viscountess Conway, Anne, with many of the leading philosophers of the day. Anne was keenly interested in the intellectual life of the era, and formed a close and lasting friendship with the Cambridge Platonist Henry More. She also suffered from debilitating headaches, and much of the Conways life was spent in a vain search for a remedy. By 1665, the Conways had despaired of ever finding relief for Anne in traditional medicine, and they turned to the wondrous cures of Valentine Greatrakes. Greatrakes, however, at first refused their request to travel to England, declaring, “somewhat rudely that he would not go thither for any Lord whomsoever”, a bold reply, and a sign that despite the claims in his autobiography, he may have harbored some republican sympathies. However, it was the Archbishop of Dublin Michael Boyle, a royalist and orthodox Anglican, who recorded

26 Greatrakes, A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks, 36-7.
Greattrakes’ response, and he may have been trying to portray Greattrakes as the republican radical many feared he was. In a letter to one of Conway’s intermediaries in Ireland, Sir George Rawdon, Greattrakes claimed the “hazards of the enraged seas, the winter, [to] leave all my concerns in the time of settlement, at so great uncertainty, and forego the comfort of my family,” were the causes of his reluctance to visit the Conway’s residence at Ragley Hall, and not without basis, as winter voyages across the Irish Sea were notoriously difficult.

Whatever the case, Greattrakes soon agreed; perhaps on the promise of one hundred and fifty-five pounds, the only instance he ever accepted money for his gift, and which he explained was necessary for the maintenance of his family and estate during his absence. He departed in January 1666 for England, and his fears were soon realized, as fierce storms blew him off course and almost sunk his ship. Consequently, he landed at Minehead, where his notoriety was so great that he was instantly accosted by the sick. When Greattrakes arrived at Ragley Hall, he was unable to cure Anne of her headaches, but he greatly impressed Lord Conway and the group of intellectuals Anne had gathered around her, and Greattrakes was invited to stay and perform his healing touch on all those who came. Greattrakes remained at Ragley Hall for nearly a month, during which time he touched over a thousand sick petitioners. It was at Ragley Hall that the first real scientific observations were made on the Stroker by a number of distinguished philosophers and scientists, including Henry More, Benjamin Whichcote, Ralph Cudworth, and George Rust, the Cambridge Platonists. Henry Stubbe was also at the court, and penned his account of Greattrakes from his observations there.

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28 The Conway Letters, 267.
29 The Conway Letters, 247-8, 267.
30 Greattrakes, A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greattraks, 39.
31 Duffy, “Valentine Greattrakes, the Irish Stroker,” 259-60.
News that Greatrakes had arrived in England spread quickly, and soon the Mayor and Aldermen of Worcester entreated Greatrakes to travel to the city and heal their sick. Greatrakes complied, and was greeted by crowds so great that he “was like to bruised to death.” However, his stay at Worcester was short, for reports that Greatrakes was in England had reached the royal court, and he was shortly summoned by Lord Arlington to report to Whitehall and present himself before King Charles II. \(^{32}\) Unfortunately, no account survives that describes the meeting between the two greatest healers of the day. Whatever transpired, Charles was content to leave Greatrakes unmolested, a notable contrast with his father Charles I, who imprisoned numerous pretenders to his touch. \(^{33}\) While in London, Greatrakes cultivated friendships with various prominent people, such as the Virtuosi Robert Boyle, Ralph Cudworth, Benjamin Whichcott, the magistrate Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey, and the poet Andrew Marvell, all of who bore witness to his extraordinary healing abilities. Greatrakes gathered the testimony of these eminent men, and published them along with his biographical account. Valentine Greatrakes truly was a celebrity, and he puzzled and fascinated English society.

By the summer of 1666, Greatrakes had tired of the excitement of London, and returned to his estates in Affane. By all accounts he continued to heal throughout his life, and kept in contact with members of the elite he had met in England, exchanging lengthy correspondences with Edmund Godfrey, and sending details of the continuing cures he wrought in a letter to Robert Boyle in 1668. He returned to London a number of times, in 1675 serving as an intermediary between the Irish Muggletonians and their English founder, Lodowick


Greatrakes connection with the Muggletonians is noteworthy, but it is tempting to read too much into the association. The Muggletonians were a radical and small religious group that arose in the mid 1600’s when two London tailors experienced a divine revelation that they were the prophets foretold of in the Book of Revelation. The Muggletonians were a millenarian sect, one of many that arose in the tumult of the seventeenth century. However, they were a largely apolitical group, and Greatrakes interest in them probably speaks more to his own mystical and prophetic religious experiences than his political motivations. However, while his continued interest in the religious and political life of the country is evident, most of his days were taken up by the mundane routine of running a small estate in Ireland, and his notoriety never reached the heights it had in 1666, when his fame as the Irish Stroker had made him known throughout the British Isles. His exploits were remembered, however, and he continued to feature as an object of puzzlement and cause of debate in discourses on religion, miracles, and science, even into the eighteenth century.

Valentine Greatrakes was an enigma, both to the men of his own time, and to the modern historian. He defies any easy classification or explanations of his motives and healing powers. Seventeenth century society was both puzzled and fascinated by the Irish Stroker. Writers referenced Greatrakes time and again in efforts to explain their religious, scientific, and political philosophies. Their accounts reveal a great deal about both Greatrakes and contemporary beliefs on science, religion, politics, and the supernatural. Greatrakes’ popularity is obvious, but what

36 Duffy, “Valentine Greatrakes, the Irish Stroker,” 272.
was it about the Irish Stroker that made him such a lightning rod for seventeenth century society? How did a simple faith healer, one among the hundreds who swelled the ranks of seventeenth century life, capture the imagination of an entire nation? And how did society regard this strange Irishman who claimed such a miraculous gift?

Greatrakes’ cures were certainly extraordinarily impressive. His healings must have been a sight to witness. Full of none of the pomp and ceremony, the solemnity and the protocol of the royal rite of healing, Greatrakes’ activities were an egalitarian, chaotic affair. Greatrakes never sought out the sick; they came to him. And come they did. Greatrakes was regularly inundated with the ill that desperately sought his touch. Crowds gathered around him like he exerted some kind of magnetic force. At his home in Affane, Greatrakes was forced to put aside three days for healing, or he would have had “no time to follow my own occasions, nor enjoy the company of my Family and Friends.”

Contemporary observers agreed, and in an average day Greatrakes stroked as many as 60 people. When he traveled, massive crowds besieged him, and he healed more than one thousand sufferers during his month long stay at Ragley Hall. These crowds had no order, and they came to Greatrakes in a confused mass. Indeed, the crowds often became so large and unruly that Greatrakes feared for his life, at Worcester facing such a commotion he felt he was “like to be bruised to death.” The crowds were often so great that the petitioners, desperate for a cure, were unable to get to him, and so resorted to drastic measures. Elenor Dickinson came to Greatrakes in London, but “not being able to come near him by reason of the

37 Greatrakes, *A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks*, 35.
39 Glanvill, *A blow at modern Sadducism*, 91
40 Greatrakes, *A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks*, 39.
throng, she snatch'd some of his urine and drank it”, and was promptly healed.⁴¹ Greatrakes himself made much of his own courage in risking “his liberty and life by the crowds, pressings, steams and stinks of the multitudes and ulcerous persons (which you can well witness few men can brook or undergo).”⁴² One can only imagine the spectacle of these massive crowds of people, diseased and wretched, infected with every variety of seventeenth century ailments, flocking around this one man.

While the crowds that gathered around Greatrakes were often large and disorderly, the stroker had a definite method of healing. He began by calling one of the sick persons forth, at which point he would proclaim a small prayer to God and Jesus. He would then proceed to stroke or rub the afflicted body part. He would stroke the part until the pain had been driven out. Often, the patient complained that the pain traveled to another part of the body, and so Greatrakes would stroke that part as well. He continued like this, chasing the pain around the body, until it had been driven out through the patient’s extremities.⁴³ The patients often experienced strange fits and sensations as Greatrakes stroked them, with chills, fevers, and numbness overcoming their extremities and foul winds, huge quantities of water, and various viscera expelled from their bodies, like one who vomited forth “several pieces of thick skin drawn over with blew veins like to a fresh bladder.”⁴⁴ Afterwards, Greatrakes would say another prayer and bid the patient give praise to God.

This was the basic nucleus of Greatrakes’ healing rite that he employed with all manner of diseases, from various tumors and swellings, to deafness and blindness, to the ague and dropsy, to rheumatism and lameness. Sometimes the patient was healed immediately, and arose

⁴¹ Greatrakes, A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks, 45-46.
⁴² Greatrakes, A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks, 4.
⁴³ Beacher, Wonders if not miracles, 8.
⁴⁴ Greatrakes, A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks, 45-6.
from the stroking whole and well. Often, particularly in the case of running sores and tumors, the healing took place over several days or weeks as the sores gradually suppurated and dried up.

While Greatrakes achieved many astonishing successes that the modern historian is at a loss to explain, many of his cures were ineffective. Greatrakes readily admitted that during his stay at Ragley Hall “many were cured of their Diseases and Distempers, and many were not.”

Henry Stubbe, Greatrakes’ first supporter in print, agreed, writing “This variety of success amused me something.” While Greatrakes’ healing was impressive, he was not infallible, and claimed he was unable to cure those whose bodies had a fundamental disability, what he termed a “decay in nature.” Perhaps it was these failures that led him to start adding some basic surgical practices to his healing rites. By the time he visited Ragley Hall, Greatrakes was frequently lancing and squeezing the tumors and cancers of his patients. He accompanied his stroking by occasionally piercing the boils or tumors of his patients with a sharp knife, and squeezing out all the “indigested matter in cores as big as nutmegs”, afterwards stroking the site again and laying a clean linen bandage upon it. His spittle and urine were also added to his repertoire of healing tools, the latter reputed to smell of violets.

When physician Henry Stubbe recommended Greatrakes try using various medical salves and ointments for his patients, he readily agreed.

However, Greatrakes does not seem to have made extensive use of physic in his cures, and his touch remained his primary method of healing.

Contemporary observers were astonished at the success of his cures. Countless reports survive, signed by such reliable witnesses as Robert Boyle, Henry More and Benjamin

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Whichcote that testify to the efficacy of Greatrakes’ touch. Various modern theories have been put forth to explain the effectiveness of his healings. Some of his cures can no doubt be attributed to psychological causes. Psychosomatic diseases such as backaches and headaches, falling sickness and unspecified “pains” in the body would have readily responded to the psychological power inherent in the stroking ritual. The power of the placebo effect has been widely demonstrated in the modern era, and it should not be discounted as a potential cause for many of Greatrakes apparent miracles. Greatrakes forays into basic surgical practice may also have played a role. Lancing and draining the various “wenns” he was presented with, many probably boils and infected wounds, would certainly have relieved the swelling and pressure of the patient, and have at least temporarily seemed like a cure as long as the wound did not become infected again.

Simple natural healing should not be discounted. The body has a remarkable capacity to heal itself. Many of Greatrakes cures took days and weeks to take full affect. It is entirely probable that these patients simply healed on their own, but attributed the cure to their recent encounter with the stroker. Henry Stubbe remarked on the ability of the body to heal itself in his pamphlet on Greatrakes, an ability he claimed had been forgotten by his fellow medical practitioners intent on the traditional “Minoratives, the Purges, the Vomits, and other Physique which is given, not because it is best, but because in fashion.” Letting the patient heal with time, as Greatrakes did, was often better than the painful and ineffective orthodox medical alternatives. However, there were many cures that are not susceptible to any obvious modern explanation. Benjamin Whichcote, the Protestant divine, was instantly healed of a tumorous

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51 Stubbe, The miraculous conformist, 6-7.
52 Stubbe, The miraculous conformist, 16.
growth on his finger, and the well-documented cure of three crippled soldiers at St. Bartholomew’s Hospital is difficult to explain away.\footnote{Greatrakes, \textit{A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks}, 52, 58-9; Duffy, “Valentine Greatrakes, the Irish Stroker,” 261.} While it tempting to attribute all his cures to psychosomatic causes, mere coincidence, or the wishful thinking of gullible minds, the nature and cause of many of the cures must remain a mystery.

Valentine Greatrakes’ cures, when they were effective, were wonders, no doubt, and greatly impressed everyone who witnessed them. But there were countless faith healers in the seventeenth century, cunning men peddling magical charms, sectarian prophets who claimed miraculous abilities, and simple madmen who raved on the street. Why was Greatrakes so uniquely popular? How did such a man manage to capture the imagination of an entire nation, so that even King Charles II himself had to see to his healing feats? There are a number of factors that contributed to his celebrity. Weight has to be given to the era in which Greatrakes appeared. The year 1666, incorporating, as it did, the number of the beast in the Book of Revelation, was fraught with “prophetic and apocalyptic” expectation. The Great Plague, the fire of London, and the second Anglo-Dutch war all led the populace of England to an expectant and unsettled mind. The years in which Greatrakes achieved his greatest popularity were years of fear and hope, of general unrest and disquiet, where even the most sophisticated thinkers gave credence to miraculous and prophetic claims.\footnote{Duffy, “Valentine Greatrakes, the Irish Stroker,” 260.} David Lloyd picked up on the centrality of this zeitgeist in his own pamphlet, writing that “we in \textit{England}, [are] famous almost to a Proverb, for our folly, \textit{in reference} to \textit{Prodigies and Prophesies}.” For Lloyd, Greatrakes’ popularity was no coincidence, for it came at a time “when all men look for a year of Miracles.”\footnote{David Lloyd, \textit{Wonders no miracles, or, Mr. Valentine Greatrakes gift of healing examined upon occasion of a sad effect of his stroaking}, (London: Printed for Sam. Speed, 1666), 2, 17.}
While the unsettled nature of the time contributed to his fame, it cannot be the only explanation, for there was numerous other healers and self-proclaimed prophets, seventh sons and cunning men, who claimed to have such powers in the same era. Much of Greatrakes’ fame rested on his own character and elevated social status. Greatrakes was, by nearly all accounts, a charismatic individual. The astronomer John Flamsteed described Greatrakes as having “a kind of majestical, yet affable, presence, a lusty body, and a composed carriage.” He was a “sober, discreet, civil Gentleman”, “a man of a gracefull personage and presence,” a sincere Protestant who impressed all those whom he met. Though minor gentry, Greatrakes was fairly well educated, his own autobiography a well-written and lucid defense of his life and healing gift. He also had a wealthy patron in Roger Boyle, and his securely elevated social rank differentiated him from the poor who made up the majority of faith healers. Greatrakes character, intellect, and status clearly impressed themselves upon those who visited him. Expecting to meet an obvious charlatan, or a ranting sectarian prophet, they instead met a composed and intelligent man, pious, well mannered and genteel, who accepted no payment from the sick that he so charitably healed.

Greatrakes personal charisma impressed a number of important and influential people, and he was careful to cultivate friendships with such men, another important aspect in his popularity. Greatrakes fascinated men like Lord Conway, the Cambridge Platonists Henry More, Benjamin Whichcote, and George Rust, and the founder of modern chemistry Robert Boyle. Doubtless surprised at his intelligence and social refinement, and unable to dismiss him as a fraud or factionalist, they wrote about him extensively, further spreading the news of the

56 Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, 200-2.
57 F. Baily, ed., An Account of the Revd John Flamsteed, 1835, 12, 16, 21
58 Beacher, Wonders if not miracles, 5; Stubbe, The miraculous conformist, 2.
59 Duffy, “Valentine Greatrakes, the Irish Stroker,” 259-60.
remarkable Irish Stroker throughout the nation. Ggreatrakes himself was not lax in this regard. Though he claimed never to seek out the sick, he was an adroit publicist. He carefully collected letters and testimonials for all of his successful healings, with signatures from the major intellectuals of the day to verify their contents. In his own publication on his life and actions, *A Brief Account of Mr. Valentine Greatrakes*, he included a lengthy section with all the collected testimonies as proof of his miraculous gift. Greatrakes was determined to prove the reality of his power, and his extensive documentary efforts in this regard contributed to his widespread fame.

While very few doubted that Greatrakes had achieved incredible successes, the nature of his cures, whether miraculous or natural, was a subject of some debate. His motives, however, elicited even greater consternation among many people, and remain perhaps the most controversial aspect of his life. What prompted this man “to make his house an Hospital, and forsake his own interest and advantages; to labour day and night, and oftentimes run the hazard of his liberty and life?” Numerous theories have been put forth to explain the cause of Greatrakes’ behavior. Many of Greatrakes’ contemporaries, and some modern historians, have attributed a veiled political motive to the stroker’s activities, branding him as a sectarian dissenter who sought to challenge the restored monarchy and orthodoxy, a theory made all the more believable in light of Greatrakes’ Cromwellian background. Some believed Greatrakes had received a true gift from God, and that he exercised that gift from purely charitable motives, others that he was sent as a symbol that the end times had come. Conversely, there were those who regarded his cures as diabolical. Still others believed he was a charmer, a particularly

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60 Greatrakes, *A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks*. 4.
cunning cunning man who fooled the masses with hitherto unknown medicaments he secretly employed.\textsuperscript{62}

However, we do not need to turn to rumor to determine Greatrakes’ motivations, for his own self-defense provides important insights into the cause and purpose behind his healing journey. Greatrakes explanation for his actions rested on basic Protestant theological grounds. In the beginning of his autobiography, Greatrakes referenced the famous Parable of the Talents from the Book of Matthew, which would have been familiar to all seventeenth century readers. In the parable, the man who did not put his talent [a coin, but metaphorically one’s innate skills] to use, but buried it, was punished and condemned, while those who went out into the world and used their talents were greatly rewarded. It was therefore a theological sin to neglect the skills that God had given to you. Greatrakes clearly viewed his healing gift as such a talent, and by reminding his readers of the parable, he sought to prove that his actions were proper and Godly. Greatrakes was also careful to stress his Christian charity in relieving the suffering of those “neither Art nor Physick probably could reach,” sacrificing his own “worldly pleasures and delights” in undertaking the noble task, another attempt to establish his piety and goodness before his audience.\textsuperscript{63}

Greatrakes’ regarded his healing power as a true gift from God. Though he did not outright deny his healings might have operated through natural means, he was adamant that he did not always have the power to cure sickness through his touch, and was suddenly and unexpectedly gifted with the power from Heaven. He believed that “there [was] something in it of an extraordinary Gift of God.”\textsuperscript{64} He viewed his healing as miraculous, and often cast his

\textsuperscript{62} Glanvill, \textit{A blow at modern Sadducism}, 3-4; Beacher, \textit{Wonders if not miracles}, 3.
\textsuperscript{63} Greatrakes, \textit{A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks}, 3.
\textsuperscript{64} Greatrakes, \textit{A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks}, 34.
performances in explicitly religious terms, on occasion describing the illnesses he cured as “Possessions by dumb Devils, deaf Devils, and talking Devils” and “several evil Spirits”, which he cast out through his touch in a thaumaturgical manner.\textsuperscript{65} However, he made sure to never portray himself as an apostolic figure, or to pretend to any new doctrines. GGreatrakes’ ventured explanation for his gift was that God wished to have a Protestant miracle worker to “convince this Age of Atheism” of the truth of the Protestant faith, an age that had fallen to deriding true religion in the face of the false miracles of the papists and enthusiast sects.\textsuperscript{66} GGreatrakes represented himself as a humble, religious conformist, who, informed by a mysterious impulse, sought to heal and relieve the pain of the sick in an act of Christian charity. Virtuosi such as George Rust, Henry Stubbe, Robert Boyle, and Benjamin Whichcote all testified to his character and his Protestant virtue. They believed that Greatrakes was “reclaimed from all that is fanaticque”, and was no sectarian enthusiast, as so many healers were in those days.\textsuperscript{67} GGreatrakes appears to have felt a genuine calling and compulsion to heal. It must be remembered that Greatrakes had long shown an interest in Christian mysticism, the occult, and witchcraft, and had suffered a spell of melancholy at the impiety and wickedness of the age, spending nearly a year in seclusion at Capperquin Castle, a classic prelude to seventeenth century religious revelation. An acquaintance of Greatrakes remarked that he “was full of talk of devils and witches.”\textsuperscript{68} It is almost certain that Greatrakes truly believed he was a miraculous healer.

However, accusations that he was a republican agent inciting rebellion were prominent during the height of his fame, and continue to feature in studies by modern historians. While

\textsuperscript{65} Greatrakes, \textit{A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks}, 33.
\textsuperscript{66} Greatrakes, \textit{A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks}, 30-1.

\textsuperscript{67} Stubbe, \textit{The miraculous conformist}, 3; Glanvill, \textit{A blow at modern Sadducism}, 90; Beacher, \textit{Wonders if not miracles}, 5.
\textsuperscript{68} Thomas, \textit{Religion and the Decline of Magic}, 204.
Greattrakes was by no means a fervent royalist or Anglican, and probably did harbor some republican sympathies, there is little evidence except his service to Cromwell’s regime, and the origin of his healing impulse after the Restoration, to indicate his healing activities were designed as a protest against the Restoration. It must be remembered that many people sided with parliament during the Civil War, particularly English Protestant settlers in Ireland, and that most of them conformed after the Restoration and did not seek to undermine the monarchy. The closest Greattrakes ever came to a political pronouncement was his condemnation of the excesses and “the immoderate courses of several that were in Power and Authority” a description that could apply equally to the monarchy as well as the commonwealth. While anyone who healed the king’s evil with their touch was to a certain extent engaging in an inherently political act by encroaching on the prerogative of the monarch, that does not mean Greattrakes intended any such protest. And more importantly, there is no evidence that any dissenting or republican sects ever regarded him as their champion against the Restoration. His position as an enemy of the monarchy existed mainly in the minds of fearful royalists and Anglicans. The Irish Stroker seems to have had a genuine belief that his touch was miraculous, and his religious experiences were far more important to his healing career than his political views. Greattrakes, a self professed “latitude man”, seemed more concerned with reconciliation and peace after the turbulent years of the Civil War and Interregnum than in making any political protests or stirring up rebellions.  

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The ‘New Science’ and Anglican Royalism

However, seventeenth century England was a hotbed of intellectual ferment, and Valentine Greatrakes, whatever his true motives, exacerbated the clash of beliefs during the era. Society had been fractured during the Civil War and the Commonwealth, and it did not magically cohere again after the Restoration of Charles II. Uncountable political and religious groups had risen during the previous years, and despite Parliamentary attempts to curb and reduce their power, these groups remained important non-conformist voices in English society. Royalists, Anglicans, Parliamentary supremacists, Catholics, dissenters, all these competing thoughts and belief systems with radically different conceptions of the way the world should be clashed and collided in Restoration England. New scientific methods were proposed, Baconian empiricism spread throughout the Royal Society, and tremendous leaps were made in understanding the natural world and the human body, with entrenched theories like Galen’s humors increasingly rejected by experimental scientists. All of these systems of thought had to address the place of religion, miracle, and government, and so indirectly the monarch’s role as a miracle worker and faith healer. However, very few were willing to publicly criticize the king’s supposed gift in the charged political climate of the day. The opinions of various commentators on Greatrakes however, provide a window into these different worldviews and their attitudes toward miraculous healing, religion, and politics that clearly influenced contemporary thought on the king’s touch.

There was an extensive amount of contemporary material published on Greatrakes and his miraculous cures. From pamphlets to philosophical treatises to letters and journals,

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Greatrakes was on the minds of a great many people in the seventeenth century. These various contemporary accounts help construct a fairly complete portrait of the Greatrakes episode. Even more importantly, however, they expose the nature of contemporary attitudes towards the Irish Stroker and his healing touch, and the manner in which publishing in the seventeenth century became an essential tool to debate opponents and promulgate ideology. A few small pamphlets and letters, both credulous and skeptical, were written during his early healing days, testimony to his growing fame. However, they were largely unconnected from each other, and consist of personal observations and opinions on Greatrakes’ cures. It was not until 1665, when Greatrakes traveled to England, that his cures became a truly public spectacle, and when he arrived in London in 1666, the arguments over the nature of his healing gift developed into a full on pamphlet war. Pamphlet wars, spurred by the growth of the publishing industry in London, were the premier form of intellectual combat in the seventeenth century, practiced by everyone from the royal court, to dissenting sects, to apothecaries and physicians. The pamphlet war that waged around Greatrakes is essential to our understanding of the affair, and of contemporary attitudes toward the stroker, and miraculous healing in general.

Henry Stubbe, academic and physician, and David Lloyd, fervent royalist Anglican and biographer, both published rival pamphlets on the Stroker within a few months of each other. However, there is some confusion in the historiography over which pamphlet was published first. Eamon Duffy, in his seminal article on Valentine Greatrakes, contends that David Lloyd’s account *Wonders no Miracles* came first, in early March of 1666, while Henry Stubbe’s defense of Greatrakes, *The Miraculous Conformist*, followed in mid March of 1666. However Duffy appears to be mistaken, as Stubbe’s account was dated Feb. 22, 1665/6, while Lloyd’s pamphlet

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72 Duffy, “Valentine Greatrakes, the Irish Stroker,” 264-265.
was finished later, on March 13th 1665/1666.\textsuperscript{73} It would seem that Stubbe had indeed written his account earlier than Lloyd. More evidence for the publication chronology comes from the actual texts of the pamphlets. \textit{Wonders No Miracles} was in many ways a direct response to Stubbe’s defense of Greatrakes. Lloyd sought to prove that “Mr. Stubbs himself in a Book written in the mans behalf, hath sufficiently laid open his [Greatrakes] pretence”, and referenced specific examples from Stubbe’s work that clearly demonstrate Lloyd had read the pamphlet.\textsuperscript{74} Lloyd, then, had been inspired, or incensed enough, by Stubbe’s account that he was motivated to respond to it and the defenders of Greatrakes, and he assumed that his readers would have been familiar with Stubbe’s pamphlet as well. It is important to note that Lloyd, the royalist and high-church Anglican, wrote his account in response to the supporters of Greatrakes. Clearly Greatrakes had reached such a level of popularity that Lloyd viewed him as a threat to his religious and political orthodoxy.

Finally Greatrakes himself stepped into the fray. In 1666 he published his own pamphlet, \textit{A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks, and divers of the strange cures by him lately performed}, an explanation and defense of his life and his healing gift, addressed to Robert Boyle, relative of Greatrakes’ patron in Ireland, Roger Boyle, the Earl of Orrery. A rebuttal to his detractors, Greatrakes addressed Lloyd’s criticisms directly at the opening of his work, indicating that Lloyd’s arguments must have been the common refrain among the critics of Greatrakes. Greatrakes went on to provide a detailed biography of his life, in which he defended his own piety and godliness, before appending a long list of specific cures, each notarized by various eminent persons such as Robert Boyle, Benjamin Whichcote, and Andrew Marvell. These three accounts reveal the important strains of debate that raged around the stroker.

\textsuperscript{73} Stubbe, \textit{The miraculous conformist}, 44; Lloyd, \textit{Wonders no miracles}, 46.
\textsuperscript{74} Lloyd, \textit{Wonders no miracles}, 44-45.
However, the publications did not stop after Ggreatrakes left England. He continued to be referenced in a number of philosophical and scientific works throughout the seventeenth, and even into the eighteenth centuries. Scientists and philosophers like Thomas Sprat, Joseph Glanvill, and Henry More all published accounts of Greatrakes, attempting to make sense of his apparently miraculous gift in light of their rational cosmology and religion.\(^75\) The work diaries and unpublished manuscripts of Robert Boyle provide insight into the confusion Greatrakes provoked among the circle of virtuosi and writers in Restoration England. Private letters further enhance our understanding of the Greatrakes affair. The Conway Letters, a series of correspondences between the Conway family, who briefly hosted Greatrakes in England, and various people across the British Isles, and the long correspondence between Valentine Greatrakes and the hero of the Great Plague Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey, provide further evidence on contemporary opinions of the stroker.

While Greatrakes attracted attention throughout the nation, the new class of intellectuals, known in contemporary circles as the Virtuosi, was particularly intrigued by the case. An unofficial group of the leading scientists, philosophers, and divines of the day, the Virtuosi, mainly centered around the newly chartered Royal Society, was pushing the bounds of natural knowledge. It would be a mistake, however, to view them as we view scientists of today, for the Virtuosi were uniformly religious men, their science informed and guided by their deeply held faith. Miracles had not yet been relegated to pseudo-science, and these Virtuosi took possible religious wonders seriously. Greatrakes, who seemed to perform his cures with unusual success, caught the attention of these intellectuals, who launched an unofficial investigation into the workings of the Irish Stroker.\(^76\)

\(^{75}\) Duffy, “Valentine Greatrakes, the Irish Stroker,” 270-2.
\(^{76}\) Duffy, “Valentine Greatrakes, the Irish Stroker,” 268.
G greatrakes first reached the attention of the Virtuosi at Ragley Hall. The group of intellectuals that Viscountess Anne had gathered was deeply impressed by Greatrakes’ apparent gift of healing. Men such as Henry More, Benjamin Whichcote, and George Rust, all learned men and leading thinkers of the day, witnessed Greatrakes exercise his healing touch, and in their various letters and correspondences spread the news of the strange wonder throughout the country. It was at Ragley Hall that Henry Stubbe, the learned and controversial pamphleteer and physician, wrote his own account of Valentine Greatrakes, The Miraculous Conformist, published as a letter to the famous chemist Robert Boyle. Stubbe was a highly educated man, trained at Christ Church, Oxford, and an expert in foreign languages. However, he was known for his fierce polemics and penchant for controversy, and during the Civil War served in the Parliamentary Army. He became a physician shortly before the Restoration, and swore allegiance to the restored monarchy and Anglican Church in 1662. However, throughout his life, Stubbe did not hesitate to voice his contentious views. Though he associated with members of the Royal Society and Virtuosi, he just as frequently criticized the group for its dogmatic love of the “new philosophy” and rejection of the ancient knowledge of Aristotle and other Greeks.

Stubbe’s contentious and occasionally contradictory beliefs are evident in The Miraculous Conformist, his explanation and defense of Valentine Greatrakes. However, despite Stubbe’s often fractious relationship with the Virtuosi, his ambiguous attitude towards Greatrakes, and his semi-religious and semi-naturalistic explanation for his healing touch, aligned closely with the scientific elite’s verdict on the stroker.

The title of Stubbe’s pamphlet summarized his opinion of Greatrakes- the “miraculous conformist”. In other words, Greatrakes conformed to the Protestant faith, but had a miraculous

77 Duffy, “Valentine Greatrakes, the Irish Stroker,” 259.
78 Anthony Wood, Athenae Oxonienses an exact history of all the writers and bishops who have had their education in the most ancient and famous University of Oxford (London : Printed for Tho. Bennet,1692), 417-418.
power. The title, with its implication of novelty, indicates that the sight of a Protestant miracle worker was fairly rare, and that most who claimed to have divine gifts were from dissenting sects, or at least condemned as dissenters. Reflecting the importance of character and orthodoxy at the time, Stubbe went out of his way to defend the life and temperament of Greateakes. Greateakes was “reclaimed from all that is fanatique… a man of very good life, of tender and charitable principles”, who, most importantly “professeth Conformity unto the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church of England.” To even begin to take Greateakes seriously, it was necessary to prove that he was no madman, no enthusiast dissenter or Papist, or anyone outside the orthodoxy of Protestant thought. Stubbe largely dismissed his Cromwellian past, using a biblical parable to explain away Greateakes’ associations with republicanism. Of course, Stubbe, a fervent opponent of clerical hierarchy and an advocate of the Commonwealth until he conformed at the Restoration, harbored his own radical beliefs, and his defense of the stroker may have been motivated more by Greateakes own moderate and latitudinarian religious beliefs that anything else, reflecting the desire of many former Cromwellians for reconciliation and acceptance after the bloodshed of the last decades.

Stubbe vowed to “confine my Discourse to my own observations”, a revealing aside, and evidence that even for a person who criticized the empirical science of the Royal Society, direct observation and experience were gaining importance. Stubbe’s treatise was roughly divided into two parts, a factual account of Greateakes’ life and the cures he wrought while at Ragley Hall, and an analytical section where Stubbe sought to explain Greateakes’ gift. However, at the very opening of the work, Stubbe sought to respond to a number of criticisms against Greateakes.

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79 Stubbe, The miraculous conformist, 3.
81 Stubbe, The miraculous conformist, 4.
Notably, he first sought to explain the frequent failure of the touch, indicating that Greatrakes inability to cure many of his sick petitioners was remarked on by the public. Perhaps Bloch’s “happy optimism of believing souls” was becoming less and less prevalent, and occasional successes did not obscure the frequent failures of the touch.\footnote{Marc Bloch, \textit{The Royal Touch}, trans. J.E. Anderson (New York: Dorset Press, 1989), 243.} Stubbe admitted that Ggreatrakes was not able to heal everyone that came before him, and that while “This variety of success amused me something”, Biblical precedent proved that the miraculous healing was not perfect, for even a healer like the Apostle Paul was unable to cure Trophimus.\footnote{Stubbe, \textit{The miraculous conformist}, 4.} God distributed his gifts unevenly, and retained sovereignty over the healing power. The unpredictability of healing, then, should reflect on the “omnipotency of God” rather than the “deficiencies of a limited creature”.\footnote{Stubbe, \textit{The miraculous conformist}, 6.} God chose who would be healed and who would not, and Ggreatrakes served only as the vessel. In the very opening of his treatise Stubbe implicitly identified Ggreatrakes’ touch with the miraculous and divine gifts of the apostles, a controversial assertion that would cause trouble later on.

While Stubbe had explained the imperfection of Ggreatrakes’ touch, he still had to refute the popular charge that Ggreatrakes was either a fraud, using secret ointments or plasters to cure the ill, or a diabolical agent. Stubbe, again from his own personal observations, claimed he saw no medicaments or ointments on Ggreatrakes’ hands, or smelled any unusual odors from them. Indeed, he saw Ggreatrakes frequently wash his hands during the healings (perhaps another hint as to the stroker’s efficacy, as hygiene was not connected to health at the time, and doctors and hospitals often spread disease through their touch because they did not wash). He also testified that Ggreatrakes used no charms or unlawful words, and only uttered a short prayer to Jesus.
before his healings. Stubbe again looked to the Bible in an effort to prove Greatrakes was no demoniac by arguing that the Devil was never able to heal disease, as the Pharaoh’s magicians in the Book of Exodus were unable to cure the diseases sent by God, a notable break from the orthodox Anglican belief that the Devil often caused miracles to lure in the unwary.  

While Stubbe defended Greatrakes, he tried to prove that his healing power was not unique, and so should not be doubted by the English people, by providing a long list of ancient precedent to prove the healing touch was not an uncommon ability. Besides the apostles, Stubbe argued that powerful rulers also had the power to heal, from ancients like King Pyrrhus and Emperor Vespasian to the kings of England and France, who have “not been doubted generally to cure the Kings-Evill.” Indeed, Stubbe argued that God seemed to have given all rulers similar healing powers, to mark them as different from other men. However, it was not only apostles and royalty that had the healing touch, and Stubbe claimed many ancient Greek, Turkish and African healers also possessed the gift. Stubbe’s long list of healers served to prove that Greatrakes was not so unusual, and consequently should not be dismissed out of hand. However, it also had the effect of downplaying the importance of miracles, and implicitly the power and majesty of the royal touch. Stubbe argued that “God hath permitted all Religions (though not the Protestants, till now) to have their reall Miracles, that men may learne to trye Miracles by the Truth, and not the Truth by Miracles.” In Stubbe’s latitudinarian view, good morality was more important than the miraculous. He further reduced the unique power of the healing touch by reminding his readers of objects like the Eaglestone that could heal people of disease through simple physical contact. Though Stubbe had began his work by associating Greatrakes with the

88 Duffy, “Valentine Greatrakes, the Irish Stroker,” 255-257.
apostles, as he continued his work, his increasing latitudinarian religious beliefs and
minimization of the miraculous are evident, and his implicit argument that the royal touch was
almost common, and no different essentially to the cures of simple objects like the Eaglestone,
surely angered the staunch defenders of the king and of the royal gift of healing.

Though Stubbe had begun his pamphlet with a broadly religious defense of Greatrakes’
touch, he examination and conclusions regarding the nature of Greatrakes’ gift were ultimately
naturalistic. Stubbe believed that “God had bestowed upon Mr. Greatarick a peculiar
Temperament, or composed his Body of some particular Ferments”, which allowed him to heal
illness with his mere touch. 89 God was still present, but increasingly relegated to the position of
a remote deity, a prime mover who set in motion the natural events of the world, but does not
actively intervene. Greatrakes, though he possessed a unique temperament and physiology, was
not a true miracle worker. The unique ferments of his body, the particular makeup of his humors
and internal processes cured disease, and could be imparted to the ill through his touch, as
objects like cramp rings, Nephritic-stones, and herbs like the Peony also healed through external
application. Greatrakes’ touch invigorated the sick and allowed their own ferments to drive out
the illness. However, Greatrakes could not cure any who had a “decay in nature.” His unique
physiology allowed him to heal only those who had an imbalance in their humors, a
“heterogeneous ferment”.90 Note that Stubbe did not argue Greatrakes’ touch in and of itself
drove out the illness. Instead, he claimed that Greatrakes’ touch strengthened the patient’s blood
and spirit, so that the patient’s own ferments could drive out the imbalances and illness. Stubbe
defended the ability of the body to heal disease on its own, and argued that healers “are but

89 Stubbe, The miraculous conformist, 10.
90 Stubbe, The miraculous conformist, 12.
Servants to Nature, to remove impediments, or strengthen her that she may effect the work.”

Stubbe’s naturalistic explanation even further distanced Greatrakes’ cures from the genuinely miraculous.

Valentine Greatrakes forced society to confront the fraught relationship between religion and science, between God’s sovereignty and a mechanistic nature, a conflict that had been built into the fabric of the seventeenth century. Miracles were an essential part of Protestant theology, and the biblical miracles were regarded as absolute truth and proof of Christianity. However, the mechanical universe that operated according to fixed laws, a universe that precluded the miraculous, was gaining ground at the expense of the miraculous and supernatural. Stubbe sought to reconcile the two worldviews in his examination of Greatrakes, and he was not entirely successful. He ambiguously explained that Greatrakes’ cures came from God, as did all miracles, including those of the Apostles. However, his belief in a universe that operated according to fixed laws took precedence, and he ultimately concluded that Greatrakes’ cures were natural. However, this naturalistic explanation of Greatrakes’ cures was difficult to accept, for it undermined the entire rationale behind the miraculous, and Stubbe’s earlier equating of Greatrakes with the Apostles led to the unavoidable inference that their miracles may really have been natural as well. The uncomfortable conclusions that naturally followed the mechanistic explanation of Greatrakes’ touch were met with dismay. As Henry More, one of the leading intellectuals of the time, delicately put it, the “management of the matter [was] not so advantageous for Religion.”

Robert Boyle, to whom Stubbe’s pamphlet was addressed, was particularly distressed by

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93 The Conway Letters, 269.
the natural explanations for Greatrakes’ cures, although he ultimately shared the same

conclusions. In Boyle’s correspondence with Stubbe, the consternation that the Virtuosi felt
toward Greatrakes, and miracles in general, was evident,

“I shall not scruple, since [Greatrakes’] belief and life give me no just suspicions, to
acknowledge my conviction, and to rejoice in the appearance of a protestant, that is
enabled and forward to do good in such a way, especially in an age, where so many do
take upon them to deride all that is supernatural… but… I think it is more fit to look upon
this gift of Mr. Greatrakes, as a distinct and inferior kind, then degrade the
unquestionable gifts of the Apostles, depress them to the same level as his.”

The difficulty in reconciling religion and science is evident. On the one hand, devout Christians
had to defend the reality of the Biblical miracles as proof of their Christian faith. But as
Protestants, the rejected the modern miracles performed by the Catholics, and as scientists they
believed the universe was governed by natural and predictable rules, in which miracles had no
place. However, fears of atheism and dissension were prevalent, and they did not want to simply
dismiss a Protestant worker of miracles, one who shared their own faith and was a potentially
important victory against the propaganda of the papists, dissenters, and atheists. And behind all
their arguments, of course, lay the king’s touch itself, and their reluctance to disparage or
degrade the possibility of a healing touch, and so indirectly the royal touch itself.

While Greatrakes’ healing touch distressed the Virtuosi, the Irish Stroker positively
alarmed royalists and orthodox Anglicans. David Lloyd, author of the pamphlet Wonders No
Miracles, a fervent attack on Greatrakes and his cures, exemplified the beliefs of such men
during the first decades of the Restoration. Lloyd was trained as an Anglican clergyman, but he
published a number of historical and biographical works throughout his lifetime, including

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94 Duffy, “Valentine Greatrakes, the Irish Stroker,” 268.
for J. Phillips and J. Taylor, 1699-1700), Book I, 47.
96 Duffy, “Valentine Greatrakes, the Irish Stroker,” 269-270.
various works on the kings and other worthy statesmen of England, where he fiercely defended the prerogative of the monarchy and the supremacy of the English church. His writing also incorporated his deep suspicion and hostility towards dissenters and Catholics. He alleged that various dissenting and papist groups had planned as many as one hundred and twenty assassination plots against the restored king, and he frequently accused non-conformists of disloyalty to the monarchy and revolutionary designs. However, Lloyd was not the most careful of writers, and was frequently criticized for his mistakes. Anthony Wood, the famous contemporary antiquarian, claimed Lloyd’s works had “almost as many errors as lines.” In spite of these mistakes, or perhaps because his ardent and wholehearted defenses were not constrained by moderation, Lloyd’s work neatly encapsulates many of the popular beliefs and attitudes of royalist Anglicans during the mid 1600’s, and so his account of Greatekakes provides valuable evidence of their beliefs regarding miraculous healing. While Lloyd was a clergyman, and his work is suffused with religious reasoning and justification, it is inseparable from Lloyd’s political, scientific, medical, and social sentiments.

*Wonders no Miracles* was published anonymously, though the source of the pamphlet was no mystery to the public, as Greatekakes himself identified Lloyd as the author shortly after its publication. Lloyd did not begin with an attack on Greatekakes, however, but with a long prologue, a lament on the decline of English society and an explanation of the role of miracles in life. The world had fallen away from true religion, Protestantism, and embraced “polutheism” and “atheism”, in a regression to the state of nature “4000 years agoe”, before monotheism and Christianity had been revealed to man. Lloyd clearly had a pessimistic view of society, and

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99 Greatekakes, *A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatekakes*, 4-5.
feared and rejected any ideas or beliefs that did not conform to his conservative ideology, a defining characteristic of strong royalist and High-Church Anglican thought at the time that jealously guarded their newly regained power from any potential threats.\textsuperscript{101}

To Lloyd, as to nearly all men of the seventeenth century, miracles were a central part of their religious conception. Miracles were widely regarded as proof positive of the truth and power of religion, the Biblical miracles of the prophets and apostles as absolute fact and the bedrock of Christian faith. Miracles were a necessity in convincing and converting ignorant mankind who possessed “such shallow, narrow, and dark…capacities.” Lloyd summed up the necessity of miracles to his worldview, writing,

“Sir, Seriously, since there is not a greater confirmation of what God speaks, than what he doth; and so no greater evidence of Religions proceeding from God, than Miracles wrought by God. And there being no ordinary way of conveighing the evidence of divine Truth into the mindes of Men, but by a concurrence of a divine power set before their eyes to confirm that Truth.”\textsuperscript{102}

Biblical miracles were an essential part of Protestant theology, but they were also an intellectually difficult one to reconcile with the seventeenth century world. To Lloyd, as to all orthodox Anglicans, the desire was to protect the status quo and the power and supremacy of the Church of England, and while Biblical miracles were regarded as proof of doctrine for Protestant theology, they posed a troubling challenge to the authority of the scripture and the Anglican clergy when they appeared in English backyards. Orthodox Anglicans believed that the Age of Miracles, necessary at the founding of the church, had passed, and that the modern wonders of the dissenters and papists were superstition or devilry. Greatrakes’ cures could not be miracles then, and to further prove the point Lloyd argued that Greatrakes’ healing gift bore none of the

\textsuperscript{102} Lloyd, \textit{Wonders no miracles}, 2-3; Duffy, “Valentine Greatrakes, the Irish Stroker,” 252-255.
hallmarks of the Biblical miracles. According to Anglican orthodoxy, miracles were sent as proof of doctrine and always came after some new revelation had been revealed to a prophet or apostle of God. Greateakes had no message, no scripture to relate, and made no pretense to be an apostle, and so could not be performing God’s miracles.\footnote{Lloyd, \textit{Wonders no miracles}, 35-6.}

This theology of the miraculous was no doubt based upon genuine belief and philosophy, but it was clearly sharpened and hardened by the Catholic and sectarian miracle workers. Particularly during the turmoil of the Interregnum, numerous prophets and enthusiasts arose, and they did not simply disappear at the Restoration. The restored Anglican Church leadership and many royalist factions were deeply jealous of their power after losing everything during Cromwell’s regime, and regarded any dissenting religious groups, and particularly any miracle workers, as potentially subversive and destructive of their established order, and often dealt with them harshly. The Anglican Royalists were the key supporters of the Clarendon Code that proscribed dissent in the early 1660’s, and they sought to restrict anyone who did not follow mainstream Anglican theology.\footnote{Kishlansky, \textit{A Monarchy Transformed}, 234-235.} Miracle workers, of course, were some of the most prominent examples of dissenting thought, and Lloyd likened them to people that “Counterfeit the King’s Seal.” Enthusiasts and papists were counterfeiting God’s seal with their false miracles, and so drove misunderstanding between God and the people. This conflation of religion and politics, and of king and God, reveals the deep reverence with which Lloyd and other royalists regarded the monarchy. Though belief in the divine right of king’s had been deeply shaken by the execution of Charles I and a decade of republican government, royalists and Anglicans still believed that the king was sovereign and divine.\footnote{Lloyd, \textit{Wonders no miracles}, 3-4.}
Lloyd continued his attack on Greatrakes by analyzing the stroker’s motivations in healing. While Lloyd acknowledged that some fake healers might have been diabolical agents, he believed that Greatrakes was either a dissenting republican fraud, or was a truly delusional madman. If Greatrakes was an imposter, his motivations were clear to Lloyd; spread his republican and radical ideas throughout the land to destabilize the Restoration government. Overblown perhaps, but it must be remembered that Lloyd sought not only to combat Greatrakes in his pamphlet, but all fake healers, papists, dissenters, and enthusiasts alike, and that Lloyd wrote in a age of bloody revolution and war. He had seen first hand the threat of republican beliefs, and was naturally fearful of another Civil War. However, Lloyd also admitted that Greatrakes could simply be a madman, and based his conclusion on his scientific and medical understanding of the mind. Lloyd argued Greatrakes was “troubled with Fancies and Imaginations, which he takes to be Impulses”, and his deranged beliefs were caused by any number of medical and supernatural issues, like an excess of melancholy in the humors, or the influence of the stars and evil angels, or poor diet and foul air. However, Greatrakes actions were a threat no matter what, for he confused the English people and made it easier for malicious healers to sway the populace. Lloyd was not just concerned with the “nine daies Wonder of Greatrates”, but with “the opportunity and temptations offered to more subtle persons to work upon an unstable people to more dangerous purposes.”

While Lloyd showed that Greatrakes’ touch was not miraculous, he sought to totally discredit the stroker and prove that even the mechanistic explanations for Greatrakes’ cures were wrong. The belief in ‘signatures’, in which natural objects were stamped with a clear sign of their

use, was still an important element in seventeenth century medicine, and plants, flowers, rocks, and other natural elements were believed to have the power to cure specific diseases based on their appearance.\(^{108}\) Lloyd, relying on the doctrine of signatures, claimed that it was contradictory for Greatrakes to be able to heal all manner of diseases, when the natural world presented only objects that could heal specific diseases. Even further proof that Greatrakes did not possess a natural power was the stroker’s use of lancing and ointments on his patients. Here was clear evidence that Greatrakes had no miraculous or supernatural power, for he resorted to physic to heal the sick. Lloyd also turned to the power of fancy again to explain that Greatrakes’ healing was the result of the patient’s own imagination stirring the natural healing processes, what he termed “the Sympathetick Cure”, and not any miraculous or natural power.\(^{109}\) Finally, in typical seventeenth century style, Lloyd cast a number of aspersions on Greatrakes’ character, accusing him of profanity and blasphemy, and licentiousness with the women Greatrakes ‘strok’d’.\(^{110}\)

While Lloyd had proven Greatrakes was a false healer, he had yet to fully elucidate the danger they posed to society. Foremost in Lloyd’s mind was the ability of men like Greatrakes to control the English people, for “when they see God in what he doth, they will easily believe he is in what he saith.”\(^{111}\) The people, convinced that God was behind the fake healers and miracle workers, would follow them as new prophets and be led from the path of true religion. Lloyd particularly singled out the danger of Catholic healers, showing the animus royalist Anglicans held toward the Roman Church. While false healers could lead people to corrupt religions, he also feared that they would lead people to atheism, for when the healers’ impostures were

\(^{111}\) Lloyd, *Wonders no miracles*, 4.
discovered, men would come to doubt all miracles, and so reject the vary basis of Christianity and turn away from religion. Common healers assaulted the edifice of the Anglican Church from all sides, either converting people to false religion, or driving them away from faith altogether. To combat their opponents, Orthodox Anglicans had to walk a tightrope, simultaneously affirming the reality and possibility of biblical miracles, but denying the numerous modern miracles that infused seventeenth century society.

The threat of miracle workers was great, and Lloyd sought to demolish their pretensions by his attack on Greatrakes. However, while he had shown that Greatrakes’ cures were incompatible with Anglican theology, the political threat of miraculous healers was great, for anyone who engaged in healing scrofula through touch was inherently attacking the power and authority of the king, the one miracle worker who royalist Anglicans did not only accept, but actively promoted. Lloyd’s view of the royal touch relied on basic divine right theory, and he regarded the ability of the king to heal scrofula “a gracious Gift of God” to “Gods Vicegerents”, bestowed on the monarchs of England since Edward the Confessor. As miracles were proof of divine truth and religious doctrine, they were also proof of the divine hand in the monarchy, a seal upon the King “evidencing the presence of God with his Person and Government.”

Anyone who claimed to have the same power was clearly encroaching on the royal prerogative and undermined the message of the rite- that the king was not as other men, but a unique, semi-divine personage. However, the threat to royal healing did not come only from false healers like Greatrakes, but doubters and skeptics who disbelieved in the entire ceremony as well, and Lloyd sought to defend the rite from both groups. His apologetic provides insight into many of the popular beliefs surrounding the king’s touch at the time. Though Lloyd spent only a few pages

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explaining and defending the royal touch, it is clear that the threats posed to the royal prerogative of healing were prominent in his mind throughout the writing of *Wonders No Miracles*.

Lloyd first sought to defend the king’s touch from the skeptics and disbelievers, and in doing so revealed one of the primary contradictions that lay at the heart of royal healing itself. The Protestant belief that the age of miracles had passed naturally conflicted with the miracle of the king’s touch, and many of the more radical or dissenting, and quietly many mainstream Protestants as well, outright rejected the possibility that the king could cure scrofula with his touch. They were also repelled by the Catholic origin of the rite, and according to Lloyd royal healing was “cavilled at by the more morose sort of people, as superstitious in the Ceremonies used about it.”113 The prayers, the touch pieces, the clergy and attendants gave the king’s touch a decidedly Catholic cast to many Protestants, who rejected any formalism or hierarchy in worship. Lloyd dismissed the concerns over the ritual itself, for, he claimed, the ceremony and rites were “rather arguments of the devotion of the great Personage that heals, than means necessarily influencing upon the people that are healed.” The king could cure scrofula “by a bare stroake”, the ceremonies was simply symbolism.114 While Lloyd did not share the resistance to ceremony held by many Protestants, he still defended the belief that the age of miracles had passed. However, he largely ignored the controversy; seemingly oblivious to the fact that one of his main arguments against Greatrakes, that God no longer sent miracles to men, could apply just as readily to the king as the Irish Stroker. However, to avoid the issue, he never explicitly referred to the king’s touch as a miracle, calling it only a gift from God, though the obviously miraculous nature of the royal touch was lost on no one. The balancing act High-Church Anglicans had to maintain in attacking and rejecting Catholicism and dissenters, defending

mainline Anglican theology, and promoting the Church of England and the king was an exercise in dissonance, to say the least.

However, Puritan religious objections against the rite melded into scientific and philosophical reasoning, and Lloyd was forced to address medical objections to the rite, objections he had previously used to attack Greateakes. To many thinkers, the king’s cures were not attributable to any miracles or “occult qualities”, but to the “power of Fancy… and Imagination.” The imagination, or fancy, was viewed as a powerful and pervasive part of the human body in medicine and science in the seventeenth century. An overwrought fancy was thought to be the potential cause of many maladies, and it was commonly held by contemporaries that plague was more likely to strike the fearful, and that a woman’s thoughts could shape her unborn fetus. Imagination had a dominant role in the health of the body. To those contemporaries who ascribed to this view, it was a natural step to regard the royal rite as simply a catalyst for the imagination to heal the body itself. The poor sickly patient, who had most likely never seen a king before, was overwhelmed by the majesty, ceremony and charitableness of such a majestic presence, and so the touch “enthroneth the Patients fancy, summoning his Spirits to assist Nature with their utmost might, to encounter the Disease with greater advantage.”

Lloyd did not have a good response to this argument, as he had used it himself in attacking Greateakes’ cures, and he simply dismissed them as obviously false in relation to the king’s healing power. He went on to explain that, if healing could occur without any supernatural power, through only influencing the mind, then “any man may work upon the imagination, as

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115 Lloyd, Wonders no miracles, 13.
117 Lloyd, Wonders no miracles, 13.
well as Princes.” False healers then,

“Might set up an Healing power, as well as the King; levelling his Gift, as well as they would his Office; with a design, that when it appeared he could do no more than other men, he should be no more than other men...they might not only out-do his Majesty, but be in a fair way to give Laws to the world.”118

The potential destructiveness of these false prophets was clear in Lloyd’s mind. Not only could they turn men away from true religion, they could turn them away from true government (which, to Lloyd, were largely synonymous). After the destruction of the Civil War and the Cromwellian regime, it is perhaps understandable that those who had remained royalist Anglicans during the Interregnum were extremely sensitive to any threats to their orthodoxy, and their power. A former Cromwellian soldier, pretending to the same power as the king and attracting mobs of followers wherever he traveled, brought up unpleasant memories of regicide, rebellion and republican anarchy to royalists.

This common healer eroded the power of the monarchy by chipping away at its majesty and divinity, weakening even more what remained of the belief in divine kingship that had been deeply shaken by Cromwell and the execution of Charles I. The monarchy had been revealed as a “system of government” in the last decade, and the belief in the divine right of kings, with their absolute prerogative and indefeasible heredity had been dealt a mortal blow.119 Those royalists, Tories, and Anglicans who still held to the theory of the divine kingship could not brook an Irish republican who challenged so directly a central ceremony of their belief, whether he did it intentionally or not. Lloyd’s attack on Greatrakes and defense of the king’s touch reveal that the belief in divine kingship did not simply disappear when Charles I was beheaded in 1649, but continued to exert a powerful hold over royalists and Anglicans. However, it also exposed the

118 Lloyd, Wonders no miracles, 14.
119 Kishlansky, A Monarchy Transformed, 225-6.
increasing difficulty in justifying the touch with Protestant theology and mechanical science.

While the majority of Anglican clergy, opposed to anyone outside the orthodoxy and conformity of the Church, were hostile to Greatrakes and his kind, a few actually welcomed this apparent worker of Protestant miracles. In an age where constant Catholic and dissenting propaganda put forth all manner of miraculous events and healings, some ‘Low-church’ Anglicans were more than happy to accept Greatrakes as their own worker of miracles and proof against the papists and sectarians. To Hebert Croft, the Bishop of Gloucester, Greatrakes’ cures were “beyond all the power of Nature.” John Beal, a Somerset rector, neatly summarized this strain of opinion, welcoming Greatrakes as “convincing evidence of the powerful name of our Lord Jesus, in a season that needed some evidence, that all revelations were not fanatical.”

Greatrakes was accepted as proof at last that Protestants too could perform miracles, an important victory in the religious propaganda battles of the day. However, these ideas were fairly minor, and most Anglicans, seeking to maintain the power and monopoly of the Church hierarchy, aligned more closely with David Lloyd in their opposition to common faith healers. As Greatrakes himself admitted, not without some amusement, he had caused “the greatest faction and disturbance between Clergy and laymen that any one has these 1000 years.”

The Greatrakes case continued to feature in the popular works on science, religion and the supernatural throughout the seventeenth century. Proponents of the ‘new science’ such as Thomas Sprat, Robert Boyle, Joseph Glanvill, and Henry More were deeply puzzled by Greatrakes, and the ambivalence they felt toward the strange cures were evident in many of their treatises and books. Robert Boyle even left a long series of unanswered questions about

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120 Duffy, “Valentine Greatrakes, the Irish Stroker,” 261.
121 The Conway Letters, 272.
Greatrakes among his unpublished papers. On the whole, the Virtuosi followed Stubbe’s lead and retreated on a natural explanation for Greatrakes’ healing power, arguing his unique temperament and the humors of his body imparted a “sanative Contagion” to the ill. Joseph Glanvill, one of the greatest proponents of the new science, but a staunch defender of the supernatural in human life at the same time, included an account from the Cambridge Platonist George Rust on Valentine Greatrakes in his seminal work on the supernatural “A Blow Against Modern Saducism.” The men concluded, like David Lloyd had, that Greatrakes’ cures did not meet the definition of miracle, but unlike Lloyd, they did not dismiss Greatrakes completely, and agreed that though his cures were probably natural, they were certainly unique. While Greatrakes himself believed that his healing was an “immediate gift from heaven”, the Virtuosi disbelieved Greatrakes’ claim, for after all, he was “no Philosopher”.

Another Platonist, Henry More, added a long section on Greatrakes to the second edition of his work on fanaticism titled “Enthusiasmus Triumphatus”, in which he discussed at length the case of the Irish Stroker. While he concluded that his healing was a natural phenomenon, based on the unique ferments and temperament of Greatrakes body, he was impressed by the stroker, and called him “an Exemplar of candid and sincere Christianity.” His healings, “if not properly called Miracles”, were wonders at least, “such as the Church of Rome in no age could ever produce for their Religion. For what Greatrakes did, was done in the face of the world, seen and attested by physicians, Philosophers and Divines of the most penetrating and accurate judgment.”

Greatrakes’ character, social status, and sympathetic latitudinarian theology, made

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122 Duffy, “Valentine Greatrakes, the Irish Stroker,” 268.
123 Glanvill, A blow at modern Sadducism, 86.
124 Glanvill, A blow at modern Sadducism, 86-87.
125 Henry More, Enthusiasmus triumphatus, or, A discourse of the nature, causes, kinds, and cure, of enthusiasme (London: Printed by J. Flesher, 1656), 51-52.
the Virtuosi unwilling to totally dismiss the stroker. Compelled by their science to reject the miraculous, the Virtuosi were unwilling to totally abandon a healer who followed and espoused their own latitudinarian philosophy.

The case of Valentine Greateakes exposes some of the complex attitudes towards miraculous healing in Restoration England. The new science that largely rejected supernatural phenomenon clashed with Protestant theology toward the miraculous. Clerical hierarchy and jealousy were forced to confront a miracle worker of the Protestant faith. Royalists had to reckon with the nation’s Cromwellian past. Though a minor event amid the turmoil of the era, Greateakes forced society to confront the relationship between religion, science, and politics in the seventeenth century. The fractures among these beliefs, and the conclusions that were drawn from them, invariably influenced thinking towards the most famous miraculous healer of the age, King Charles II himself.
Part Two

John Browne’s “Adenochoiradelogia” and the Royal Touch

Such is thy Art, Fam’d Browne, whose Skilful Pen
Can Lym the Great Creator's pow'r in Men:
The Purple Liquor in the smallest Vein,
Which runs, like Arethusa to the Main
In secret Channels, cant escape thine Eye,
Which does new Tracts i'th’ lesser World descry:
Ev'n Death begins to fear thy searching Art,
Lest thou shouldst find a Balm against his Dart.
The Healing Vertue of the Royal Hand,
(Next to our King, the Glory of our Land)
Which Heaven on our Monarchs does bestow,
To make the Vain, Conceited Rabble know
That Pow'r and Government, from Heaven flow;
And that there’s some Divinity in Gods below,
Is now discover’d by thy piercing Brain,
As far as Man can Miracles explain.¹

-Thomas Walker

While philosophers and divines puzzled over Valentine Greateakes and his miraculous
cures, another healer attracted even greater numbers and fame than the Irish Stroker. Charles II
had begun his healing career from almost the moment of his father’s execution, touching eleven
people in Jersey in December of 1649 while still only a teenager, without a throne or kingdom.
From these humble beginnings, Charles II became the most prolific healer of the age, and
probably of all the rulers of England before or since. By the time of his death in 1685, Charles
had healed over one hundred thousand of his subjects, two percent of the English population.²

The Merry Monarch, as he is best known to posterity, has a reputation for carelessness and

impatience towards the business of kingship. Yet scarcely a month went by where he did not heal for the evil, in ceremonies public and private, large and small, many lasting multiple hours, which must have grated on the restless king. While his reputation for inattention is not entirely undeserved, Charles II had a keen understanding of the importance of ceremony and ritual in the establishment of a monarchy, and formal rites were practiced frequently during his reign. However, the healing ceremony was arguably the most central and favored of all the royal rituals. Throughout his life, Charles was careful to cultivate his image as a healing monarch, and encouraged public viewings of the healing rite. He even frequently invited royal dignitaries to the ceremony, such as the Duchess of Modena, Cosimo III of Tuscany, and the Ambassador of Morocco, who remarked after the ceremony that he now found Charles “to be the greatest monarch in Europe.”

The sources the historian has at his disposal when studying the royal touch are varied. References to the touch abound in pamphlets, letters, and books. Official records and registers help further reconstruct the nature of the rite, its size and importance. However, one work is unavoidable in the study of the royal ritual of healing, and forms a central pillar in every study of the touch in Restoration England. *Adenochoiradelogia, or, An anatomic-chirurgical treatise of glandules and strumaes* by John Browne, published in 1684, is the most complete and relevant account of royal healing we possess today. In one book, Browne examined the history of the rite, the causes and nature of the healing power, the structure of the ceremony itself, and the efficacy of the touch, and appended numerous examples of the effect of the cure on those who received it. His compilations of the numbers Charles’ healed throughout his reign provide the basis for

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modern estimations on the popularity of the rite. It is no exaggeration to say that the
historiography of royal healing would be markedly different if John Browne’s book did not exist.

It is puzzling, then, that so little has been written on Browne’s life and career. Surgeon-
in-ordinary to three monarchs, Charles II, James II, and William III, and a central figure in the
study of the royal touch, scant little is known about the man. While his work stands at the heart
of research into the ceremony of royal healing, a critical eye has not been cast at
*Adenochoiradologia* or the man who wrote it. The book and the author simply stand as
invaluable first hand accounts of the touch in the historiography. While it is necessary to study
Browne’s treatise on struma to understand the king’s touch under Charles II, it is equally
necessary to study John Browne and the writing of the book itself to reach a clear understanding
of the work’s purpose and ideological bent. Besides being an inherently interesting story, John
Browne’s career as surgeon sheds light on the nature of royal healing and its relationship with
court life and ritualized power that goes beyond what the study of *Adenochoiradologia* alone
provides. Through an examination of Browne’s life, we can obtain a more complete portrait of
the ideological purpose of *Adenochoiradologia*, and consequently, a deeper understanding of the
royal rite of healing itself.

Unfortunately, the scant evidence we have on John Browne’s life and career presents a
number of challenges. The majority of information about his life is circumstantial, and comes
from records, transcripts, and court minutes, such as the case of 1687 where he was charged with
malpractice. The other major source is the polemical pamphlet by the surgeon James Yonge,
*Medicaster Medicatus, or, A remedy for the itch of scribbling*. Published in 1685, Yonge’s work is
a scathing attack on Browne’s competency and honesty, and accuses him of gross errors and

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plagiaries in all of his works. Browne, conspicuously and suggestively, failed to respond to the rival surgeon’s accusations. The other major sources on Browne’s life are the papers relating to his stormy tenure at St. Thomas’s Hospital. Browne, a royal appointee, was in frequent conflict with the governors of the hospital, and the various cases that were brought before the aldermen of London and the king’s councils shed light on Browne’s career.

The partisanship of the surviving sources makes it difficult to present an unbiased and fair portrait of Browne’s life. The one full length scholarly appraisal of John Browne, by K.F. Russell, published in the *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* in 1959, falls firmly on the side of Browne’s opponent, James Yonge, going so far as to thank Yonge for his “magnificent appraisal” of Browne in the acknowledgements. Whatever the reality of Yonge’s attack, it is clear that Browne lived a controversial life, one marred by accusations of plagiarism, dishonesty, and incompetence. At the very least, this should give the historian pause when examining *Adenochoiradelogia* and drawing conclusions from the work. To reach a fair appraisal of Browne’s treatise and properly situate it in the history of the royal touch, then, we first have to understand John Browne himself, and why he wrote the book in the first place—if he actually wrote it at all. To do so, a study of his life must be coupled with an examination of the text itself.

**Career**

John Browne was born in 1642, in the city of Norwich. Throughout his career as a surgeon, Browne maintained that he was from a prominent medical family, and so was “conversant in Chirurgery almost from my cradle, being the sixth Generation of my own

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5 Russell, “John Browne,” 520.
Relations, all eminent Masters of our Profession.” However, like many who sought to rise above their births, Browne’s claim about his family is deceptive, at best. Browne’s father was not a surgeon, but a humble tailor named Joseph Browne, and Browne was born into relatively modest conditions. However his claim was not entirely spun out of whole cloth. Throughout his life, Browne, amnesiac towards his actual parentage, preferred to present himself as the relative of his uncle William Cropp. Records indicate that the Cropp’s were indeed a prominent medical family in Norwich, for a John Cropp appears repeatedly in the list of Masters and Wardens of the Guild Of Barber-Surgeons for the city. It would seem that these Cropp’s were the familial relations Browne often wrote of, but the nature of his relationship and closeness with them remains a mystery.

Yonge, of course, had his own opinion on Browne’s heritage. “The Son, and Brother of poor Taylors… This pedigree must be from his Uncle Crop, a kind of bastard-like Geneology, as if he either had no father, or were ashamed to own him.” Yonge’s appraisal is accurate, on the whole. Clearly, Browne, the simple son of a tailor, sought to present himself as a descendent of finer stock when he began his career in London. However, in a society where birth and social station were overwhelmingly important, distorting one’s own history was a common deception for social climbers who sought to rise above the circumstances of their birth. Browne was clearly one of these social climbers, and as we shall see, was dependent upon royal patronage for his positions. It is not surprising or unusual that he would obscure his origins. It was also a common tactic for writers to slander their opponents’ backgrounds and social status, and Yonge’s accusations were not unusual; they are more indicative of the unease and anxiety many had.

towards social mobility in the seventeenth century than any true shortcomings in Browne’s life. While Yonge may be correct in his assessment, Browne’s actions were not as contemptible or blameworthy as he would have the reader believe, and we should not, at this stage, dismiss Browne as a liar and fraud.

Little else is known about Browne’s early life, and he does not appear in the records again until 1660, when he came to London at the age of seventeen to apprentice himself to a surgeon. Browne appeared before the London Barber-Surgeon’s Company, where he was entered as an apprentice to the surgeon John Bishop. While we possess no records of the nature of Browne’s apprenticeship, Yonge disputed Browne’s assertions about his early surgical experience, claiming that Browne never actually served Bishop, but was instead the skillet carrier (an apprentice who carried the dressing and tools for surgeons, and thus presumably, low in prestige) for Thomas Hollyer at St. Thomas’s Hospital. The scarcity of evidence makes it difficult to determine the truth. However, there is no mention in the Barber-Surgeon’s records of Browne having changed masters, and Bishop even paid the presentation fee for Browne almost a year later. Again, Yonge sought to discredit Browne and his background, but he stood on shakier ground with this criticism, as no other documents can corroborate it. Even if Yonge was correct, however, Thomas Hollyer was a prominent surgeon at St. Thomas’ Hospital, and he had operated on Samuel Pepys for urinary stones in 1658, and so either case indicates Browne probably received a good education as a surgeon.

However, the status of the surgeon in the seventeenth century was markedly different from their role and position today. Surgery, or ‘chirurgery’, as it was spelled then, comes from the Greek for ‘hand’ and ‘work’, and, in many ways, surgeons were the manual labor of medical

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practice. Surgeons did not attend universities as the physicians did. Their education was through apprenticeship, and they were organized in trade guilds, as any common craftsmen were. The province of the surgeon was entirely the external body and its ailments. Internal ills were reserved for the physicians. However, while most notorious for the knife, surgeons also helped set broken or fractured bones and treated burn victims. They operated without any formal education or theoretical knowledge of the underlying processes of the human body, and were expected to work on their patients blindly, as a laborer works on a building without knowing the mathematics behind the architecture. Physicians, however, were classically trained at universities, learned and studied in ancient Greek and Arabic medical texts. They were not organized in a trade guild, but were controlled by the Royal College of Physicians, which strictly policed its membership and standards, and sought to exercise dominance over all of medicine, including surgery. Their extensive education, knowledge of the body, and control over the medical world made the physicians the elite of medical practitioners.

However, it is easy to exaggerate the second-class station of surgeons in the Early Modern Era, and in the seventeenth century many surgeons were making a concerted push for independence. While physicians frequently went to the crown and the courts in attempts to control other practitioners, they were often unsuccessful. The Royal College of Physicians failed in its attempt to gain the right to supervise surgeons’ operations, and though they were technically the only group allowed to prescribe internal medicine, that regulation proved extremely difficult to enforce, and in reality everyone from surgeons to mountebanks gave out physic. And while physicians undoubtedly received a more extensive education than surgeons,
surgeons were not the uneducated laborers that many physicians wanted them to be. Beginning in the Renaissance, there arose a desire on the part of many surgeons to create a more learned surgery through the translation and dissemination of Greek and Arabic surgical texts, and in the 1600’s the Barber-Surgeons Company continued to emphasize the importance of learning by seeking apprentices who could read and write Latin and instituting frequent anatomy lectures at the Surgeon’s Hall in London.\(^\text{14}\)

While it is difficult to say how much these efforts actually affected surgical practice, there was clearly a desire among many surgeons to make their profession more prestigious. Contemporary surgical treatise did not just cover basic prescriptive operations, but delved into the anatomy and the causes of illness. Surgeons wrote about the humoral makeup of the body and the theories of disease and of corruption with as much frequency as physicians. Surgeons also prescribed for diet, internal medicines, and purging as commonly as the physicians.\(^\text{15}\)

Clearly, while physicians sought to portray themselves as the learned men of medicine, and frequently used the power of the law to enforce those distinctions, the reality was more complex. Surgeons shared the same basic assumptions about illness and the body as physicians, and employed many of the same remedies. This desire to create a more unified medical realm was spearheaded by many of the Virtuosi in the Royal Society, and the conflict between the College and the ‘new science’ dominated the medical landscape of the day. While the popular image of the uneducated and submissive surgeon still held sway, in reality, surgery was asserting itself as a learned and important profession, and to a large extent had appropriated the theoretical knowledge that physicians tried to monopolize.\(^\text{16}\)


Whatever the extent of Browne’s theoretical learning and practical experience during his apprenticeship, in 1663 he was appointed to serve as a naval surgeon during the era of the Anglo-Dutch Wars. War was one of the primary training grounds for surgeons in the seventeenth century and an important stepping-stone in establishing a surgical career.\(^{17}\) Contemporary records indicate Browne may have served on the *Westergate*, for a bill in the State Papers to the Navy Commissioners name a Browne as surgeon of the ship. However, Yonge cast Browne’s military service in the dimmest possible light, and claimed that the ship he served on “was not the Kings, but a Merchant Ship… which in time of war, is an employ of the least credit comparatively… though he wisely conceal her name and rank.”\(^{18}\) Yonge, who also served in the Navy at the same time and was captured by the Dutch for a year, and later held a prominent career as a naval surgeon, would have had first hand knowledge of the positions and relative importance of the surgeon during the war. However, the paucity of evidence again makes it difficult to reach a firm conclusion regarding Browne’s employ in the navy.

It is almost certain though that a cannonball injured Browne during the Second Dutch War in 1666, though, not surprisingly, Yonge disputed Browne’s account of the wound. Browne claimed that “the wind of a 24 pound bullet… miserably fractured and contused” his arm. Yonge, however, asserted that only “an accidental splinter” hurt Browne’s arm, and that Browne attempted to draw allowance for the injury out of the poor Seaman’s Chest, which as an officer he was forbidden to do.\(^{19}\) Whatever the case, after his service in the Navy, Browne returned to Norwich, where he worked as a surgeon for ten years, though there are no extant records that provide details about his career during this time. Notably, he neglected to become a Freeman of

\(^{19}\) Russell, “John Browne,” 395.
the Barber-Surgeons Company when his apprenticeship expired, and did not do so until years later, on the eve of his appointment to St. Thomas’s Hospital. Perhaps the oversight testifies to Browne’s carelessness, but it more directly indicates the decentralization of the medical community, and the regularity of practicing medicine without official recognition.20

It was around 1675, when Browne was 33, that he returned to London and began the most prominent and well-documented stage of his career. The earliest news we have of Browne dates to May 1675, when he endorsed Londoner John Hilton’s application for a medical license. It was on this document that Browne first signed himself as “Medic. et chirurgus, Surgeon in Ordinary to His Majesty.”21 When, or how, he received this title is a mystery, but clearly Browne had already established himself as a surgeon of some note. However, the actual role of royal medical practitioners under Charles II helps shed light on the nature of Browne’s service. The royal household was a labyrinthine institution of supervisors, councils, and attendants. There was an office and station for nearly every aspect of royal life, from the Groom of the Stool with his bedchamber staff, to the separate Privy Chamber Staff, to the Master of Horse, to the Lord Chamberlain, to the Master of the Great Wardrobe. The responsibilities and duties of the various offices, and their importance and power, waxed and waned depending on the character of the current office holder and the attitude of the monarch.22 It was among this convoluted and ornate royal household that the king’s medical staff operated.

There were two levels of medical position in the royal household, the First Physician and First Surgeon (or Sergeant Surgeon), and the Physicians-in-Ordinary and the Surgeons-in-

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20 Cook, Old Medical Regime, 22-23.
Ordinary. Generally one of the First Surgeons and Physicians served at a time, while several of the ‘in-ordinary’ served at once. Technically, these medical positions were appointed by commission from the Privy Seal and carried a salary, but the position appears to have been more of an honor than a job, as records reveal that the royal physicians and surgeons rarely drew from their salary, which were almost always in arrears. However, the picture is complicated when various civilian practitioners are factored in. The king and members of the royal household often consulted with ordinary physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries, who did not have royal appointments. These men were called royal physicians extraordinary. Frequently, though, these men adopted the title and simply signed themselves as royal physicians or surgeons, though they did not have a royal appointment. Confusing the situation even more are the incomplete records kept on royal medical appointees. The only real indication of the status of an individual was an appointment by royal warrant, which only the first physicians and surgeons received. Sorting the real from the pretended royal medical practitioners is a difficult task, then.

There is no reference in the State Papers for a warrant for the appointment of John Browne, and surgeons-in-ordinary were not listed in the official records. James Yonge, of course, had his own explanation of Browne’s position, and claimed that

The vain empty title, was procur’d him by a very near relation of his, who being of private use to some Courtiers, procured him that nudem nomen... Of this little title, there were many men possest in the late Kings time, who (as our pretender) had neither salary, fee, board-wages, or stipend, were not obliged to any waiting, or attendance, had no manner of Priviledge, or advantage thereby...And so far from being the least step to any preferment, that should all the late Kings actual Surgeons have died before him, this airy

24 Cook, *Old Medical Regime*, 281.
25 Cook, *Old Medical Regime*, 281.
Character, would not have given them any better claim to succeed, than that of a meer stranger.27

Yonge’s claims raise some important questions about the nature of the John Browne’s position. Royal patronage was an essential part of the seventeenth century English system, and Charles II practiced it as much as any other rulers, so it was not unusual for Browne to have received his position through personal connections and patronage, though it does perhaps explain his loyalty to the crown.28 However, Yonge’s claim that the surgeon-in-ordinary was a useless and unimportant position, an honorary title that came with no duties or responsibilities to the crown is more noteworthy. The documentary evidence, or lack thereof, clearly indicates that the surgeons-in-ordinary were not an integral part of the royal household, and in Edward Chamberlayne’s seminal and influential book the *Present State of England*, which provides the basis for most of our modern information on the makeup of the royal court, only the three first surgeons appointed by royal warrant are listed. John Browne, of course, is not mentioned.29

Clearly Browne was not an officially warranted officer, and was not an essential part of the royal household. That does not mean, however, that he never served at court or at the healing rite. As we shall soon see, Browne was appointed to St. Thomas’s Hospital by royal recommendation, and his later entreaties to the Privy Council regarding his tenure reveal that he had some connections at court, and Browne was almost certainly a surgeon-in-ordinary to Charles.30 Additionally, the ceremony of the healing was a long and protracted affair, and was frequently delegated to the surgeons-in-ordinary, and so it is plausible that Browne would have

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been called to help minister to the rite by the more important first surgeons.\textsuperscript{31} Whatever the exact nature of his official duties and relationship to the crown, Browne did serve as a surgeon to King Charles II in some capacity, distant though it might have been.

However he achieved his position, when Browne arrived in London, he sought to make even more of a name for himself through writing and publishing, and he released his first two books in quick succession. \textit{A Compleat Treatise of Preternatural Tumors} and \textit{A Compleat Discourse of Wounds}, both published in 1678, are standard surgical texts. The first treatise is dedicated to Browne’s uncle, the surgeon William Cropp, betraying Browne’s desire to advertise his medical and social lineage, while the second is dedicated to Charles II, revealing Browne’s wish to curry favor with the monarchy and his own royalist sympathies. However, neither publication was an original work. Both books were compilations of earlier treatises on surgery and disease. Browne simply served as an editor, assembling the works of others, though he fully acknowledged his role as a compiler. While the two books do give useful portraits of seventeenth century surgical procedure, by the time they were published, many of the operations had become outdated.\textsuperscript{32} Yonge, of course, relished in demolishing Browne’s pretensions, and described the works “as twice sodden Cabbage, nothing new, nothing his own”, and Browne as being so incompetent that he even failed to take “the best to be had among the Authors from whom he filcht.”\textsuperscript{33}

His most famous work, however, was to be published in 1681. The \textit{Compleat Treatise of Muscles}, an anatomical work on the musculature of the body that was fully illustrated with numerous detailed plates, proved to be extremely popular, and went through ten editions in

\textsuperscript{31} Keay, \textit{The Magnificent Monarch}, 113.
\textsuperscript{32} Russell, “John Browne,” 397.
\textsuperscript{33} Yonge, \textit{Medicaster Medicatus}, unpaginated.
multiple languages, including Latin and German.\textsuperscript{34} Browne, unlike his two earlier works, claimed to have written most of the treatise himself, and its popularity brought him great prestige and fame. It also inspired controversy, and Yonge’s attack on Browne a few years later. The second edition of the \textit{Compleat Treatise of Muscles} was published in 1683, and Yonge’s \textit{Medicaster Medicatus} was published shortly after. While Yonge criticized all of Browne’s work in his polemic, his longest and most forceful criticism was reserved for Browne’s book on the muscles. Yonge charged Browne with flagrantly plagiarizing his entire work from William Molins’ \textit{Muskotomia}, published in 1648, and copying the anatomical plates from the \textit{Tabula Anatomicae} of Julius Casserius. Despite the popularity of the \textit{Compleat Treatise on Muscles}, Yonge’s allegations were largely true. By far the bulk of Browne’s text was lifted straight from Molins’ \textit{Muskotomia}, and only minor grammatical changes were used to try and disguise it. The plates, as well, were replicas of Casserius’s work, with contemporary dress and wigs occasionally placed on the figures in an effort to modernize them.\textsuperscript{35} Yonge published his attack in 1685, and Browne never mustered a response to it. However, he heavily altered the subsequent additions of the text, and added in various letters and discourses by other authors, like Charles Scarborough’s \textit{Syllabus Musculorum}, which he was careful to credit in these new versions. While Browne never publicly admitted that he took the work of Molins or Casserius, he was obviously aware of the accusations, and his silent changes confirm the truth of Yonge’s claims.\textsuperscript{36}

It is indisputable that Browne plagiarized his \textit{Compleat Treatise on Muscles}, and yet it remained an extremely popular work, going through ten editions well into the eighteenth century. We simply cannot know the reasons for Browne’s plagiary, and the popularity of the book must

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\textsuperscript{34} Russell, “John Browne,” 510.
\textsuperscript{35} Russell, “John Browne,” 512.
\textsuperscript{36} Russell, “John Browne,” 510-512.
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remain a mystery. Perhaps Yonge’s treatise did not gain enough readers, though this seems odd given his latter polemic against William Salmon was so effective it won him an extra-licentiate from the College of Physicians. Perhaps Browne’s royal connections protected him from complete disgrace. It is also possible that Molins’ work was too obscure and unknown for society to recognize or care about the plagiary. However, Browne provided his own indirect defense of his actions in the preface to *Adenochoiradelogia*. He lamented that writers had to endure critics who sought only to attack the “Industrious Hand”, men who “build their wit upon contradiction”, “Ignorant Bugbear” who produced nothing themselves. Clearly, Browne could not abide the critics. He rose to defend himself from claims of plagiarism:

> And because I know there are some sort of Men may think that I live better upon Transcription than upon producing new Matter; yet in this I hope the Crime is not very great, so long as the Reader hath it brought home clean. Others I full well know there are, who will readily suppose that I have borrowed a part of my Treatise from others; yet since I had it from the common Stock, and have distributed the same for the advance of publick good, I would willingly know where lies the Injury.37

Browne’s defense raises a number of important issues. First, he does not deny that he has taken from other authors. Modern ideas of authorship and copyright had not been formulated yet, and the reproduction and printing of previous works was often not seen as stealing, but as a public service, particularly in the case of medical works, where the goal was to educate and disseminate useful information. Browne believed that republishing such works was for the “publick good”, and was defiant in the face of claims that he was a common thief. This differing conception of ownership and the public sphere must be kept in mind, and was probably the main reason that there was no major backlash towards Browne and his book.

However, *Adenochoiradelogia* was written in 1684, a year before Yonge published his polemic. Clearly then, Browne’s plagiarism was widely enough known even before Yonge’s

attack that he felt compelled to respond to it in print, however briefly. Browne’s medical competence had also apparently been called into ill repute, for he claimed his “skill for some late years past, hath been questioned… and my Judgment thereof hath met with many uncivil rubb by some of our Profession (although I cann’t say many).”38 Browne was obviously a figure of some controversy in the medical world even before Yonge penned his polemic. Whatever the cause of Browne’s notoriety, however, these accusations appear not to have caused major harm, as his career as a surgeon continued undiminished, if not untroubled, throughout the seventeenth century, though his application to become an assistant of the Barber-Surgeons Company was rejected, and he was later forced to apologize before the Company for some offense he gave, though the details of the incident are now lost to history.39

In 1680, as King Charles II attempted to diminish the influence of the Whig faction in politics and consolidate the monarch’s power during the Exclusion Crisis, the crown began initiating quo warranto proceedings against the corporations of England. Quo warranto, literally ‘by what warrant’, was a legal procedure in which the crown demanded proof that a city or corporation legally existed or exercised its power. The crown used the proceedings to prove that the charters given to various cities and organizations were invalid in some way, in which case the organizations would revert to monarchical control. Many Tories, seeking to oust their political rivals, supported and actively initiated these purges in the 1680s, and they were a major factor in containing the Whig challenge to the crown.40 Over the course of 1682-3, Charles’ legal officers used the quo warranto proceedings to revoke the charters of numerous corporations, allowing the

38 Browne, Adenochoiradologia, Book III Preface.
crown to reshape the structures of key local institutions.\textsuperscript{41} It was in 1681 that Charles II began the quo warranto proceedings against the City of London, forcing the Mayor and Aldermen to forfeit the city’s charter on the grounds that they had incited the people to hatred of the king and the king’s government and had collected illegal market tolls. It was through these royal manipulations that John Browne embarked upon the next stage of his career, as one of the surgeons at St. Thomas’s Hospital.

By 1683, the quo warranto proceedings had reached the hospital, and the royal commission appointed to inspect St. Thomas’ removed numerous officers from their positions, including the president, treasurer, a number of governors, one physician, and two surgeons. While we do not know the exact cause of their removal, most casualties of the quo warranto proceedings were victims of either political or personal vendettas, with Whigs being especially vulnerable to dismissal. The Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London were obviously vexed by the intrusion, as they traditionally had the rights to administer the hospital.\textsuperscript{42} However, under the reactionary political climate of the 1680’s, it was clear to the governors that anyone with royal backing would have to be appointed. It was under these conditions that John Browne, a letter from Charles II in hand, applied for the post of surgeon on the death of William Pierce. Though he came with a royal recommendation, the governors had previously promised the position to another surgeon, Edward Rice. Rice had been one of the only medical practitioners to stay at St. Thomas’s during the outbreak of the plague in 1665, and had risked his life running the hospital and ministering to the patients. Because of his extraordinary service “the Court recommended him to be specially considered for a Chirurgeons place on the next vacancy.”\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41} Harris, \textit{Restoration}, 297.
\textsuperscript{42} Russell, “John Browne,” 400.
\textsuperscript{43} Russell, “John Browne,” 401.
However, Browne’s royal backing forced the governors to appoint him in Rice’s place. In response, the governors’ created a supernumerary surgeon position (the hospital normally had three chief surgeons) for Rice, who would be employed at half the normal rate of the regular surgeons. The conflict that surrounded Browne’s appointment to the hospital would set the tone for the rest of his career.

The royal recommendation forever changed Browne’s life, and is essential in understanding his attitudes and career. Charles’ recommendation proves that Browne had at least some connection or position at the royal court, and was also presumably known to be politically sound—a Tory, or at the least, not a Whig. More importantly, the origin of *Adenochoiradelogia* probably rested in the royal support that led him to St. Thomas’. As a recipient of Charles’ largesse, Browne must have felt a duty to support the crown, as the archetypal patron client relationship required. His study and defense of the royal gift of healing, published less than a year after his appointment to the hospital, was dedicated to Charles II and a whole host of the royal household, including the “Gentleman of his Majesties Bed-Chamber” and “Lord Steward of his Majesties Household.” A clear attempt to glorify Charles II and sacred monarchy, the book fit in perfectly with the court’s propaganda efforts in the early 1680s.\(^4^\) The motivation for writing it, then, probably lay in that fateful royal letter.

While Charles’ royal recommendation gained John Browne admittance onto the staff of the hospital, it did not ensure a stable working situation. Browne, along with the two other royally appointed surgeons, appears to have been in near “constant strife” with the governors of the hospital.\(^5^\) The minutes of the governors provide ample evidence, and Browne’s willfulness and stubbornness stand out in the records. Arguments and disagreements appear to have been the

\(^{4}\) Browne, *Adenochoiradelogia*, Dedication.

\(^{5}\) Russell, “John Browne,” 402.
norm during his tenure. The chief conflict stemmed from Browne’s reluctance to follow the governors’ orders. He argued that, since he was royally appointed, he was beholden to the crown, not the governors, though whether he really believed that, or simply used the reasoning as an excuse to follow his own prerogative, we do not know. Unfortunately, little is known about Browne’s surgical work at the hospital, although he did provide the first written description of cirrhosis of the liver in 1685, which he sent to the Royal Society and which was subsequently published in the *Philosophical Transactions*. It is significant that Browne sent his findings to the Royal Society, not the College of Physicians, more evidence, perhaps, that Browne was sympathetic to the ‘new science’ and opposed to the dogmatism and monopoly of the physicians.

While most of Browne’s time was probably taken up at St. Thomas’ Hospital, surgeons were allowed to work freely outside of it, and frequently did. It was on one of these outside cases that Browne’s competency was again brought into question when in February 1687 a widow named Susanna Levine charged him with malpractice. The case went to the Mayor’s Court, and the surviving court interrogatories, the seventeenth century form of depositions, provide our chief evidence on the litigation. The case provides some interesting hints about John Browne’s life and character. In February 1684, a coach driven by one William Snow ran down Susanna Levine, fracturing her tibia and fibula. Browne was called to her home the next day, and he promised to heal her leg. However, Levine claimed that Browne only looked after her “indifferently well” for a few days, and thereafter sent his apprentice to care for her, who likewise neglected the widow. When Browne found out about his apprentices behavior, he

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reportedly admonished the young man, yelling that he was “not fit to look after a dog’s leg.”49 However, while Browne again promised to cure Levine’s injury and applied further plasters to the leg, Levine claimed that his care was negligent and that he did not provide any medicines or cordials. Levine reportedly called on her neighbors to induce Browne to come and continue the treatment, but they were apparently unsuccessful.

Browne got into a further dispute with Levine when she refused to pay for his treatment. However, a private arrangement was reached in July 1686, where the coach driver, William Snow, who Levine had also sued, agreed to pay 20 guineas to Browne out of the money he owed the widow while Browne promised to complete Levine’s treatment. However, he again failed to heal Levine to her satisfaction, and so she brought him to court in 1687. Browne called upon his fellow surgeons at St. Thomas’ and his new apprentice (having gotten rid of the old one) to testify on his behalf before the court.50 Unfortunately, we do not know the ultimate outcome of the case. It is easy to assume from the incident that Browne was a poor surgeon, and Thomas R. Forbes, the author of the sole essay on the trial, concluded, “there can be no doubt of Browne’s malpractice.”51 However it is dangerous to draw such firm conclusions from the little evidence we possess. Additionally, medicine was an imprecise and often ineffective art in the seventeenth century, and Levine’s continuing pain should not be laid solely on Browne’s shoulders.52 While the case certainly is suggestive, it is not definitive, and one incident of neglect should not stand representative of an entire surgical career.

As we have seen, John Browne’s tenure at St. Thomas’ Hospital was troubled from the start, and his frequent conflicts with the governors put him in a precarious position. After the

Glorious Revolution of 1688, parliament, freed from James II’s absolutist ambitions, quickly overturned the *quo warranto* judgments against London. It was the beginning of the end for Browne, for the Mayor and Court of Aldermen quickly set about reversing the *quo warranto* appointments at the hospital. The old president was reappointed, as were various governors and physicians.\(^{53}\) Within two years the former governors of the hospital moved against the royal appointees. In May of 1689, the governors met to discuss the current surgeons at the hospital. In the court minutes, the governors accused the surgeons of neglect of their patients and breach of duty, the cause of which they “humbly conceive … has been occasioned by the method which they came into their places, every one of them having been chosen or placed either with regard to Recommendatory Letters or by Mandamus.”\(^{54}\) The governors’ efforts to dispose of Browne are clear, and on October 24 1689, Browne was suspended for operating on a patient without the consent and supervision of one of the hospital’s physicians (in another indication of Browne’s resistance towards physicians’ attempts to control surgical practice). We unfortunately do not know the fate of the patient, but Browne remained suspended for a month, until he finally came before the governors and begged for forgiveness.\(^{55}\) However, by July 1691 the court finally decided to remove the royal appointees, and met to appoint new surgeons. Browne applied for the post again, as did the other royal appointees, but all were rejected.

Browne and the other royal surgeons immediately sought redress and appealed to the Privy Council. The Privy Council decided to investigate the matter, and raised a royal commission to immediately visit the hospital. However, the Privy Council quickly recalled the commission, perhaps due to behind-the-scenes pressure from the Court of Aldermen, and

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collected written testimony instead. The case was then remitted to the Lord Chief Justice, who ruled in favor of the hospital.\(^5^6\) In response, Browne composed his own personal petition to the Court of Aldermen, which was discussed before the group in December 1691. However, the governors of the hospital were still vehemently opposed to Browne, and when they heard of his actions, they marshaled the full extent of their legal power and sent a subcommittee to the Aldermen to defend Browne’s dismissal. Browne, probably despairing at the force brought against him, had the case deferred, and appealed instead to the Lord Commissioners of the Great Seal. The governors learned of Browne’s actions, however, and again sent a subcommittee to justify their decisions. While the result of the petition has been lost, the Commissioners obviously decided against Browne.

The Governors of St. Thomas’ were fervently opposed to John Browne, and were willing to spend large amounts of time and money to ensure he was not reinstated at the hospital.\(^5^7\) Browne, however, had not given up on regaining his position at St. Thomas’ Hospital yet. On the death of one of newly appointed surgeons, a Mr. Smith, in 1692, Browne again applied for the post. He was, again, passed over- in this case, in favor of one of the other royalist surgeons that had been appointed by \textit{quo warranto} and earlier dismissed. Clearly, then, Browne’s troubled relationship with the governor’s of the hospital was not solely the result of his royal appointment. Six years later, in 1698, Browne again sought a post at the hospital and applied to be made a supernumerary surgeon, the same position that he had forced Edward Rice, the hero of the plague, into almost fifteen years ago. However, the governors curtly refused his petition, and Browne at last gave up on returning to St. Thomas’ Hospital.\(^5^8\)

\(^{5^7}\) Russell, “John Browne,” 411.
\(^{5^8}\) Russell, “John Browne,” 412.
After his stormy tenure at St. Thomas’, Browne continued to work as a surgeon, but he slowly faded from prominence. There is evidence to suggest that he delivered lectures on muscular anatomy at the Barber-Surgeons’ Hall, for after 1697 he signed himself as ‘Master of Anatomy’, and the later editions of his Compleat Treatise of the Muscles refer to muscular lectures he made before the Barber-Surgeons Company. There also exists a syllabus of muscular lectures at the Surgeons’ Hall given by a ‘Dr. Brown’, who very well could have been John Browne. However, there is no concrete evidence that Browne did give the lectures, and it is possible that he assumed the title on his own initiative. Some later claimed Browne was present at the autopsy of William III, but there exist no first hand accounts that prove he did. Browne published his final book, Somatopolita, in 1702. In a notable deviation from Browne’s earlier propensity to dedicate his books to royalty, he inscribed Somatopolita to a Captain John Potter, evidence, perhaps, that Browne’s previous royalist tributes had been motivated more by the promise of patronage and career advancement that genuine Tory beliefs. There are no extant records of Browne’s death, unfortunately, but he probably died in late 1702, for when the second edition of Somatopolita was published in 1703, the dates were uncorrected, an oversight that Browne had never made in his previous works. 59

So what are we to make of John Browne? Was he a fraud, a plagiarist, and a poor surgeon, who only got by through luck and patronage, as James Yonge believed? Or was he unfairly maligned, a good surgeon and author who simply wanted to practice his trade in peace? And what does his life reveal about the composition of Adenochoiradelogia? While the evidence is incomplete at best, and what evidence we have is colored by partisanship, the reality seems to lie between the two extremes. John Browne was born into relatively humble conditions, the son

of a tailor in Norwich. However, with the help of family connections and royal patronage, he managed to become a surgeon, and achieved a prominent medical career. While most of Yonge’s criticisms are true, they should not be taken as disqualifying. Browne did plagiarize earlier works, and very little of his writing appears to be completely original, but it was not an uncommon practice in the seventeenth century. Browne apparently believed, or at least argued, that his reproduction of earlier works was a public good, not a blatant attempt at plagiarism. Though for a modern, such actions may seem inexcusable, they were not necessarily an indication that Browne was immoral, or according to some contemporary claims, a dishonest and incompetent person.

However, we unfortunately know little about Browne’s medical competency. While he was brought to court for malpractice, he also gave the first recorded description of cirrhosis of the liver. Although James Yonge claimed that Browne’s position as surgeon-in-ordinary was a useless and meaningless adornment, the evidence suggests that Browne did indeed have connections and favor at Charles II’s court, and did participate in the ceremony of the royal touch in some regard. It is difficult to believe that a truly incompetent surgeon would have been able to remain in royal favor for so long, or would have been chosen by the court to serve at St. Thomas’s Hospital. While Browne was not an entirely forthright or honest man, he was probably no worse than many of his contemporaries. His unfortunate reputation resulted largely from the attacks of his enemies. The governors of St. Thomas’s were hostile to him from the start, either because of his contentious personality or because he represented monarchical control over their affairs, we cannot definitively say. Both, however, probably played a role in his troubled career.

Browne’s great nemesis, James Yonge, was the only person to leave a full account of Browne’s life, and so inevitably his attacks, whatever their accuracy, colored Browne’s
reputation throughout history. It is impossible at this distance to determine the true cause of the animosity between the surgeons. The evidence is simply too scant. However, some evidence may be found in Yonge’s own career. James Yonge was by all accounts an excellent surgeon for his time, and a prominent citizen. He was a naval surgeon who was captured for a year by the Dutch in 1666. He later became head of the naval hospital in his hometown of Plymouth, and deputy surgeon-general to the navy. His publications include the first account of flap amputations, a treatise on head wounds, and polemical attacks on Browne and William Salmon. Yonge was also a staunch Tory, and so had no discernible political motivation to attack a royal appointee so harshly.

The cause of the dispute between the two surgeons may have lain in the conflict between the conservative Royal College of Physicians and the new chemical science and medicine of the day. Yonge’s scathing attack on the empiric William Salmon, a great critic and opponent of the Royal College of Physicians, won Yonge an extra-licentiate from the College in 1699. His only other polemic among his four published works was his attack on John Browne. Browne, as we shall see in Adenochoiradelogia, had to a large extent embraced the new science and chemical medicine of the day. Stubborn and obviously hostile to interference in his work, Browne was probably opposed to the College and its monopoly, and shared in the desire to make surgery the equal of physic. It is possible, then, that Yonge’s attack was motivated by Browne’s hostility to the College, and throughout Medicaster Medicatus, Yonge was quick to criticize Browne’s chemical theories. Having said that, however, Browne’s writings cannot be taken as

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62 Cook, Old Medical Regime, 150-3, 192-5.
wholehearted attacks on the College of Physicians or on academic learning, and we simply know
too little about his life to make any definite conclusions about the cause of his conflict with
Yonge. We are left only with conjecture.

Browne’s own political leanings are not quite as mysterious, however. His position at
court, his royal favor, and his frequent dedications to the aristocracy paint him as a Tory, or, at
the very least, a royalist sympathizer. His writings, with their frequent royal dedications and
flattery of monarchical government, reveal a clear strain of royalist thought, though only one of
his works, *Adenochoiradelogia*, is overtly political in nature. While it is impossible to assess his
true political ideology with the available information, it is safe to assume that Browne, though
not fervently partisan, supported the monarchy and its rule. Whether out of sincere belief, or
because it was the best avenue for the advancement of his career, we cannot say. However,
*Adenochoiradelogia* is clearly a royalist tract, and its publication at the height of the Tory
Reaction, when the monarchy and its Tory sympathizers sought to contain the Whig challenge to
their authority, undoubtedly served the interests of the court. And while a *Compleat Treatise of
the Muscles* is an obvious plagiary, *Adenochoiradelogia*, or at least much of it, appears to be
Browne’s own work. As a medical treatise, it reveals a great deal about the nature of late
seventeenth century surgical practice and medicine. As a political tract, it is a valuable account
of ‘official’ attitudes towards royal healing, and of the common objections to the rite that
defenders had to contend with. However, what the treatise tells us is as important as what it does
not tell us, and by situating it in the general milieu of thought on monarchy, religion, and politics
in Restoration England, we can arrive at a much more complete picture of the touch during
Charles II’s reign.

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64 Harris, *Restoration*, 212-215.
Adenochoiradelogia

Adenochoiradelogia, or, An anatomick-chirurgical treatise of glandules & strumaes or, Kings-evil-swellings: together with the royal gift of healing, or cure thereof by contact or imposition of hands, performed for above 640 years by our Kings of England continued with their admirable effects, and miraculous events, and concluded with many wonderful examples of cures by their sacred touch/ all which are succinctly described by John Browne, One of His Majesties Chirurgeons in Ordinary, and Chirurgeon of His Majesties Hospital.

Thus John Browne began his discourse on the king’s evil. As was the custom in the seventeenth century, book titles left little to the imagination, and Browne clearly did not deviate from the norm in his own work. The book was published in 1684 by Thomas Newcomb, heir to the Newcomb publishing house and principal printer for the king, another important indicator of the royal approval with which Browne wrote his work. The detailed title does an admirable job of summarizing its contents, though the emphasis on the king’s touch is somewhat misleading, as the majority of the book is a medical discourse on glands and strumaes. Adenochoiradelogia is roughly divided into four parts, a brief preface, which serves as a sort of medical glossary, and three separate books. The first book concerns the basic anatomy of the glandules, the second the particular disease processes that lead to strumaes, and the last the royal touch itself, its history, ceremonies, and efficacy.

Adenochoiradelogia’s medical sections are in the tradition of the learned surgical treatise, a form stretching back to the Middle Ages in England, and based on the earliest Greek, Roman, and Arabic medical texts. In its most traditional form, surgical tracts were supposed to simply lay

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65 I. Gadd, ‘Newcombe, Thomas, the elder (1625x7–1681)’, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008
out normative mechanical operations to fix various ills. However, as we have seen, surgeons had appropriated the elite theories of the physicians, and this knowledge was represented in their texts. Beginning with discourses on anatomy, surgeons had begun expounding on the internal world of the body. By the mid seventeenth century, surgical tracts routinely included theoretical studies of the nature of disease, and frequently prescribed internal medicines, purges, bloodletting, and diets, the traditional province of the physicians. Browne’s book, with its detailed studies of the anatomy of the body and the causes of strumatical disease, clearly reflects the desire to create a ‘complete’ medical practitioner guided “by the two Assistants of Reason and Experience.”

Browne’s audience provides further evidence of the integration of surgery and physic at the close of the seventeenth century. As a surgical work on the anatomy of glandules and the curing of scrofula, the book is clearly directed towards surgeons, but Browne included in his readership “Every Physician and Chirurgeon, [who] according to the Rules of Art, ought diligently and prudently to contemplate on the Prognostick Signs of a Disease.” Despite the continued efforts by the some physicians to monopolize medical practice, there was obviously a great deal of shared medical knowledge between the two groups, and efforts to unify medicine were not wholly unsuccessful. Physicians frequently lectured at the Barber-Surgeons Hall, and the College of Physicians began, slowly, accepting surgeons through Honorary Fellowships and Extra-Licentiates.

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66 Wear, English Medicine, 219-220.
67 Wear, English Medicine, 226-8; Cook, Old Medical Regime, 141-2.
68 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, 93.
69 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, 86.
70 Wear, English Medicine, 232; Cook, Old Medical Regime, 152.
However, Browne did not write only for elite medical practitioners. There was an expectation that the literate public would read medical works in an effort to self diagnose and heal their ailments. The extensive indexes and glossaries that accompanied these works were designed to make them appealing to laymen, who could easily look up the various diseases and their cures.⁷¹ The sheer number of medical books on the market indicates their popularity with the common person as well as the medical profession, not surprising in a time when illness was ever present, and effective medical care was rare. However, Browne, perhaps spurred by his subject matter, addressed *Adenochoiradelogia* to an even broader audience, the very poor. Often the diseased commoners who came to the king for a touch were not infected with scrofula, and so Browne had “undertaken to unmask the same in the Order, and give it that Light, that the Meanest Capacity may become a good Judge thereof.”⁷² Browne saw his work as a practical manual to “prevent all tiresome Journeys, and tedious Travels of many indigent and sick people” by allowing them to diagnose their illness and confirm that they actually suffered from the king’s evil, and to guide them through the process of actually receiving the royal touch.⁷³

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Browne wrote *Adenochoiradelogia* for Charles II and the royal court. However, the propagandistic nature of the last section of the book on the royal touch itself has long been the subject of controversy. Browne’s brief preface in the form of a letter to the reader helps illuminate the genesis and political purpose of *Adenochoiradelogia*. Browne first apologized for appearing “so suddenly again in Print”, having published two other books less than three years previously. Browne assured the reader that he did not write the book out of “vainglory”; neither was he forced to by the “demand of such Nobility as were able to give

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Life to its intended design”, but rather from a desire for “universal conversation.”\(^{74}\) Browne’s insistence that he was not compelled to write the book by the nobility is an obvious attempt to preemptively counter charges that his work was simply Tory propaganda. However, his claim belies his connections to the court; and the publication of the book by the royal printer Thomas Newcomb directly after the royal recommendation that lead to his appointment at St. Thomas’s Hospital was probably no mere coincidence. While it is possible that Browne wrote the work on his own initiative, the royal court made frequent use of printed propaganda in the 1680’s in an attempt to win public support after the Exclusion Crisis and the challenge of the Whigs.

Adenochoiradelogia, with its depiction of Charles as a semi-divine healing monarch, would have greatly appealed to the propagandists at court.\(^{75}\) Whatever Browne’s true motivations, it is clear the politicization of society was already underway, and it affected everything, including the royal touch.

In any case, the book served the interests of the monarchy, and through Browne’s defense of the royal touch, he championed Charles II, his government, and divinely sanctioned monarchy itself. Browne’s professed goal was to remove the veil that had been “kept over our Nations” so that “all the World may admire our English Isle, and have the most Venerable and Sacred Thoughts of her Mighty Monarchs.” He thought of the work as a celebration of monarchy itself, and hoped his readers would come to “detest Anarchy, and… acknowledge thy own happy Nation and present Government, where our present Bliss, and English Interests are safely wrapt up in the safety of our Prince.”\(^{76}\)

\(^{74}\) Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Book III Preface.
\(^{75}\) Harris, Restoration, 216-220.
\(^{76}\) Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Book III Preface.
Medical Understanding

*Adenochoiradologia* is primarily a medical treatise. Over two-thirds of the book is concerned with the workings of the body, the anatomy of the glandules, the causes of scrofula and the methods that were used to cure it. Browne’s understanding of the body exposes the intellectual disputes that had seized the medical world in the seventeenth century. The traditional Galenic understanding of the body, based on the humoral theory of physiology, was being actively challenged. The reliance on the ancient medical texts of the Greeks and Arabs was declining, and the stranglehold of the physician as a philosopher and theoretician, who uncovered the internal workings of the body through reason and fit them within the framework of the past, was beginning to fray.  

The ‘new science’ of the royal society, with its emphasis on experimentation and practical knowledge became increasingly accepted among the elite of society. Chemical and corpuscular theories of the body, which had their origin in the works of Paracelsus and Van Helmont, were gaining supporters among both laymen and medical practitioners. Together these philosophies reinforced each other and began to pose a serious threat to the College’s preeminence. For the average practitioner, however, the divide was not so stark, and ancient Galenic and humoral theories were freely incorporated into chemical medicine and a corpuscular universe to create new modes of understanding the body. Browne reflected this uneasy integration throughout *Adenochoiradologia*, presenting a semi-humoral and semi-chemical view of the body and of illness.

Browne began his work, after the customary dedication to Charles II and various other members of the royal court, with ‘An Introdutional Preface to the Studious Reader’. In another

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77 Cook, *Old Medical Regime*, 142-3.
indication that Browne expected his book to be used by laymen, the preface gives a brief primer on his views of the body and its basic functions, and a glossary of various medical terms. Browne’s ideas on the body are rather vague, and he was clearly influenced by both traditional Galenic humoralism and the new chemical theories of medicine. He began with a brief philosophical digression on the nature of the human body. Though the “Industry of the Bee” and the “labour of the Silkworm” were wondrous, to Browne, they paled in comparison to the “Fabrick of Man…made by the Almighty as the Image of his Maker, and the Prince of all Animals.” Religion was embedded in the fabric of seventeenth century society, and, like the Virtuosi who studied the workings of the universe to uncover God’s plan, medical practitioners studied the body to understand God’s creation, and believed the power of man to cure illness was a symbol of God’s beneficence and an act of Christian charity. Browne’s philosophical and religious designs further indicate that he viewed himself not as a simple tradesmen, who only knew how to treat mechanical ills with no knowledge of the causes of things, but as learned medical practitioner, who studied both theory and practice, and who could discourse at length on both. He may have been a surgeon, but he sought to portray himself as educated and as learned as any physician.

The rest of the preface provides further evidence of Browne’s theoretical pretensions, attempting to detail the nature of the human body and its various functions. Browne first divided the body, and the causes of life, into four parts. Mankind was the product of the interplay of an “innate Heat”, “Spiritual parts”, “Solid parts” and “Moist parts”, each aspect corresponding to one of the Aristotelian elements of fire, air, earth, and water, respectively. These four aspects of

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78 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Preface.
79 Wear, English Medicine, 30-33.
80 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Preface.
the body are clearly based on the ancient Greek conceptions of the elements of nature, with the microcosm of the body reflecting the macrocosm of the universe. However, Browne did not conceive of these as physical elements like the four Galenic humors. His conception is much more ambiguous than that, and hints at his chemical leanings. The innate heat he compared to the “engine” of the body, the cause of “natural Motion and Life”. In the solid parts rested the “Basis of the four Elements”, probably Browne’s conception of traditional humoral medicine, which he wrote were formed from the natural coldness of the solid parts, the “Primum Frigidum.” Heat and cold were the two central causes of life, “Natures right and left Hands, under whose commands are Life and Death, Generation and Corruption.”

Browne’s abstract and vague conception of the four “causes” of life was a clear attempt to demonstrate his own learning and theoretical knowledge. Though to the modern reader, they seem hopelessly muddled, the medical world of the seventeenth century had not been standardized, and the conception of the body for many people was similarly abstract and undefined. Yonge, however, recognized the confusion in Browne’s work and his incorporation of chemical theories, and relished in attacking Browne’s ambiguity, writing, “He prefaceth this learned treatise, with a pile of hard words, and abstruse notions, stoln partly from Helmont, Sylvius, &c., but mostly from the Chymiasters of the age, and so confusedly jargon’d, as if his brains had no more Symetrie, than the unlickt Cub of a Bear.” Yonge’s criticism of the ideas of Helmont and Sylvius, two of the most well-known founders of chemical medicine, provide further evidence that Yonge was inspired in his polemic by Browne’s chemical sympathies. Yonge’s also referenced Thomas Wharton, a staunch Aristotelian and opponent of mechanistic

81 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Preface.
82 Yonge, Medicaster Medicatus, unpaginated.
theory, as an accurate anatomist, more proof of his ideological support for the ancient learning of the physicians.\textsuperscript{83}

After the brief discourse on the fundamental nature of the human body, Browne set out to explain the various physical processes that drove its functioning. These processes accounted for changes within the body and the abundance of ‘juices’ and ‘liquids’ and their various states. The language of cooking figured prominently in medical writing, and Browne regarded ‘fermentation’ as one of the principal functions of life. Fermentation helped digest foods and spread nutrients throughout the body. However, Browne’s conception of fermentation, which he believed resulted “out of Sulphure and Salt,” was largely chemical in nature.\textsuperscript{84} Sulfur and salt were the two principal chemical elements in Paracelsian theory, and Browne argued they were essential to the body’s function throughout \textit{Adenochoiradologia}.\textsuperscript{85} Browne also embraced chemical experimentation, and recorded that mixing “an acid Spirit upon Vulgar Sulphur dissolv’d in Lixivium… [casued] its Red colour turn’d White” an experiment “evidently made good in Chymistry.”\textsuperscript{86} Corpuscular theories were also important to Browne, and he frequently mentioned the “saline Corpuscles” and the “hot and fermented Particles …that do arise out of Sulphur and Salt.”\textsuperscript{87}

Browne’s conception of the liquids of the body also diverged from traditional humoral theory. In Browne’s view, the body was filled with a large and diverse number of ‘juices’. This variety of “Fermentative Menstruums, Salts, and separating Juices”, which included “Acids,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{84} Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradologia}, Preface.
\textsuperscript{86} Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradologia}, Preface.
\textsuperscript{87} Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradologia}, Book I 152.
\end{footnotesize}
Subacids, Salines, and Acreds” performed a variety of functions within the body. Again, Browne used the language of food to describe the juices, and classified them by their taste as either sweet, bitter, unctuous, or acrid.” The liquids of the body also consisted of “essential balsamick liquors”, and included “Chyle, Blood, Animal Spirits, Nervous Juice, Lymphoma, Salival Flegm, Choler, [and] Pancreatick Juice.” Traditional humors like phlegm and choler coexisted with such non-humoral elements as chyle, nervous juice and lymphoma. Browne believed the basic humors were made out of more elemental liquids, like bile, “Oyl and Fat being accounted the two chief ingredients” of the humor. However, he still clearly held some Galenic ideas about the body and disease. Browne continued to recommend traditional Galenic therapies, such as treating a disease with its opposite, and wrote that a “Concretion of Bodies [is] commonly solv’d by its contrary, thus Ice which was congealed by cold, is dissolv’d by heat.” On the whole, Browne had a rather confused conception of the body and its liquids, and he himself admitted that it was “no easie task exactly to explain all the innumerable qualities of the Humors in our Bodies.”

In the next section, Browne turned specifically to the anatomy of the glandules. In another indication of his ‘modern’ views on the body, he argued contemporary medicine had surpassed that of the ancients, and that “in our times we have seen both the spark and flame much invigorated, appearing more bright and clear, and freed from many thick obscurities which it enjoyed in its early days.” However, Browne borrowed freely from both ancient and modern sources, and consequently, his descriptions of the glandules are somewhat vague and contradictory. Yonge, of course, disparaged Browne as “so fickle in his Judgment, to be… of the

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88 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Preface.
89 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Preface.
90 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Book I 1.
opinion of the last Book he read,” an attack on Browne’s acceptance of the ‘new science’.\footnote{Yonge, \textit{Medicaster Medicatus}, unpaginated.} However, his conception of the glandules was largely Galenic in nature. Browne defined glandules as “so many Scavingers” that “suck up all the excrementitious humors, which might otherwise disorder the human Pile.” Hair was essential to the workings of the glandules, for hair served as “Beesomes, by which [the body] sweeps and wipes up all the excrements which she sends to these emunctuous parts.”\footnote{Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book I 4, 12.} These glandules became disordered and swollen when the normal passage of excrements and humors through the body became blocked or obstructed. The juices, prevented from their proper motion, would “both harden, concrete, incrassate, and convert the same into a coagulate caseous substance.” The main liquids susceptible to coagulation were “Cold and moist Matter” like “Flegm and Melancholy,” “Adust Choler” and “Subsaline and Subacid Juice, collated from the wheyish part of the blood.”\footnote{Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book II 13,31.} The coagulation itself could be attributed to a number of causes, such as an “inequality of Nutriment”, the patient’s “cold and moist” temperament, excessive sleep or a “sedentary life,” traditional Galenic theories on the causes of illness.\footnote{Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book II 43, 58, 65.} Browne’s understanding of glandules and the disease processes that led to scrofula clearly reveal a more Galenic and humoral understanding of the body than he had shown in his preface.

His recommendations for the treatment of strumaes also relied more on Galenic therapeutics than chemical remedies. Browne divided the cures for scrofula into three categories, “the Pharmaceutical, the Chyrurgical, and the Dietetical.” Browne cautioned against “all violent Purges” and most bleeding, but he did allow for “Benign and gentle Evacuations” if the constitution of the patient was strong, in which case “it may be allowed as useful and necessary
as any other Remedy whatsoever.”95 Eating a diet free from “vaprous and windy” foods and having air that is “clear and serene, dry and hot in temper” were further aids in curing the disease. He went on to prescribe a number of different purging potions and powders, largely based on plant and animal materials, like “Figs, Calves Dung, Honey and Lilies.”96 Browne’s acceptance of these various Galenic treatments indicates that he was not the wholehearted chemical physician Yonge may have viewed him as. Browne only spent a little time on surgical procedures for treating scrofula. He warned that manual operation should only be used when medicines have proved ineffective. “Caution and skill ought to joyn together in the Operation,” and the “greatest advice in the use of the Knife is to have a particular and special care to the Vessels bordering upon those parts.” The surgeon should only excise the swelling when it was shallowly placed, moveable, and not fixed to any veins, nerves or arteries.97 Browne’s free appropriation and recombination of both chemical and Galenic medicine is testimony to the blurring of medical knowledge and skill in the later seventeenth century.

Of course, these medical treatments were not always successful. Browne counseled all those whose king’s evil proved “so rebellious as not to yield, [that] there is no other hope left of Cure but by the Hands of our Sacred Majesty, whom God preserve, that he may live many years to exercise this Healing Faculty.”98 It is to this cure that Browne devoted the attention of the final section of his book.

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95 Browne, *Adenochoiradelogia*, Book II 90, 97, 103.
96 Browne, *Adenochoiradelogia*, Book II 118.
Browne titled the third part of his work “Charisma Basilicon”. The Greek word Basilicon meant ‘kingly’ or ‘royal’, while charisma was used as a descriptor to signify a gift given from God. Charisma Basilicon, then, can be understood as ‘Divine Royalty’; an appropriate title, as the royal touch was the essential ceremony of divine right kingship. Browne put aside his surgical expertise and became a historian and theologian in the final section of his book. His attempt to provide a complete account of the touch—its history, causes, and ceremonies—is the centerpiece of any study of the touch during Charles II’s reign. By placing the work within the broader context of the seventeenth century, we can reconstruct a fairly complete portrait of the rite itself, and the beliefs and arguments that informed it.

Browne opened “Charisma Basilicon” with another dedication to a member of the royal household, the Lord Bishop of Durham Nathaniel Crewe, and Clerk of the Closet to Charles II. The Clerk of the Closet acted as the king’s personal chaplain and head of the private gallery at the Chapel Royal. He also had the responsibility of running the healing ceremony, where he presided at the king’s right hand, holding the gold angels the king would present to the sick. Perhaps Crewe was the connection that helped Browne into royal favor and arranged for him to attend at the healing ceremony, although we cannot be certain; but in any case Browne’s dedication to a member of the royal household is further evidence of his desire to ingratiate himself with Charles’ court. Browne also used the dedication to promulgate many typical royalist beliefs on the monarchy, comparing the king and queen (somewhat ironically, as Catherine was a Catholic) to “the Living Stones of the Church… In whose right Hands are the Nerves and Sinews

of the Church and State.” The role of the king as the head of the church state is significant, as
the dual religious and political position of the monarch was central to justifications of the royal
touch, and the decline in such beliefs was central to its end.

“Charisma Basilicon” is divided into ten chapters, and each chapter details a specific
aspect of the royal touch, from its history to its ceremonial practice. Browne’s defense of the
touch rested mainly upon mainstream Anglican and royalist ideology, a far cry from his surgical
expertise. However, his religious arguments provide further testimony to the overwhelming
influence of religion on everyday life, and it was not as unusual as it might at first seem for a
medical man to defend the power of the royal touch on theological grounds. William Clowes,
royal surgeon to Queen Elizabeth, published his own work on the king’s evil in 1602. Though
primarily concerned with surgical remedies for scrofula, he acknowledged the “sacred hands” of
the Queen, who “by Divine inspiration and wonderfull worke and power of God” healed scrofula
beyond the power of medicine. Richard Wiseman, who was sergeant surgeon to Charles II,
and would have attended the king at all his healings, included a section on scrofula in his seminal
medical work *Eight chirurgical treatises*, published in 1696. While the section on scrofula was
primarily concerned with the medical diagnosis and treatment of the disease, he had no difficulty
in acknowledging the divine healing power of the king, which was beyond the skill of medicine,
and the last recourse for those suffering from the evil. Seventeenth century society remained
deeply religious, and it caused no dissonance to discuss the medical cures of scrofula and the
divine healing power of the king in the same sentence. Indeed, the religious justification was
appropriate, because at its heart the royal gift of healing was inspired by and based on religious

teachings. Christianity, from its beginnings, was a healing religion, and the miracles of Jesus and the Apostles were central to the Bible, and hence, to the Christian religion. 103

As David Lloyd had demonstrated in his attack on Greatrakes, mainstream Anglican theology accepted the miracles of the Bible as absolute truth, as they did the Bible as a whole. However, Lloyd and most Protestants, as well as rationalist thinkers like the Virtuosi, rejected present day miracles. Consequently, they were forced to defend biblical miracles while simultaneously denying the miracles of Catholics, dissenting sects, and men like Valentine Greatrakes. To do so, they constructed a theology in which the “age of miracles”, which had been used by God to convert the heathen masses, had ended with the establishment of the Church. This gave them the ability to defend the miraculous in the Bible, while attacking and denying the medieval and modern day miracles of the Catholics and dissenters. While Anglicans and rational Protestants were forced to walk a tightrope in simultaneously affirming biblical miracle and denying modern miracles, Browne was forced to walk in the opposite direction in his defense of the royal touch.

For Browne had the problematic task of reconciling rational Protestant theology, in which the age of miracles had passed, with a defense of the monarch’s apparently miraculous gift of healing. It was in fitting the royal touch into the rational theology of mainstream Protestantism that Browne devoted much of “Charisma Basilicon.” Browne first claimed that it was a “Truth as clear as the Sun… [that] the Divine Healing Faculty did arise from the first time of Christianity.” As was the general belief in the seventeenth century, the Bible was all the evidence that was needed to prove an argument, and Browne turned frequently to scriptural passages to demonstrate the prevalence of the healing gift among God’s chosen. Browne quoted Corinthians,

103 Wear, English Medicine, 30-33.
that the Holy Spirit gave “the gift of Healing” to God’s chosen, to prove that a healing faculty was indeed a biblical truth, and one of God’s gifts to man.\textsuperscript{104} The truth of the healing gift was evident in the figure of Jesus Christ, “The first and last, the best and greatest Recoverer of all Diseases.” However, Jesus was not the only one to perform miracles, and the healing feats of the other biblical figures were “evidence enough to convince the transmission of the Gift from our Saviour to his Apostles.”\textsuperscript{105} Browne continued by presenting a long list of historical examples to prove the healing gift had continued throughout Christian history, “although some Ages hath had it more frequently than others.”\textsuperscript{106} The “historical illustrations” of healing men, from St. Augustine to Gregory the Great to the ancient Roman legates stationed in Britain were proof that the gift of healing had continued from the time of Christ. Browne’s history of religious healing proved that “not only the great Apostles, but their Successors, have been sharers in their most excellent Endowments, as well as in their Natures and Constitutions.”\textsuperscript{107}

However, while defending the Biblical miracles, Browne still had to justify rational Protestant theology, in which the ‘age of miracles’ had passed, and the supposed feats of the Catholics and dissenters could be safely and easily denied. Browne admitted that, while he had shown “In former times… this Gift was bestowed on Pious and Religious Men… our succeeding Ages have much lessened in the number thereof.”\textsuperscript{108} Browne, using the Socratic question and answer method, known as ‘elenchus’, posed what must have been a common reservation for Protestants defending royal healing; “Wherefore are not those Miracles which have been performed by the Preachers and Pious Men of former times still continued?” However, the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[104] Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book III 2, 5.
\item[105] Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book III 7, 12.
\item[106] Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book III 28.
\item[107] Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book III 10.
\item[108] Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book III 57.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
answer was “ready and easie”, and rested upon the usual Protestant theology that Lloyd and the Virtuosi had used in their discussion of Gretrakes. Miracles had been performed frequently in the early days of the Church to convince the heathens of the truth of Christianity. Miracles were “necessary [so] the World should be taught Credence, that it might be brought into a state of Belief.”

The ‘age of miracles’ had existed

…in the Bloody times of the Church, when it laid under Persecution for near 300 years, all these Gifts or most of them continued in vigor, but when it once abated of its Flame and Troubles, it lost of its power and efficacy, and became more sparing in its appearance to mankind.

Miracles convinced pagan mankind of the truth of Christianity, and once the Church and its doctrine were established, miracles were no longer needed. Protestant theology had increasingly distanced itself from miraculous events in favor of the power of morality and scripture, a theology in which reason led men to Protestantism. Browne acknowledged the preeminence of the scripture over miracle, claiming that he would “not presume to appear so curious, as to look into the course of Gods thus confirming his Truth with such Seals and Miracles done in the Church; we ought rather to consult the Scriptures, which are the proper Fountains of Truth.”

The difficulty of incorporating miracle into the increasingly influential rational theology of the day is clear. Attempting to reconcile a theology that minimized the miraculous with the wonder working power of the king must have caused a deal of intellectual dissonance.

To reconcile the royal touch with Protestant theology, Browne and other defenders of the rite were forced to make an important and fundamental distinction between the current healing gift of the English monarchs, and the unquestioned miracles of the Bible. Namely, Browne had

109 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Book III 36.
110 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Book III 31-2.
112 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Book III 45.
to admit the royal touch was not a true miracle. While “this great Gift of his may well compare with a Miracle”, men should “not allow it the nature thereof.” The king’s healing touch was a ‘gift’, not a miracle, and it was referred to as the ‘gift of healing’ throughout the era, not the miracle of healing. While the royal touch did possess “miraculous Efficacy… there may be some inequality with it with Miracles, yet the Dignity thereof is to be admired, and the use and benefit thereof being not much unlike.” The healing gift, while not exactly a miracle, “ought not to come much beneath a Miracle.” The vague distinction between the royal touch and the miracles of the past was an obvious rationalization. Browne and the kings defenders sought to have their cake and eat it too, denying the present day miracles of the Catholics, while promoting their own wonder working king. Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, and one of the central figure of the Restoration government, proclaimed in his book Animadversions that Charles II had healed more than any other figure in history while at the same time attacking the “Fanaticism fanatically imputed to the Catholick Church.” Simultaneously denying contemporary miracles and defending the cures of the king was intellectual and theological challenge, and by claiming that the royal touch was not exactly a miracle, they walked a fine line between their theology and their royalism.

Indeed, Browne attempted to use the king’s gift of healing to demonstrate the differences among Catholics, “ill Protestants”, and orthodox Anglican Protestants. Catholics readily and credulously accepted any wonder that they heard of, “even in their Embrio… greedy to catch hold at the very empty shadows and resemblances thereof.” They exercised no restraint or thoughtfulness, and any charmer could sway them. “Ill Protestants”, on the other hand, rejected any miraculous event out of hand, “be it brought to them by the purest Light and brightest

113 Browne, Adenochoiradologa, 24-25.
Reason” (however, Browne ignored the miracles of dissenting groups like the Quakers). Good Anglicans exercised moderation, neither accepting miraculous claims outright nor rejecting them out of hand.\textsuperscript{115} Instead, they carefully examined and probed apparent miracles, and accepted them only if they were truly divine work. Perhaps the experimentalism and empiricism of the new science had influenced rational Protestant theology, as only careful observation could determine the reality of the miraculous.

In a further effort to distance the royal touch from the crude wonders of Catholics and dissenters, Browne emphasized the spiritual nature of the rite. The king did not possess magical powers, but was only “the Organ and Instrument, God himself the chief Agent and Master of the Operation.”\textsuperscript{116} “The Author of the whole Work” was the Holy Spirit, and the king only served as the vessel through which the cure proceeded.\textsuperscript{117} John Brinsley, the moderate Puritan minister, agreed that although “The King may touch… it is God must Cure.”\textsuperscript{118} The stress on the divine source of the healing power was an important theological distinction. It distanced the royal touch from charges of superstition and Catholicism, and gave it a decidedly religious and holy aspect, pure from any idolatry of the king. However, even Browne referred to the touch as a miracle on occasion, and it is doubtful that among the general public much thought was given to the difference between royal healing and biblical miracle, which were probably regarded as one and the same.

The emphasis on the divine nature of the healing touch was a precarious basis for Charles II’s own healing power, however. Though Browne admitted that only a “Holy and good Man” would be able to perform the cure, he choose instead to emphasize the importance of the

\textsuperscript{115} Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book III 72-3.
\textsuperscript{116} Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book III 21.
\textsuperscript{117} Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book III 102.
“Patrimonial Virtue… [that] doth run in the Royal Line.” Edward the Confessor, the saintly English king of the early eleventh century, was widely regarded as the originator of the healing touch, a power he derived from his unquestioned holiness. Even staunch republicans like John Milton acknowledged that Edward had healed the sick. However, Milton rejected those who “attribute the Cure to his Royaltie, not to his Sanctitie.” A popular undercurrent of belief, one that was implied by Browne’s examples of the saintly men who had healed in the past, was that the gift of healing was given only to those who were personally holy. Charles II, the “Merry Monarch”, was notorious for his decadence, and many loudly decried the indiscretions of his personal life. It is easy to imagine that Charles’ moral laxity made it difficult, particularly for the deeply religious, to accept his healing gift.

While Browne had established, however tenuously, that the gift of healing was consistent with both the Bible and Protestant theology, he still had to account for the origin of the touch. While notions of lineage and divine favor had been briefly mentioned, Browne identified the source of the healing power in the anointment of the king with sacred oil during the coronation ritual. The coronation of the monarch was one of the most elaborate and lengthy ceremonies in England. The new ruler’s parade through the streets of London brought out massive crowds and was perhaps the most public spectacle the monarch would participate in during the course of his reign. Charles II’s coronation, patterned after “the records and old formularies,” was an elaborate affair designed to revive the cult of monarchy after a decade of Cromwellian rule. The costly three-day celebration revived many of the old ceremonies, including the traditional royal progress from the Tower of London to Whitehall, abandoned by Charles’ father. The actual

121 Harris, *Restoration*, 72-74.
coronation took place on April 23rd, St. George’s Day. However, despite the elaborate and costly pageantry of the inauguration, and Charles’ own insistence that it be followed according to the traditional method, the coronation and anointment did not occur until the spring of 1661, nearly a year after Charles had returned to England and assumed the throne. The inauguration had become a purely symbolic event, whether the royal court admitted it or not. The unction and coronation did not literally confer the power to rule onto the monarch’s person.

However, the unction of the king with holy oil had long been a central element in divine right beliefs. The anointment had been seen as a literal taking on of divinely ordained sovereignty- the anointment made the king a semi-sacerdotal figure, one of God’s chosen. The sacred character the anointment gave to the monarch was central in the development of the royal touch, for through the unction the monarch became part of the religious tradition of holy miracle workers. However, by the seventeenth century, the importance of anointment in conferring power unto the prince had declined. Charles, who began healing in 1649, over ten years before his actual anointment, and healed frequently throughout his exile, was obviously unconcerned he had yet to be anointed. Yet Browne emphasized the importance of the unction throughout “Charisma Basilicon”. Indeed, the centrality of the coronation to the healing rite is noted in the very title, “The Royal Gift of Healing Strumaes… by Contact, or Imposition of the Sacred Hands of our Kings of England and France, given them at their Inaugurations.” This “salutiferous Gift” was received with “their just Rights to the Crown, confirmed and made good to them at their Inaugurations.”

Browne continued to stress the importance of the unction, as the “great Gift of Healing, [was] peculiarly given to his Gracious Majesties Royal hand, by the reception of the

123 Harris, Restoration, 69.
125 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Book III Preface.
Holy Oyl which at his Inauguration he made use of, and which entitled him the Sovereign of our Nation.” The oil, which was placed on the king’s head, breast, and arms, signified the “three equalizing Fames given to them, of being Holy, Sacred, and Divine.”

Given that Charles healed long before his coronation, and prominently at that, why would Browne emphasize the anointment as so central an element to the divine authority of the monarchy? While the importance of the anointment had clearly waned, it did not mean that it had been wholly abandoned, and the king and court still acknowledged its importance, if in lip service only, or Charles would not have been anointed at all. The belief that the anointment conferred divine sanction on the king was still an idea current in society, and other members of the royal court argued for its importance. James Howell, a moderate royalist who was appointed official royal historiographer by Charles II, penned a tract vindicating royal authority titled Proedria vasilike. Howell, defending the “Eminence and Royal Dignity… of the King of Great Britain” argued that the English monarch was “super-illustres” because he was an anointed king. “The Kings of England and France, they two are onely capable of being Anointed”, their anointment signaling out their special authority, and their “Gift also to cure the Strumatical Disease.” However, we must keep in mind that there was as yet no rigidly defined royalist ideology, and differences between writers, particularly in points of theology, were numerous. While Browne wrote Adenochoiradelogia from a largely royalist perspective, it is possible that his emphasis on the anointment reflected his own personal beliefs in the origin of the monarchy’s divine authority, and that in his efforts to defend the king he simply ignored Charles’s previous deviations. Whatever the case, Browne’s reliance on the anointment, which even in the

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126 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Book III 3-4.
seventeenth century was an old and outmoded belief based on Catholic ritual, reveal the extent to which royal healing had become an anachronistic survival in Protestant England.

Browne continued his study of the touch by explaining the reasons God singled out the monarchy for the healing gift and continued to do so to the present day. While Browne’s reasoning rested along strong theological lines, his political theories were inseparable from his religious arguments throughout the book. Divine right kingship was a central theme throughout Browne’s defense of the rite. In royalist thought, government came from God, not from the people, and Adam’s patriarchal rule over Eve was the basis and ideal of government. The monarch served as “God’s vicegerent”, his earthly representative, the “Defender of the Faith… and Preserver of the People.” However, divine right theory had been dealt a severe blow by Charles I’s execution and the decade long rule of Oliver Cromwell. The world had not fallen apart with the death of the king. However, after the restoration, royalists sought to strengthen and defend divine right theory from republican and Whig attacks. The Exclusion Crisis of the early 1680’s, in which opposition to Charles’ Catholic brother James peaked, posed a grave threat to the restoration government, and to the belief in the indefeasible hereditary monarchy as a whole. To meet the Whig challenge against the monarchy, Tory propagandists launched numerous defenses of monarchical government in the 1680’s. During the Tory Reaction, as it was called, royalists targeted all classes of society in an attempt to win public approval, and made extensive use of print to spread their ideology. The obvious message of the royal rite of healing, that the king was not as other men, but was a divinely sanctioned prince who ruled with God’s authority, both reflected and appealed to Tory ideology in important ways.

128 Harris, Restoration, 223-4.
129 Harris, Restoration, 223-4.
Throughout the era, Tory propagandists were quick to emphasize the unchallengeable nature of monarchical rule in an obvious effort to counter the civil disobedience advocated by some Whig revolutionaries. This concern with preventing resistance against the king is reflected throughout “Charisma Basilicon.” The royal gift of healing was only given to a divinely sanctioned ruler who, in Browne’s words, was “worthy of a Divine Progeny, and of a Royal Uction.”\(^{130}\) While clearly usurpers could take control of the crown, their reign was not divine or just. While the clearest symbol of the divine right of kings was the royal touch, the clearest symbol of the heretical rule of usurpers was their inability to heal the scrofulous. If the tyrant was “not the right Heir to the Crown… and conducted thither by Divine Authority,” he would not be given the divine gift of healing, and “should an Usurper or Tyrant… touch at the same Experiment, you’l never see such happy success.”\(^{131}\) While Browne’s attacks on the usurpers were obviously designed to delegitimize Cromwell and the Interregnum government, the arguments seem even more pointedly directed against the Duke of Monmouth, Charles’ eldest illegitimate son. Monmouth had allied himself with the Whigs during the Exclusion Crisis, and in the summer of 1680 had toured the western England in an effort to gain support for his bid to the throne. It was during this tour that he had touched for the evil. Browne’s emphasis on legitimate birth and divine unction pointedly excluded Monmouth from claiming the same power his father had.

However, while Tories argued in favor of divinely sanctioned kingship and indefeasible heredity, they did not wholly embrace absolutism. Perhaps the central challenge of Tory ideology in the 1680’s was in reconciling divine right theory and its absolutist overtones with a theory of monarchy that limited its arbitrary power and ensured it ruled in accordance with

\(^{130}\) Browne, *Adenochoiradelogia*, Book III 78.

\(^{131}\) Browne, *Adenochoiradelogia*, Book III 81.
common law and respect for traditional English liberties and property. Charles, who sought to strengthen his own rule in the 1680’s, largely adopted Tory ideology, and consequently sought to portray himself as both a divinely sanctioned ruler who answered only to God, and a ruler who followed common law and was dedicated to protecting the rights of the English people and the existing establishment. The royal rite of healing was the perfect expression of those two images of the monarchy. The gift of healing was God given, and so the king was clearly a quasi-divine person. But Charles used the gift to heal and protect his subjects, to safeguard their lives, not to rule arbitrarily. As Browne explained, the healing gift expressed the King’s “Charity, Mercy, Clemency, and Sanctity.” The ceremony conveyed both messages clearly; the King’s authority came from God and so was unchallengeable, but his rule was just and for the protection of the English people. The royal rite of healing conformed neatly to the image Charles wished to portray, and consequently became the quintessential ceremony of his reign.

The propaganda of the Tories and the Royal Court did not seek only to elevate Charles II, however. His father, Charles I, executed by his own subjects, served as a powerful tool to express the role of the king in government, and attempts to apotheosize Charles I began from very near the moment of his death, with the publication of his purported confessional Eikon Basilike, which stressed the Christ like execution of the king, only ten days after his beheading. Charles became a martyr to the royalist cause, a symbol of the rightness of monarchical government. Such attempts to elevate Charles I to near sainthood relied extensively on his healing ability, and stories about his sacral powers proliferated after his death, with particular emphasis on the healing power of his spilled blood. Publications like the anonymously

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132 Harris, Restoration, 232-235.
133 Harris, Restoration, 258-9.
authored *A Miracle of Miracles: Wrought by the blood of King Charles the First*, which was published in 1649, were typical. It related the wondrous curing of a maid’s blindness with a handkerchief dipped in Charles I’s blood, and spoke reverently of the late king as “a maintainer of the Truth, Defender of the Faith, a protector of his Subjects, and a help of the poor.”

Clearly, as evidenced by the title alone, the stories told about Charles I embraced the miraculous power of the healing gift wholeheartedly.

The tales of Charles I’s healing power continued unabated throughout the Charles II’s reign. Royalist supporters like the historians Sir Roger Manley and Sir William Sanderson penned accounts of Charles healing sick petitioners while imprisoned by Parliament, and of the miraculous effects of his blood, which the republican “*Novellists, more out of envy than grounded in reason, endeavoured, tho' to no purpose, by Declarations, to divert the People from this pretended Superstition, as they called it.*” The royalist physician George Bate, a staunch defender of Charles I and later first physician to Charles II, wrote an account of Charles I in which he noted the power of Charles’ body to heal disease, and the scramble among the public to obtain a relic of the late king that they “might never want a Cure for the Kings Evil”. Browne continued this tradition of celebrating the healing power of Charles I in “Charisma Basilicon”, where he described “the marvelous and miraculous efficacy of the Blood of our late Sacred Martyr King Charles the First”. Browne too was clearly less reserved about ascribing a miraculous power to Charles I than he was to his son, and he even claimed that Charles I’s “very Prayers alone” were able to affect the same cures as his blood. While Charles II used the

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healing rite to portray himself as a divinely chosen, but charitable and humble ruler, the apotheosis of Charles I as a saint-like, miraculous figure featured just as prominently in royalist attempts to reinforce divine right theory, and relied just as heavily on the gift of healing. However, they were less moderate than Browne’s earlier delicate explanations of the royal touch, and indicate that popular opinion on royal healing was probably less restrained than Browne’s careful justifications.

While the domestic political use of the rite is clear, the relationship between France and England, a subject of much controversy in Charles’s reign, was also brought up in debates over the royal touch. The only other monarch in Europe to claim the divine gift was the French ruler, Louis XIV. While it was almost universally agreed that both monarchs possessed the healing touch, arguments frequently arose over which monarchy had been given the gift first. The standard English belief, unsurprisingly, was that the English monarch had been the first to possess the ‘sanative virtue’. Edward the Confessor had been the first English monarch to heal; St. Louis IX was the first French king to touch for scrofula according to the English histories, and his reign came more than one hundred and sixty years after Edward. The French, then, “derived the same from the English by Sprig of Right… under whose Government most of the French Provinces were once subjected.”140 This patriotic belief was widely accepted in England, and nearly all accounts of the touch, from Richard Wiseman’s brief mention in his surgical treatise, to John Milton’s History of Britain, to the minister Francis Fullwood’s sermons, argued for the preeminence of the English touch. Though Protestant England was naturally hostile to Catholic France, defenders of the royal touch were unwilling to totally reject the Catholic rite, perhaps out of fear that doing so would ultimately harm the English one as well.

140 Browne, Adenochiradelogia, Book III Preface, 66.
While Browne had explained the origin and cause of the healing rite, he still felt the need to respond to a number of criticisms that were frequently leveled at the royal touch. According to Browne, these “Several Doubts” about the healing gift were leveled by “Atheists, Sadducees, and ill conditioned Pharisees.” Although Browne claimed everyone who doubted the royal touch was really a heretic or atheist, he felt compelled to respond to their doubts, which indicates they probably were well known in society, if not popular. Browne divided the opposition to the touch into two groups, those “who do wholly deny the substance of the Action”, and those who only rejected “its Ceremonies, bringing hereby the whole Operation under Superstition.” However, anyone could see the reality of the healing power through “Ocular Demonstration” alone, and Browne criticized those who rejected the cure outright as blind to reason and experience, an interesting appeal to empiricism.141

Browne’s arguments rested on a number of commonly held beliefs, and his reasoning and language were nearly identical to those used by the controversial minister and Erastian Francis Fullwood (David Lloyd had also used Fullwood’s arguments in his attack on Greatrakes), indicating that both the complaints against the touch and the responses to those complaints had become a familiar exchange. Fullwood, who published his history of the English church in 1655, explained that many who rejected the divine power of the touch attributed the apparent cures to the “power of Fancie, and an exalted Imagination”, and both Lloyd and Browne took the following passage from Fullwood nearly verbatim:

For when the poor Patient (who perchance seldome heard of, and never saw a King before) shall behold his Royall Hand dabbling in a Puddle of Putrefaction… I say, when the Sick-man shall see an Hand so humble of an Arme so high, such Condescension in a King, to stroak that Soar, at which meaner Persons would stop their Nostrills, shut their Eyes, or turn their Faces; this raiseth, erecteth, enthroneth the Patients Fancie,

141 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Book III 113-114.
summoning his spirits to assist Nature with their utmost Might, to encounter the Disease with greater Advantage. 142

As we saw in our study of Greatrakes, the idea that the imagination could affect the physical body was a prominent belief in seventeenth century society. The connection between the power of fancy and the royal touch was noted by many, and formed one of the main arguments against the king’s healing gift. However, neither Fullwood, nor Lloyd, nor Browne managed to muster a full response to this explanation of the king’s power. They only stated that many men believed it “to avoid the Censure of over-easie Credulity” (another hint that skepticism and empiricism was becoming more prevalent in society), but that anyone who had viewed the ceremony would see its efficacy “as clear as the sun.”143 Clearly, mechanistic and natural explanations of the miraculous had become well known throughout English society, and presented one of the central challenges for proponents of the royal touch.

However, Browne diverged from both Fullwood and Lloyd in explaining the sick who were not healed by the king’s touch, and in doing so walked a fine line between defending the touch from doubters and accepting the reasoning of the power of fancy. Browne argued that right faith was essential to receiving a cure. Those like the “Trayerous Usurpers” who denied the king was God’s vicegerent, consequently gave “as little belief to God Himself”, and so were faithless and would not receive a cure. He quoted St. Chrysostom to defend his argument, “Thus every unbelieving Man may rest satisfied, that without he brings Faith enough with him, and in him… his expectation will not be answered: whereas the Man of Faith, who confides on the same, will as readily find the benefit of the same.” The difference between faith and fancy might appear tenuous to us, but to the religious mind of the seventeenth century it was an important

142 Francis Fullwood, *The church-history of Britain from the birth of Jesus Christ until the year M.DC.XLVIII*, (London: Printed for John Williams, 1655), 146.
distinction. Though even Browne admitted that “this method doth not always answer
expectation”, the effects of the touch were still wondrous, and the “Cure most frequent.”¹⁴⁴ In a
credulous age, any apparent cure was proof of the touch’s efficacy, while failures could be
ignored.

Browne also responded to claims that the king’s healing was not divine in nature, but was
the product of “an Ingenite Faculty which may be produced with the nature thereof.”¹⁴⁵ The
argument that a natural element in the king’s body might be the cause of his cures reflects the
mechanistic conclusions of the Virtuosi in the Greatrakes case, who determined that the
apparently miraculous cures of the Irish Stroker derived from his unique natural temperament.
Clearly, the influence of the new science had grown, and the desire to explain all events through
natural law had begun to reach the king’s touch. However, Browne did not much dwell upon this
naturalistic objection to the touch, and simply rejected it out of hand, indicating that it had
probably not gained much traction in society yet. It is revealing, however, that Browne, a
surgeon who embraced the new science and sought to portray himself as learned and educated,
was able to accept supernatural explanations for the king’s touch. Clearly the new science and
belief in natural law had not yet removed the supernatural from the realm legitimate study and
belief.

The ceremony for touching the evil began when England was still Catholic, and the
ceremony clearly reflected the formalism and worship of its religion of origin. Many Protestants
consequently objected to the ceremony of the rite, with its Catholic and superstitious flavor, and
were “displeased at the Collect read… as wholly improper… or unresolved as to the Efficacy of
the Gold pendent about the Patients Neck.” Browne responded to their objections in two ways.

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¹⁴⁴ Browne, Adenochoiradologia, Book III 111-112.
¹⁴⁵ Browne, Adenochoiradologia, Book III 119.
First, he turned again to the formulaic reasoning used by Fullwood and Lloyd. He argued that the rituals were purely symbolic, and were “requisite rather to the Solemnity, then Substance of the Cure”, for the “bare Hands of our Kings (without the Gloves, as I may term it, of the aforesaid Circumstances) have effected the healing of this Disease.” However, Browne went further and defended the formal prayers used, arguing that “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Though Browne maintained the ceremonies were only accoutrements that did not cause or affect the royal cures, he still argued in favor of ceremonial as an important part of the symbolism of the rite.

The role of the gold angel in the healing process was also a matter of some controversy. It was widely believed that the gold had a special efficacy, and that if one lost the ‘touch piece’, as it was known, the disease would return. Browne rejected this popular belief, claiming the gold “is no more than a resemblance of Health, for the Cure has oft been seen done without any Gold at all given.” Despite Browne’s protestation, belief in the importance of the gold piece was still common, as is evident by the testimonies he appended to the end of the book. Frequently, the stories told of the efficacy of the angel itself, like the story of the father and son who traded their touch piece back and forth between them to constantly keep the evil at bay. While educated and elite society tried to rationalize the royal touch and remove superstition and idolatry from the ceremony, popular beliefs were clearly less moderate, and the ceremonial and angel was commonly seen as an integral part of the cure.

While Browne provided a thorough defense of the theological and ideological foundations of the touch, he had set out to give a complete account of royal healing in “Charisma

146 Fullwood, The church-history of Britain, 145-146.
147 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Book III 116.
149 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Book III 138-139.
Basilicon”, and so he devoted a section of the book to a detailed description of the ceremony itself. He also offered a number of useful recommendations in his capacity as a surgeon to improve the operation and function of the ceremony. Browne, who had established the practical nature of his book as a guide “for the meanest Capacity to find out the disease” so that it would “prevent poor People from unnecessary Journeys,” was obviously concerned with the actual mechanics of the royal rite of healing. He was obviously concerned with the actual mechanics of the royal rite of healing. His practical concern is striking, and is a reminder that despite all the elaborate religious and political reasoning that informed it, the healing ceremony was an actual event that required a great deal of planning and organization to accomplish.

Browne began by differentiating between the two different healing ceremonies, the public and private. The king held a number of public healings throughout the year. After the initial rush of the Restoration, when Charles II healed near seven thousand people in six months, a proclamation was issued in 1662 which stipulated that public healings would occur between the Feast of All Saints, on November 1st, to a week before Christmas, and in the month preceding Easter. The specific day for healing was generally a Sunday. Official proclamations claimed that the dates were chosen as “more convenient both for the temperature of the season, and in respect of any contagion which may happen in this near access to his Majesties Sacred Person.” However, the original cause behind those particular dates was the belief that the cure was only efficacious on especially holy times, Christmas, Easter, and Sundays in particular. Browne admitted that many did “presume and suppose any other time in the year is not so fitting.” While he rejected the belief as superstition and “A sin… to tie the Almighty to particular times and seasons”, popular beliefs again were less refined than Browne might have hoped.

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150 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Book III.
151 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Book III 83.
152 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Book III 95.
153 Broadside, Proclamation for the better ordering of those who repair to the court for their cure of the disease called the Kings-evil, (London: Printed by John Bill and Christopher Barker, 1662).
However, Charles healed as “frequently as He pleaseth”, and aside from the prescribed public ceremonies, he also engaged in numerous private healings throughout the year. While two to three hundred normally came during one of the public rituals, the private healings were usually given to only a handful of people. Often private healings were the held for members of the aristocracy and gentry and their family and friends. While the poor had to undergo the ordeal of the long and tiresome public healings, those with connections at the court were often able to attend the private ceremony, evidence of the importance of social status, despite Browne’s claim that Charles “never makes any exceptions of Persons.”\footnote{Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book III 83-84.} Charles II also healed in both public and private venues. During the public healings, the largest rooms at the king’s residence were used to accommodate the large crowds, usually the Banqueting House at Whitehall or the great hall at Hampton Court. However, at the smaller ceremonies, religious venues were preferred, and the healings that took place at Windsor occurred in the chapel royal, which had been given a lavish renovation in 1680. It was at Windsor that Browne attended the royal healings, “having the great Honor of first waiting on His Sacred Majesty at his Chappel Royal at Windsor on my Knee”\footnote{Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book III 165-6, 176; Keay, \textit{The Magnificent Monarch}, 191-192.}.

While those who received a private healing only needed a connection at court, those who attended the public ceremony had to fulfill a number of tasks before they were able to obtain the royal touch. According to the proclamation that Charles II had issued in July 1662, any person who sought to receive the cure had to “bring with them Certificates under the hands of the Parson, Vicar, or Minister, and Church-Wardens of those several parishes where they dwell… testifying according to the truth, that they have not any time been Touched by the King.”\footnote{Proclamation for the better ordering, 1662.}
These certificates were necessary to obtain entrance to the ceremony, and their implementation hints that the sheer number of people who came to be touched was so great that it was necessary to prevent people from getting multiple touches. The issue was apparently serious enough that the proclamation warned of ‘his Majesties Displeasure” if any Justices of the Peace “suffer any to pass” who did not have a certificate.\textsuperscript{157} Many, of course, were able to avoid the restriction, such as William Vickers, who was touched twice by Charles II and three times by James II.\textsuperscript{158} Browne further recommended that the certificates be standardized and printed, and then distributed to every diocese as “an infallible Remedy against all counterfeit Certificates whatever.”\textsuperscript{159} Apparently, the popularity of the touch was so great that people counterfeited the certificates in order to gain access; the fact that Browne wrote of it indicates that excessive turnout was a very real problem for the ceremony.

While the sufferers of the evil had to obtain a certificate from their church ministers, Browne had a further recommendation for the better ordering of the rite. In order to prevent overcrowding and “the tiresome Journeys, and tedious Travels of many indigent and sick people, who do venture to march many hundred miles not really having this Disease, save only on their own supposition”, Browne recommended that every person should also be examined by their local physician and surgeon to confirm they were actually suffering from scrofula. The certificate would then serve a “double use and advantage”, confirming the petitioner was inflicted with scrofula and had not been previously touched.\textsuperscript{160} The inference that many people came to the king who did not possess the evil, besides indicating the impreciseness of medical definitions in

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\textsuperscript{157} Proclamation for the better ordering, 1662.
\textsuperscript{158} Keay, The Magnificent Monarch, 113.
\textsuperscript{159} Browne, Adenochiradelogia, Book III 85.
\textsuperscript{160} Browne, Adenochiradelogia, Book III 86.
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the seventeenth century, again indicates that popular beliefs in the royal touch were less
moderate than official orthodoxy. Though the king could only cure scrofula, many of the sick
petitioners who sought a touch suffered from a variety of different maladies. Unable to get relief
from traditional medicine, they hoped that the king might relieve their suffering.

While the certificates were designed to prevent people who had already been touched, or
who did not have scrofula, from arriving at the ceremony, they had another purpose--to stop
those who sought to receive a touch only for the gold angel that was given out. The use of the
gold was a serious matter to the crown, which was in severe debt for much of Charles’ reign.
With the amount of people who came to be touched, the annual expenditure on the rite was at
least three thousand pounds a year, a considerable sum.\footnote{Fabian Philipps, \textit{The antiquity, legality, reason, duty and necessity of prae-emption and prourveyance, for the King}, (London: Printed by Richard Hodgkinson, 1663), 258-9.} Preventing the “cheats” who sought
only a gold piece was a matter of some importance then. The desire to get touched only to
receive the angel was apparently a fairly common one, or at least was widely acknowledged as
one. A common joke circulating from at least 1636 testifies to the prominence of the use of the
touch to gain some money:

A Notable drunkard passing the street, and having his chaps muffled with a red cloth, was
asked by a friend who met him what he ailed, to which he answered, that hee was almost
starved, and therefore desired the other to have him to a Taverne, and there to bestow on
him some wine, and meat; promising to spend on him an angell the next weeke; and the
other demanding how he would come by an Angell: marry said he, I have a great
swelling in my chops, & I hope it is the Kings Evill, and then the King will give me an
Angell.\footnote{This joke appears in essentially the same form in a number of humor books throughout the 1600’s. Robert Chamberlain, \textit{The Booke of Bulls}, (London: 1636), 9-10; Robert Burton, \textit{Versatile ingenium, The Wittie companion, or Jests of all sorts}, (Amsterdam: Printed by Stephen Swart, 1679), 95; William Hickes, \textit{Coffee-house jests}, (London: printed for Hen. Rhodes, 1686), 101-102.}
While many regarded the royal touch as sacred and powerful, it was just as subject to ridicule and satire as anything else, and the greed that informed many petitioners surely caused some scoffing at the real cause of the popularity behind the ceremony.

Browne described a number of different ways the poor sought to cheat the king out of more gold. While many tried to pretend they had the evil in order to get a touch, even many who actually suffered from scrofula simply sold the gold piece, or the “touching Medals would not be so frequently seen and found in Gold-Smiths shops.”\textsuperscript{163} Particularly enterprising individuals would move from county to county to gain numerous certificates, and so gain more gold pieces, a trick “studied by divers, who look more after the Gold than the cure.” Browne recommended the institution of a ledger book for the surgeons-in-waiting, in which they would record the names of every person who received the touch. In this way, when the recidivist appeared with a new certificate, the surgeons would be able to consult the list and see if the petitioner had already been touched.\textsuperscript{164} Unfortunately, the ledger-book was never implemented, for it would have been an invaluable resource in determining the demographics of those who sought the touch. Finally, Browne argued any person to whom the king deigned to give a second touch should “bring up his or her own Gold to the King, and put a new Silk Ribbon into it.”\textsuperscript{165} Clearly, the use of the gold angel caused not a little dismay.

Once the petitioner had managed to obtain a certificate, he next had to travel to London to present the proof to the king’s surgeon-in-waiting in order to receive the actual ticket to the healing ceremony. This proved to be the most difficult part of the entire process, for as Browne

\textsuperscript{163} Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book III 93.
\textsuperscript{164} Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book III 87-88.
\textsuperscript{165} Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book III 93.
admitted “its harder to approach the Chirurgeon, than obtain a touch.” Browne was critical of the wait that the poor were forced to undergo in London, which often left them indigent, “both their Money and Credit gone.” The surgeon who was assigned the task of examining the sick and giving out the tickets, “whose chief business should be to attend their coming”, often neglected his duty, causing “the ill opinion the Chirurgeon goes under at the continual and tedious waitings at his House.” The three surgeons-in-waiting attended to the duty in monthly shifts, and so the location of the house the sick had to go to changed regularly. While the address of the current surgeon was supposed to be published in the royalist paper the *Mercurius Publicus*, it was not always done so, and for the sick arriving in London for the first time, it must have been difficult to find the surgeon’s house, and determine the appointed day to get the ticket. When the surgeon did finally open his house for the sick, there was a frantic rush for the tickets, and in 1684, seven people were killed in the crush outside the surgeon’s home. While the use of bribes to obtain the ticket was strictly prohibited by the Lord Chamberlain, those who had a connection to the surgeon or to members of the royal household were often able to get a ticket without waiting, such as the Quaker gun-smith who obtained a ticket from his friend John Stephens, who was a member of the king’s back-stairs.

Browne recommended two remedies for the problem of obtaining a ticket. First, he argued the king should set aside a place in Whitehall, “where a Physitian and two Chirurgeons ought always to attend to view, examine, and dispatch the poor.” Instead of forcing the poor to wait at the surgeon’s house, there should be a prescribed area and time for the sick to present their certificates and be examined, bringing order and regularity to the proceedings, and

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lessening “somewhat of the hard censure” put upon the surgeons. Browne further recommended that Charles should publish the times of his healings during the summer months. While the Christmas and Easter ceremonies were well publicized in proclamations and newspapers, Charles held irregular summer healings, and the sick that came for a touch during those times were often forced to wait months for a ceremony. Browne recommended that “publick Notice ought to be given hereof in the Gazette” of the summer healing sessions so the sick would only travel to the court when the ceremony was to be held. Browne’s recommendations, again, appear not to have been implemented, however considering that Charles was to die within a year, it is unsurprising that they were not used.

Once the sick person had obtained the signed certificate, presented it to the surgeon-in-waiting and received a ticket, the surgeon would inform him of the date, time, and location of the ceremony, and all that was left was the touch of the king. The actual ceremony of the touch was technically under the Lord Chamberlain’s jurisdiction, who was in charge of all royal ceremonial at court. However, he generally left the running of the event to the Clerk of the Closet and the surgeons. On the appointed day of the event, the diseased people were to gather outside the appropriate building, which in London was the Banqueting Hall at Whitehall, at the prescribed time, usually after the king’s morning prayers. The chief officer of the Yeomen of the Guard checked the tickets and organized the sick people into a “convenient order” and escorted them into the Banqueting Hall. The two royal surgeons appointed to attend the ceremony would then take charge of the sick and put them into a proper line, with those who had traveled farthest placed at the beginning. After the sick had been properly organized, the king entered, bareheaded, and took his seat. The Clerk of the Closet, who carried the gold touch pieces,

170 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, Book III 89.
171 Browne, Adenochoiradelogia, III 96; Keay, The Magnificent Monarch, 115.
attended at the king’s right hand. Two chaplains, and at the larger ceremonies a host of nobles and other spectators, were also present. Indeed, Charles II encouraged the public to view the healing ceremony, and Samuel Pepys attended easily in 1660.\(^{172}\)

Once everything was in place, the ceremony could begin. The chief surgeon would bring the patients to the king one at a time, and they performed three bows as they approached the monarch. Once at the throne, the surgeon and patient would kneel, while the chaplain read from the Gospel of St. Mark, 16:14. The king would then stroke both his hands under the chin of the sick person, as the chaplain read the key verse of the passage, “They shall lay their hands on the sick, and they shall recover”. The other surgeon would then bring the just touched person to the back of the line, while the chief surgeon would conduct the next sufferer to the king. This was repeated until all the sick petitioners had been touched. Then the process would be repeated for the giving of the gold angel. The chief surgeon would lead again lead the petitioner to the king, both bowed three times along the way, until they kneeled before the king himself. The chaplain would then read from the first chapter of the Gospel of St. John, and upon reading the verse “That Light was the true Light, which lightneth every man which cometh into the World”, the Clerk of the Closet, on his knee, would present the gold angel to the king, who would place it around the sick persons neck. This was repeated until all the scrofula sufferers had received the gold angel. Then, with everyone present on their knees, except the king, who remained sitting, the chaplain would read out a number of prayers, which the sick were supposed to respond to. After the prayers had been said, the Lord Chamberlain, or more commonly the Vice-

Chamberlain, along with two other nobles would bring linen, a basin and an ewer for the king to wash his hands. The king would then rise and depart, and the ceremony was over.\textsuperscript{173}

John Browne had explained the origin, cause and theological foundations of the rite, and shown the ceremonies used were performed “without any appearance of superstition.” He proclaimed that there was “no man of Sense, Religion or Honesty… which shall dare to deny the truth and efficacy thereof.”\textsuperscript{174} However, he still felt the need to provide more evidence of the effectiveness of the king’s touch, and appended a large number of testimonies from people who were cured by both Charles II and his father to the end of “Charisma Basilicon.” The examples are full of the usual stories, of men and women who suffered from scrofula and were immediately cured upon the touch of the king. A large number of the reports relate the healing of blindness, a truly inexplicable feat that we cannot put down to the frequent remissions of scrofula. It is important to note that nearly all of the testimonials came from the upper classes of society. John Plummer, esq.; Sir Rogers Hasnet, Sergeant at Arms to the king; the Earl of Starling; and the Mayor of Wickham all sent letters to Browne that told of the power of the royal touch. Valentine Greatrakes had done the same thing in his own self-defense \textit{A brief account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks}, appending signed letters from prominent people, like Robert Boyle, who testified to the efficacy of his healing touch. The importance of social status in determining truth is evident. Anecdotes from the upper classes of society were taken as reliable and necessary proofs of an event, while those of the lower classes, the poor and uneducated, were not proof of anything.\textsuperscript{175} Even though the poor were the ones who overwhelmingly sought the touch, the elite were the ones consulted as to its wondrous effects.

\textsuperscript{173} Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book III 96.
\textsuperscript{174} Browne, \textit{Adenochoiradelogia}, Book III 101-102.
The king’s touch is one of the most puzzling beliefs of pre-modern Europe. Its origins are shrouded in mystery, but its popularity throughout England is evident. How did this belief arise and put down such deep roots in society? Any attempt at an explanation must rely on sociology as much as history; however, it is safe to say that the belief in royal healing was bound up with an entire worldview, one in which the political and religious were inseparable, and the supernatural was recognized as an active part of the world. This mixture of politics and religion reached its most potent and complete expression in the theory of divine right kingship. Government and Authority flowed from God, not from a democratic contract between the people. The king was God’s representative on earth, sovereign, absolute, and unchallengeable. The monarch was not just a political figure, but a religious one, who derived his power from God, and ruled according to His will. The king, then, was no ordinary man, but a sacerdotal figure, semi-holy and heir to the biblical legacy of kingship.176 Into this powerful mix was thrown the wide acceptance of the miraculous and the supernatural. Biblical miracles were fact, and witches, ghosts, and the healing powers of seventh sons were taken seriously by all of society. In such an intellectual environment, it was not a difficult leap to attribute the same healing gift that the holy men of the bible had possessed to the king.

The royal gift of healing was the quintessential ceremony of divine right kingship. Its message was clear—the king was not an ordinary man, but was God’s vicegerent and a sacred figure. The rite of healing emphasized both the divine authority of the king and the humility and charity he showed to his subjects. Though he was a sovereign and holy ruler, the king willingly stroked the most wretched and diseased of his subjects, at whom most “would both stop their

Nostrils, and shut their Eyes,” in order to relieve their suffering. The political usefulness of the touching ceremony was thus clear to Charles II. Divine right kingship and indefeasible heredity had been dealt a severe blow by the execution of Charles I and England’s ten-year experiment in republicanism. The royal court and Tory propagandists sought to rebuild the power and authority of monarchical government in a number of ways, and winning over the English people was essential. Ritualized ceremony served as a central tool in projecting the majesty and authority of the monarch, and the royal touch was the unmistakable ceremonial manifestation of royalist ideology. While Charles was notorious for the ease with which he ran his court, he was keenly aware of the power of ritual in making a king. His tutor during his youth, William Cavendish, the Duke of Newcastle, lectured Charles frequently on the importance of court ceremonial, reminding the young prince that nothing “preserves you kings more then Ceremony.” Charles clearly embraced Newcastle’s recommendation, and scarce a month went by when he did not engage in the royal rite of healing. By the end of his reign, Charles had touched around 100,000 people.

The popularity of the touch is obvious. After the initial rush of the restoration, when Charles healed over six thousand of his subjects in just eight months, not a year went by where he failed to heal at least three thousand people. In revitalizing the royal rite of healing, then, Charles was as much imposing his vision of the monarchy on his subjects as responding to popular demand. The popularity of the touch was due in part to the fact that it was widely believed to be an effective remedy against the evil. Society did not yet possess modern statistical analysis or precise record keeping, and the anecdotes of friends and prominent men throughout

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history were enough to convince many that the king was a genuine healer. However, there was undoubtedly a substantial portion that attended more out of desperation than true belief. Scrofula was a painful and disfiguring condition, and the medical treatments that existed were ineffective and often expensive. The king’s touch, free and available to all, must have been an attractive option to those who were not helped by or could not afford traditional medicine, whether they truly believed in its divine efficacy or not. Browne’s preoccupation with preventing ‘cheats’ from attending the ceremony also indicates that a significant number of attendees were drawn more by the angel than the touch of the king. Unfortunately, we do not know the percentage touched out of all scrofula suffers. We do know, however, that while thousands did seek the king’s touch, most people did not. The touch undoubtedly remained popular throughout the seventeenth century, but the thousands who attended the ceremony does not mean that popular skepticism toward the rite was insignificant.

Indeed, we must ask ourselves how effective the healing ceremony actually was in propagating the image of a divine ruler. While the king’s touch was supposed to be the sovereign remedy of the monarch, we know that the king was hardly the only one to touch for the evil. Magical healing was easily obtained in the seventeenth century, and cunning men and women peddled their cures throughout the country. Valentine Greatrakes was only one among a whole host of faith healers. The people who believed in the royal gift were also likely to be the same people who believed in a whole host of supernatural phenomenon, including ghosts, witches, and other healing figures. The king, then, was not such a unique figure in this regard. The effect of these rival healers was not unnoticed by the monarchy. Charles I was particularly sensitive on this account, and imprisoned numerous pretenders to his touch. However, while many Tories

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who defended the majesty of the king, like David Lloyd, recognized the dangers that false healers posed to the message of the ceremony, Charles II seemed largely unconcerned with the threat, and rarely prosecuted rival healers. He even summoned Greatrakes to the court to perform his touch, and let him heal throughout London unmolested.  

However, the greatest threat to the power of the king’s touch came from the changing attitudes of seventeenth century society. The two necessary ingredients for the royal gift of healing, a belief in the divine nature of royal government, and the continued presence of the supernatural in everyday life, was declining. Contract theories of government were increasingly articulated by authoritarian theorists like Thomas Hobbes, and by more ‘liberal’ radical thinkers associated with the Whigs. Whigs effectively spread their radical political thought throughout the country, and the threat of arbitrary rule from divine right monarchy loomed large in peoples’ minds. The words of a common prisoner in Tangier in 1664, that “kings are but men as other men”, was gaining acceptance in society at the expense of a divinely ordained monarchy. In addition to the decaying political attitudes that underlay the royal gift of healing, traditional views on the supernatural and miraculous were also under threat. Protestant theology had largely abandoned the miraculous in contemporary life, and even the miracles of the Bible were coming to be minimized in favor of “good morality.” The difficulty in justifying the king’s miraculous power, while dismissing all other miracles was an exercise in futility. Browne’s insistence that the king’s touch was not technically a miracle, but “ought not to come much beneath a Miracle,” was a rationale that stood upon quicksand, and could not long survive. In addition, the growing acceptance and popularity of the ‘new science’ of experimentalism and natural philosophy

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182 Duffy, “Valentine Greatrakes, the Irish Stroker,” 255-256.
further eroded belief in the supernatural. In a universe where God operated according to fixed laws, and all phenomena were explainable according to the natural order, the royal touch had no place.

Social status and class undoubtedly played a role in one’s attitudes and beliefs toward the nature of government and the miraculous, however. As Browne testified throughout *Adenochoiradelogia*, it was the poor who overwhelmingly sought the touch. Although the upper classes did seek the king’s healing gift, it was in much smaller numbers, and usually at one of the private ceremonies. Supernaturalism held much deeper roots in popular culture, and survived the onslaught of rational and empirical thought longer. However, early modern England was a time of unprecedentedly high political participation and literacy, and the ideas of the elites were shared throughout society. Indeed, sometimes these doubts originated among the lower classes, like the radical Protestant skepticism that arose among the poor.¹⁸³ Although doubts about the royal touch may have been most prevalent among the upper classes, many of the lower classes undoubtedly held them as well. And even those who were still firm believers in the supernatural could not help but see the openly political nature of the royal touch and its precarious religious position during the rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth, and in the failures of the reign of James II.

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Part Three

The Duke of Monmouth and the Politicization of the Royal Touch

Charles II had not earned his sobriquet, ‘the merry monarch’, idly. He applied himself diligently to the work, and by the end of his life, he had fathered at least twelve children with seven different women. Royal bastards were not an uncommon sight among court life, however, and while Charles came in for his fair share of gossip and disdain, his illegitimate children were not a problem in and of themselves. The real problem was that despite Charles’ virility, he was unable to beget a child with his lawful wife, Catherine of Braganza. In the indefeasible hereditary monarchy that Charles promoted, having no legitimate children was understandably a sore point for the king. However, the monarchy was prepared for such contingencies. Without a trueborn child, the line of succession would pass to Charles’ brother, James, the Duke of York. Normally, the passing of the crown to York would not have proved controversial. There was a major problem with the Duke of York, however, one that threatened the very foundations of the monarchy Charles had worked so hard to rebuild—York was a Catholic. York’s religious devotion would nearly destroy the monarchy Charles had inherited at his restoration, and by 1688, to a large extent it had.

England was not only a staunchly Protestant nation, but also a deeply anti-Catholic one. Memories of the brutalities Catholics supposedly inflicted on the English dominated the national consciousness—the reign of Bloody Mary, the last Catholic monarch to rule England; the attempted invasion of the Catholic Spanish Armada in 1558; the massacres of Protestants during the many rebellions by Irish Catholics; and the Fire of London in 1666 that most believed was started by Catholic conspirators. Englishmen did not only have to look to their own history to
fear the accession of a Catholic king, however. Louis XIV of France, with his absolutist, even arbitrary rule, and his persecution of the French Huguenots, provided a clear example of the type of rule England could expect from Catholic rule. Understandably then, a fervent opposition to York formed when it became clear that he was destined to inherit the throne. The Exclusionists, as they were known, sought desperately for a way to prevent the Catholic heir from assuming the crown. While many options were considered, there was one in particular that attracted many—Charles’ eldest child, James Scott, the Duke of Monmouth. Monmouth had much to recommend him to the exclusionists. Though he had been a notorious wastrel and rake during his youth at the Restoration Court, he had grown into a reasonably serious young man, and had proved his competency with his military exploits and unofficial command of the English Army. He was also popular with the people, and spontaneous eruptions of support for the young Duke were frequent during the latter part of Charles’ reign. Above all, however, he was a faithful Protestant. There was only one major problem—he was a bastard, or at least, Charles claimed he was.

Monmouth formed one of the central pillars of anti-York conspiracy in the 1680s, and, among the English people at least, he was the most popular alternative to the rise of a Catholic monarch. He was a central figure among the Whig revolutionaries who plotted against the monarchy in the early 1680s, and his ill-fated 1685 insurrection against York, who had just been crowned James II, was the last popular rebellion in England. Much has been written about the conflicting and confused motivations of Monmouth, his popular supporters, his fellow Whig conspirators, and his Tory opponents. However, central to all the debates about Monmouth was the question of his legitimacy, and there is no doubt that whatever Monmouth’s own personal ambitions were, he sought to prove he was the trueborn son of Charles. While legends of marriage certificates hidden in black boxes were the most prominent manifestations of attempts
to prove Monmouth was the rightful heir to the throne, perhaps the most suggestive and revealing was when he touched for the king’s evil during his semi-royal progresses through Western England in the early 1680s. Monmouth’s life was intimately bound up in the tempestuous politics of the time, and his career is extremely revealing of the intellectual clash of the era and of its impact on popular attitudes towards monarchy. His attempt at healing, then, is an especially valuable account of the way those ideological currents affected the royal touch towards the end of the seventeenth century.

**Early Life**

Monmouth was born on April 9, 1649, in Rotterdam. Charles was only nineteen when, nine months earlier, he had met the eighteen year old Lucy Walter, a beautiful and impetuous girl who had so far made her way in life by attaching herself to wealthy men.¹ Lucy had traveled to The Hague with the royalist Colonel Robert Sidney, but within a few months the exiled prince was to arrive at the court, a greater catch by far. Charles had traveled to Rotterdam to rendezvous with a group of parliamentary ships that had mutinied, and it was during his brief eight-day stay that Monmouth was evidently conceived, for nine months later, almost exactly to the day, Monmouth was born. The timing was so near that some were later to whisper Monmouth was not in fact Charles’ son at all. James II, the Duke of York, was later to hold that Monmouth more closely resembled Robert Sidney, “even to a little wart on his face”, than he did Charles.² York, of course, had a vested interest in denying Monmouth’s lineage, and in the end, most people regarded Monmouth as Charles’ son. Most importantly, Charles himself always believed

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² Clifton, *The Last Popular Rebellion*, 78.
Monmouth to be his child, and the few surviving portraits of Monmouth reveal a definite familial resemblance to the royal family. After his eight-day stay, Charles embarked from Rotterdam with the parliamentary ships, but to little avail, as the royal cause was already nearly over. Charles returned to The Hague a few months later, the Civil War lost, the king executed, and parliament firmly in control. Though the historical record is unclear, it is probable that Charles resumed his relationship with Lucy Walter during his stay, for Lucy was taken to present Henrietta Maria, Charles’ mother, with her first grandchild in August of 1649. However, Charles was leave Lucy that September as he prepared for his ill-fated Scottish expedition to reclaim the throne, and when he returned to France in 1651, his royalist army thoroughly defeated, he never again resumed relations with her. Charles’ relationship with Lucy, hasty and shrouded in obscurity, was to prove the subject of much rumor and gossip throughout Monmouth’s life, and the confusion around his origins were to dominate the young Monmouth’s future.

By all accounts, Monmouth had a trying childhood, with an unstable mother, a dizzying succession of residences and male figures, and repeated kidnapping attempts. After Charles left his mother, Lucy found her way to Viscount Taafe in Paris, with whom she probably had a daughter, Mary, in 1651; some held she was really Charles’ daughter, although there is no evidence that she was. She continued to “use in vain all her little arts” on Charles as well, but, as far as he was concerned, the affair was finished. Lucy had trouble maintaining relationships, leaving Taafe in 1654 to return to The Hague with her two children. While at The Hague, Lucy

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4 Clifton, *The Last Popular Rebellion*, 78.


6 Clifton, *The Last Popular Rebellion*, 78.
became the mistress of Thomas Howard, Master of the Horse to Princess Mary of Orange. However, Howard had his own family to support, and, accused of being a Parliamentary spy, he was dismissed by the Prince of Orange. Lucy, her condition and her temper deteriorating, again turned to Charles for support, and demanded that he pay her an annuity. Her behavior became the talk of “scurrilous stuff”, and when the king’s promise of payment was exposed as simple theatre, as his treasury did not have the money to pay her, she attempted to kill one of her maids. One of Charles’ agents at The Hague complained, “everie idle action of hirs brings your majestie upon the stage.” Charles was forced to find someway to contain the increasingly volatile Lucy, and, in a strange compromise, gave her some money and a pearl necklace, and sent her, Howard, and his family to England, apparently to live quietly until the hoped for Restoration, and more importantly, to stop disrupting the exile court. Living quietly, however, had never been Lucy’s strong suit, and, after spending openly and lavishly in London, Lucy tried to have one of her maids thrown into jail. The maid informed on her employers, and Cromwell’s forces imprisoned the group, including the young Monmouth, in the Tower of London. Apparently realizing that they were no spies or imposters, but simply fools, Cromwell had them shipped back to Flanders. On their return to the continent, Howard abandoned Lucy, and she was left penniless with her two children. Increasingly distraught, Lucy ordered a bravo to attack Howard in the street, who received a serious wound on his arm. After, she threatened to release Charles’ old letters to her if she did not receive the promised annuity. Charles, who was living in Paris with his new mistress Catherine Pegge, had apparently grown tired of Lucy’s dramatics, and with perhaps some paternal concern that Lucy was “ruining an innocent child by making a property of him to

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8 Clifton, *The Last Popular Rebellion*, 79.
support herself in [her] wild and disgraceful courses”, ordered Sir Arthur Slingsby, with whom Lucy and her children were staying, to abduct the young Monmouth and bring him to the exiled court.\textsuperscript{10} The first attempt was a disaster, and the spectacle of Slingsby attempting to drag Monmouth from his wailing mother in the middle of the street brought a sharp reproof from the Spanish governor of Brussels. Charles was not discouraged however, and in March 1658, sent one of his spymasters, Sir Thomas Ross, to abduct the boy. He was successful, and Monmouth was parted forever from his mother, who was to die before the end of the year.\textsuperscript{11} Monmouth was only nine. Monmouth’s early childhood was tumultuous, to say the least. With no stable home or family, frequently penurious, and little education, Monmouth’s later life was forever marked by his formative years. In particular, Lucy inculcated in her young son a sense of his own importance and frequently told him he was the son of a king, a king, however, who had abandoned him until the traumatic kidnapping attempt that separated him from his mother forever. Monmouth’s early childhood, chaotic and broken, deeply influenced his conduct later in life.\textsuperscript{12}

Though Monmouth had been taken on his father’s order, at the moment Charles still had little interest in connecting with his son. Monmouth was sent to Paris, where he was put under the care of William, Lord Crofts, who gave Monmouth his first surname. Monmouth’s education had been totally neglected up till that point, and he could neither read nor write.\textsuperscript{13} Lord Crofts, unfortunately, was more concerned with the pleasures of life, like dancing and hunting, then educating his young charge, and though Charles appointed Monmouth’s erstwhile kidnapper Tom Ross to tutor the boy, Monmouth’s education remained woefully inadequate. Perhaps

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\item \textsuperscript{10} Clifton, \textit{The Last Popular Rebellion}, 80.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography}.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Clifton, \textit{The Last Popular Rebellion}, 81-2.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Clifton, \textit{The Last Popular Rebellion}, 82.
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through the influence of his grandmother, Henrietta Maria, Monmouth was enrolled in a *petite école*, and later the academy of Family, though these attempts at Catholicization had no effect. While he learned enough to read and write, penning a letter to his father at the age of fifteen made him “sigh and sweat”, and, intellectually, it can be argued he was very ill-prepared for court life.\(^\text{14}\)

Despite the fact that Charles had had Monmouth kidnapped, he did not actually see much of his son before the Restoration. It was not until 1662, when Charles had been on the English throne for two years, that he summoned Monmouth to him, who traveled to the English court among other distinguished company, including his guardian, William Lord Crofts, and the Queen Mother, Henrietta Maria. Though Charles had undoubtedly been neglectful of his son up to that point, the sight of the young boy aroused his paternal instinct, and Monmouth quickly won the deep affection of his father.\(^\text{15}\) The thirteen-year-old boy was energetic and vivacious, and Samuel Pepys remarked upon first seeing Monmouth that there was a “most pretty sparke” about him.\(^\text{16}\) By all accounts, the boy charmed the whole court, and even the Duke of York, who was to become Monmouth’s chief antagonist, later remarked that he was “very handsome… tall, well-shaped, a good air, [with] civil behaviour.”\(^\text{17}\) Monmouth’s antics were well noted by the court, and Pepys’s assessment of Monmouth as “the most skittish leaping gallant that I ever saw”, was not inaccurate. In 1667, after a ceremony of the Order of the Garter, Monmouth chased a few knights, still in their robes, around Hyde Park, and then held impromptu races in a

\(^{14}\) Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

\(^{15}\) Clifton, *The Last Popular Rebellion*, 83.


\(^{17}\) Clifton, *The Last Popular Rebellion*, 83.
commandeered hackney coach, which Pepys remarked was “a scandalous thing, so as all gravity may be said to be lost among us.”\(^\text{18}\)

However, Monmouth’s spontaneity and liveliness attracted Charles, and he soon showered Monmouth with titles and honors. In February 1663, only a few months after arriving at the court, Monmouth was officially created Duke of Monmouth, Earl of Doncaster, and Baron of Fotheringay, and invested with the Order of the Garter. He was given precedence over all dukes not of the royal blood, and was even allowed to take arms that resembled the royal one, without the baton sinister that denoted illegitimacy. Charles also quickly arranged for his son to marry the young, and very wealthy, Scottish heiress Anna Scott, countess of Buccleuch, in preparation for which he took the surname Scott, which was a requirement Anna’s father had made for any who married his daughter.\(^\text{19}\) Charles also made sure Monmouth was well provided for, and granted him a patent on the export of all new drapery, a further pension of 6000 pounds, and even bought him the Chiswick residence of Sir John Ashburnham.

Charles’ obvious affection for his son did not go unnoticed by the court, and soon led to unsettling rumors about Monmouth’s position. In 1662, it was remarked that Monmouth was “in so great splendour at Court, and so dandled by the King, that some doubt, if the King should have no child by the Queen… whether he would not be acknowledged for a lawful son; and that there will be a difference follow upon it between the Duke of York and him… God prevent!”\(^\text{20}\) In July of 1663, George Digby, in his premature attempt to unseat the Earl of Clarendon, accused the earl of calling Monmouth legitimate. After Clarendon’s actual fall in 1667, and with York’s increasing unpopularity for his naval failures in the Second Dutch War and his conversion to


\(^{19}\) Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

Catholicism in 1668, talk of Monmouth’s legacy intensified. Lord Conway, who had earlier entertained Valentine Greatrakes at his court, wrote that either Charles would divorce his barren wife, or he would legitimate Monmouth. The slowly forming opposition to the Duke of York, led by the Earl of Shaftesbury and the Earl of Carlisle, urged Charles to legitimate Monmouth to prevent York’s succession. Even in the countryside, rumors were beginning to circulate that Charles had secretly married Lucy, and that three bishops had been present who could prove it.\(^21\)

Even before Monmouth had reached manhood then, his uncertain lineage put him at the center of courtly intrigue, and his troubled relationship with his family led him to proclaim in 1664 that “he would be the death of any man that says the King was not married to his mother.”\(^22\)

Despite Monmouth’s boastful claim he clearly had no design on the throne, and was deeply loyal to his father. He was also a typical product of the Restoration court, and despite the honors and precedence that Charles gave him, Pepys remarked that the young duke spent “his time the most viciously and idly of any man.”\(^23\) Dancing, hunting, drinking, and horse racing took up most of his time, and as he entered adolescence, he added womanizing to the list, in which he took decidedly after his father. He also lived extravagantly, and despite his generous pensions, he was often in debt, and could run through nine thousand pounds in nine months on clothes alone, which prompted Charles to provide further gifts to help his son pay off his debts.\(^24\)

His position and vigor made him the natural leader of his peer group, who gallivanted about London, frequenting the coffee houses and setting popular fads, like the ‘Monmouth cock’, which Pepys decried as wearing one’s “hat like a fool behind.”\(^25\) Though Monmouth was in

\(^{21}\) Clifton, *The Last Popular Rebellion*, 87.
\(^{22}\) Pepys, “22 February 1664,” *Diaries*, (http://www.pepysdiary.com/archive/1664/02/).
\(^{24}\) Clifton, *The Last Popular Rebellion*, 89.
\(^{25}\) Clifton, *The Last Popular Rebellion*, 89.
many ways a spoiled wastrel who spent his youth on disposable pleasures, in a sense he was
simply reflecting the Restoration court to which he belonged, and his father continued to dote on
his son, treating Monmouth as if he were the Prince of Wales.\(^\text{26}\)

Despite Pepys’ disapproval, Monmouth continued to gain prestige and titles. He was
awarded an honorary degree from Cambridge and admitted a member of the Middle Temple in
1663. However, he was destined for a military career, and in 1665, he accompanied his uncle the
Duke of York during the battle of Solebay in the Second Dutch War. His poise and courage
during the battle won him praise from Charles, and in 1666, he was given a commission as a
captain of a troop of horse, and in 1668, he was made captain of the Life Guards, the personal
protectors of the king himself, after Charles had bribed the current captain out.\(^\text{27}\) However,
despite his growing power, Monmouth had not mastered his impulsive and violent nature, and
his actions in early 1671 caused not a little disquiet. When Sir John Coventry, a member of
parliament, made a joke in the House of Commons about the king’s interest in actresses,
Monmouth sent four men, two from the Life guard, to attack and slit Coventry’s nose. It was
possible that Monmouth acted under orders from his father, but the incident caused a minor
scandal, and parliament passed the Coventry Act in response, making it a capital offence to
maim any man, without benefit of clergy or amnesty from the king.\(^\text{28}\) A few weeks later
Monmouth went to a brothel with his courtier friends, including Christopher Monck, son of the
recently deceased Captain General of the army George Monck, and now the Duke of Albermarle.
The group got into a drunken brawl, and when a beadle was summoned to suppress the melee, he

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\(^{26}\) Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

\(^{27}\) Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

\(^{28}\) Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 
was run through with a sword. It remained a mystery whether Monmouth or Albemarle had wielded the weapon, but both were quickly given royal pardons.\textsuperscript{29}

However, Monmouth quickly overcame the incidents, and his father continued to promote his son lavishly, with membership of the House of Lords and Privy Council in 1670 and the Chief Justiceship in Eyre in 1672. Monmouth was undoubtedly the king’s favorite, and attempts by a group of courtiers to promote another of Charles’ bastards, Charles FitzCharles, met with no success.\textsuperscript{30} Monmouth’s honors remained only that, however, and he was not a real political force in the nation except in the whispered conspiracies of courtiers, until he began his military career in earnest. As Captain of the Life Guards, Monmouth showed some attention to detail when he undertook an inventory of their arms and uncovered some serious deficiencies, and he presided impressively over their annual parades.\textsuperscript{31} In 1672, however, Monmouth established himself as a serious soldier, and made his greatest impression to date, when he was given command over the English troops sent to fight with the French against the Dutch. The French King, Louis XIV, was particularly taken with Monmouth, and gave him command of one of the four bodies of French troops besieging Maastricht. He led two battalions into battle, and showed his flexibility and determination in charging the Dutch entrenchments with a group of French musketeers, including the famous D’Artagnan, who was killed in the assault, and some English nobles. Monmouth dislodged the Dutch troops, and though it was only one battle, Maastricht cemented his military reputation in England and assured his popularity among the people. Indeed, Charles had a mock recreation of the siege performed in 1674, in which

\textsuperscript{29} Clifton, \textit{The Last Popular Rebellion}, 90.
\textsuperscript{30} Clifton, \textit{The Last Popular Rebellion}, 92.
\textsuperscript{31} Clifton, \textit{The Last Popular Rebellion}, 92.
Monmouth took center stage in reliving his glorious battle.\textsuperscript{32} Charles’ promotion of his son’s glorious exploits would prove troublesome in only a few short years.

After the Captain-General of the Army, George Monck, died, Charles left the position unfilled, preferring instead to let the army be governed by an unofficial council, which included the Duke of York. Charles gradually included Monmouth in the council, and with the passage of the Test Act in 1673, which was designed to exclude Catholics from office, he gained increasing influence over the political life of the country. He was appointed lord lieutenant of the East Riding of Yorkshire and governor and captain of Kingston upon Hull, Master of the Horse, a privy councilor of Scotland, and chancellor of Cambridge University. When York surrendered the office of Lord High Admiral when he refused to take the Test Act, Monmouth was appointed in his place, which caused the first rupture in the relationship between the two Dukes. Monmouth, aware of the jealousy of his uncle, refused to replace the brutal Duke of Lauderdale as commissioner for Scotland to prevent the envy and anger of his uncle.\textsuperscript{33} However, it was clear that Monmouth was gaining increasing political power apart from his position as son of the king, and was being groomed for post of Captain-General of the army.

Although Monmouth had no commission or official title, Charles ordered that all matters relating to the army should be brought first to Monmouth for examination before being sent for royal approval, a way of “initiating him into business.”\textsuperscript{34} Monmouth further proved his increasing competence by his control of the army. Though York still technically made all appointments over the rank of captain, Monmouth intervened whenever he could, sending letters of recommendation and encouragement. He heard the case of an ensign accused of killing his

\textsuperscript{32} Clifton, \textit{The Last Popular Rebellion}, 92.
\textsuperscript{33} Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography}.
\textsuperscript{34} Clifton, \textit{The Last Popular Rebellion}, 94.
captain, personally replaced a colonel whose ill health led to indiscipline among his troops, circulated instructions for the proper recruitment, and actively petitioned the French army to improve the conditions of the English garrison overseas. Monmouth did not just intervene in the small details but took a prominent role in three broad attempts to reform the military. In 1675 he drafted a basic code of discipline, consisting of ten articles, which banned blasphemy, swearing, drunkenness, and disrespect toward superiors, and prescribed death for sentries who slept on their watch or sold arms to civilians. It also warned officers specifically of their duty to see that pay was correct and regular, to supervise the making and breaking of camp, and to prevent arguments and quarrels.35 With the Duke of Buckingham he also attempted to reform the system of military drill along the successful French model with the printing of the *Abridgement of English Military Discipline*, ordering 1500 copies of the book printed and distributed to the army. Though this measure encountered some resistance among the conservative officers, and it was probably not widely used, his revision of the payment system, which he devised with the paymaster-general, was highly successful. Monmouth was also responsible for the suppression of riots in London, and put down the weavers’ riots of 1675. The English military at the time was small, around 6000 strong, and Monmouth, with his easy manner and active role, became familiar and even popular to a wide part of the army.36

Monmouth’s increasing authority and influence was real, but he was still to a large extent dependent on his father’s power base. He remained a loyal royalist throughout the 1670’s, and did not associate with the growing country and Whig opposition to the court and to the Duke of York. Though his popularity with the London crowds, which often cheered him as the ‘Protestant Duke’, fueled speculation that he would inherit the throne, he was not considered a serious

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36 Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 
alternative by the opposition yet. The unofficial spokesperson of the Whigs, Anthony Cooper, the first Earl of Shaftesbury, even went so far as to list Monmouth as “very, very vile” when he drew up a list of his allies and enemies in parliament.\(^{37}\) It was not until 1678 that the first major rupture between Monmouth and the court occurred. Monmouth had served as the unofficial Captain-General of the army for a few years, had proven his competence, and in 1678 petitioned the king to give him an official commission, in light of the growing conflict between the French and Dutch in which he would have to take command. Charles finally acquiesced, and a commission was drawn up. York, angered that his nephew was being promoted so highly while his own reputation had fallen, and placated with the meaningless title of generalissimo of the military, ordered the king’s secretary to include the term ‘natural son’ in Monmouth’s commission, a term used to denote illegitimacy. Up to that point, all Monmouth’s commissions had not included the slur, often using the style “our dearest and beloved son” instead, and York must have been aware the inclusion might cause some controversy.\(^{38}\)

When Monmouth saw the disparaging wording, he ordered his own secretary to erase the phrase, and Charles signed the document without looking it over. York, however, did, and furious at Monmouth’s deception, brought the matter to the king, who had the document destroyed and a new one written up with the proper wording.\(^{39}\) It is interesting that Charles, who up to that point had not been particular about asserting his son’s illegitimacy, went through the annoyance of drawing up two documents. It might speak to his desire to appease his brother, but the growing rumors, particularly among the London crowds, that Monmouth would be declared legitimate, probably motivated him even more. Monmouth was deeply offended by the slur on

\(^{39}\) Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 
his status, and consequently on his mother, and to show his anger, voted with the opposition in parliament for the first time in 1678. Though he had no designs on the throne, he obviously viewed himself as the true son of Charles and could not abide any attacks on his lineage. However, he was quickly drawn away from the court, and from any further infighting, when he traveled to Flanders at the outbreak of battle, which ended inconclusively a few months later. He returned to the English court in late August, a chip probably still on his shoulder. However, the conflict with his uncle was overshadowed by new rumors, rumors of a Catholic conspiracy to kill the king. Monmouth was about to be drawn into the chaos of the Popish Plot, and the issue of his legitimacy was to become one of the dominant features of debate in the turmoil of the Exclusion Crisis.

The Exclusion Crisis

Titus Oates, with his twisted visage, flagrant self-importance, and unsavory personality, has become one of the chief villains of English history. This was not always the case, however, and for a brief moment in the early 1680s, his wild accusations seized the entire nation in the grip of fear, and plunged the restored crown into a serious crisis that threatened the very nature of the monarchical rule Charles had steadfastly rebuilt. Though Oates’ account of the popish plot did not initially implicate the Duke of York as one of the conspirators, it was inevitable that York, whose Catholicism been made public a few years previously by his refusal to conform to the Test Act, would become embroiled in the controversy, and sure enough, the Popish plot quickly merged into the Exclusion Crisis and the fear that a Catholic would inherit the throne and institute popery and arbitrary government.\(^{40}\) In response to this fear, the opposition that had been

\(^{40}\) Harris, \textit{Restoration}, 137-8.
slowly forming throughout the 1670’s was galvanized into action, and party politics began, with the Whigs supporting exclusion and seeking any way to prevent the ascendancy of the Duke of York, and the Tories defending the indefeasible hereditary principle of the monarchy and attacking the threat of republican government. The Duke of Monmouth, as the king’s most favored son, popular among the people, Protestant, and recently estranged from his uncle, was inevitably drawn into the crisis, and was openly talked of as a potential successor to the crown. The nature of his legitimacy, and consequently, the nature of monarchical government itself, became central to the arguments surrounding Exclusion. Monmouth’s attempt at healing then, is a uniquely valuable example of the way these debates and ideologies informed beliefs on the royal touch.

When Monmouth returned from Flanders in August of 1678, the Popish Plot was still only a vague and undefined rumor. Charles himself was extremely skeptical of the accusations, and it was not until September that his Privy Council finally convinced him to summon Oates to give a deposition before the court. Monmouth, following his father’s lead, did not take the plot seriously at first, and along with his father, left the initial hearings early to attend the Newmarket horse races. Both of them missed Titus Oates masterful performance in the afternoon. He spun his tales with such force and conviction that the Privy Council became genuinely alarmed, and a full-scale investigation was launched into the Catholic conspiracy. Monmouth, as Master of the Horse and Captain of the Life Guards, responsible for the king’s protection, was inevitably drawn into the investigation. Monmouth was appointed a member of the special committee set up to investigate the plot, and delivered the group’s recommendations to the House of Lords. Monmouth, with his former experience in putting down London riots, was responsible for

41 Clifton, The Last Popular Rebellion, 105.
ensuring the safety of the informants, carrying out the house searches, and as Captain-General, removing Catholics from the army. He naturally was appointed to the parliamentary committee, overseen by the Earl of Shaftesbury, which took over the investigations from the Privy Council.42

Monmouth, however, was not a fanatical instrument, and he treated many supposed conspirators with generosity, returning some sensitive letters unopened to the wife of one of the suspects, and refusing to dismiss one of his Catholic servants for a year, until he finally sent him to France with a personal letter of recommendation.43 He also remained loyal to his father for the time being, voting against the second Test Act in November 1678. However, his growing estrangement from his uncle became evident when he excused himself when the proviso exempting the Duke of York from the provision was brought up. Though he initially voted against impeaching Charles’ advisor the Earl of Danby, by March 1679 the opposition members of parliament, the Earls of Shaftesbury and Essex, convinced Monmouth to drop his support. While there is no evidence that Monmouth yet harbored any pretensions to the throne, he was being slowly drawn into the exclusionists’ intrigues. It was also around this time that Londoners began regularly demonstrating for Monmouth’s succession. In November 1678 Charles appeared before both houses of parliament in an attempt to quell the growing desire for exclusion of the Duke of York, but his pronouncement that he would consent to any laws that would make the people “safe in the reign of my successor” reached the streets as a resolution that Monmouth was to succeed to the throne, and bonfires were lit throughout London in celebration, the first of many such spontaneous eruptions of support for the ‘Protestant Duke’.44

44 Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.
It was in May 1679 that the House of Commons introduced the first Exclusion Bill into parliament. However, the bill held that the succession should pass to the next lawful heir, as if the Duke of York were dead, implying that York’s daughter, the Protestant Mary, and her husband William of Orange, should succeed to the throne, not Monmouth. Clearly, the leaders of exclusion in parliament were still uncomfortable with Monmouth, poorly educated and still seeking his father’s favor above all else.\footnote{Harris, \textit{Restoration}, 161-2.} However, his role in protecting London from the Popish Plot only increased his popularity with the masses, and Whig printers began circulating pamphlets that claimed Charles had actually married Monmouth’s mother Lucy Walter, and that a black box existed which contained the evidence. Support for Monmouth slowly grew, and Monmouth’s close follower Sir Thomas Armstrong busied himself with a very public search for the black box.\footnote{Clifton, \textit{The Last Popular Rebellion}, 110-11.} Monmouth was unable, and perhaps unwilling, to silence the public champions of his succession, though he still remained at arm’s length from the Whigs in parliament.

When the Scottish covenanters rose in rebellion in the spring of 1679, Charles gave Monmouth a commission as Captain-General of the Scottish army and ordered him to put down the rebellion. Clearly, Charles still trusted his son, but his ulterior motive, prompted by Monmouth’s growing popularity, may have been to remove the Duke from London and the hotbed of exclusionist intrigues. Whatever the case, Monmouth again proved his military skill, and won a decisive victory against the rebels at the Battle of Bothwell Bridge on June 22. Monmouth demonstrated the control he exercised over his troops when he prevented a massacre of the quickly scattered Scots. Only three hundred rebels were killed, while a thousand were captured. Monmouth urged leniency for the captured Scots, and Charles was convinced, granting an indemnity to most of the imprisoned rebels, and passing an indulgence to allow all Scottish...
Presbyterians to meet in house conventicles.\footnote{Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography}.} When Monmouth returned to London in July to much adulation numerous pamphlets were printed to celebrate his military exploits. The Whigs, whose Exclusion Bill had been frustrated when Charles dissolved Parliament, began to think of Monmouth, whose popularity among the masses and role in the military gave him a uniquely powerful position, as a viable means to unseat the Duke of York. Monmouth, perhaps finally convinced by the praise and support heaped upon him, and still in a deep feud with his uncle, allowed himself to be drawn into the Whig plots, and he met frequently with Shaftesbury throughout that summer. Speculation about the black box revived, and Thomas Armstrong met with many nobles, such as the Earl of Oxford, and the London radical Francis Jenks, in an attempt to gain support for Monmouth’s succession.\footnote{Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography}.}

The situation in London was becoming increasingly volatile, but matters were brought to a head when Charles fell gravely ill on August 21, and for a few tense days seemed near death. The issue of the succession was no longer a distant fear, but an immediate crisis, and lines were drawn between the Whigs and Tories. York was in Brussels when Charles became sick, but Monmouth had remained in England, and split his time between Windsor, where his father lay, and London. While we cannot accurately say what Monmouth’s goals were during this time, he urged Charles to keep York in Brussels. The opponents of exclusion clearly feared Monmouth’s intentions, and the Earl of Sunderland remarked that if the king died, Monmouth “would have made great troubles, either setting up for himself, or for a Commonwealth.”\footnote{Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography}.} Charles recovered, however, and a potentially disastrous crisis was averted, but the tensions over the succession had not been resolved, and Monmouth’s popularity in England only increased, with numerous

\footnote{Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography}.}
pamphlets published praising the ‘Protestant Duke’. Monmouth’s association with the Whigs and Shaftesbury must have troubled Charles, and the Earls of Essex and Halifax convinced him that the best way to reduce the tension after his near death was to send both York and Monmouth into exile. Charles revoked Monmouth’s commissions as Captain-General of the Scottish and English army, and sent the two Dukes into exile in September. In another troubling sign of Monmouth’s popularity, however, false reports that Charles had changed his mind and kept Monmouth in London led to another bonfire celebration the night of September 17.\(^{50}\)

Monmouth left for Utrecht on the 24\(^{th}\) September 1679, while York was sent to Brussels. Monmouth at first seemed as if he would quietly wait out his exile in Europe until the controversy had been contained. However, his feud with the Duke of York was too deep, and when Charles summoned his brother to London to give him control of the Scottish government, Monmouth was outraged. Flouting his father’s orders, he came back to London on the evening of 27\(^{th}\) November to a rapturous welcome from the London crowds. So many bonfires were lit throughout the city that it was remarked its like had not been seen since the celebrations “for the restoration of his Majesty.”\(^{51}\) Charles, naturally outraged that his son had so flagrantly disobeyed him, and fearful of his popularity and ability to destabilize the regime, stripped Monmouth of all his remaining offices (except Master of the Horse and Chancellor of Cambridge University), and ordered him to return to exile. Monmouth refused to go, publicly claiming he would rather be sent to any prison in the city than remain in exile. Charles’ anger grew, and he banned Monmouth’s very name from court. However, he was unwilling to take direct action against his eldest son, and Monmouth had free rein of the city.\(^{52}\)

\(^{50}\) Clifton, *The Last Popular Rebellion*, 110-11.

\(^{51}\) Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

\(^{52}\) Clifton, *The Last Popular Rebellion*, 115-16.
Monmouth’s bitter break with the royal court in 1680 led him into a shaky alliance with the Whig leader, the Earl of Shaftesbury. Many historians have long argued that Shaftesbury simply used Monmouth, the charismatic but uneducated Duke, as a rallying point to garner support for exclusion, without any actual intention of deciding the succession on him. While Whig attitudes were certainly ambivalent towards Monmouth, it is important to remember that their doubts were driven more by his perceived intellectual shortcomings and his continued desire for rapprochement with his father than any concerns about his legitimacy. Whigs had long distanced themselves from strict acceptance of hereditary monarchy, and all options, including the succession of Monmouth, were considered in their desire to prevent the rule of York. For his part, Monmouth was probably driven more by his deep anger at the disgrace he suffered from his father and uncle, and a desire to prove his legitimacy and worth, than any deeply held political feelings. However, as he frequented Whig gatherings in London during the early 1680s, it is probable that he began to embrace Whig ideology to a certain extent. However, many supporters of Monmouth continued to champion the Duke as the legitimate son of the king, and in the pamphlets that were published during the 1680s, both arguments derived from secular, contractual monarchy and indefeasible hereditary rule were employed, betokening the ideological divisions that had seized the kingdom.

Perhaps the most incendiary pamphlet was *An appeal from the country to the city*. Written by Charles Blount, it was published in October 1679 and quickly circulated throughout London. Besides painting a horrifying and detailed portrait of the atrocities a Catholic successor would inflict on the English people, the tract defended Monmouth’s right to the throne. However, Blount did not argue that Monmouth was the legitimate heir to the throne. In fact, he

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based his defense on the very fact that Monmouth was illegitimate. According to Blount, “He who hath the worst Title, ever makes the best King.” A few months later a tract by William Lawrence, *Marriage by the Morall Law of God*, was published, in which Lawrence argued that fully solemnized church marriages were irrelevant, and so the notion of illegitimacy was meaningless. Consequently, there was no reason Monmouth should not accede to the throne. However, many others continued to champion Monmouth as a legitimate son, claimed that Charles and Lucy had secretly been married, and that the infamous black box contained the evidence. Though some Whigs may have pushed his legitimacy not out of genuine belief, but a desire to gain supporters among those who still believed in sacred, hereditary monarchy, rumors of the marriage and Monmouth’s legitimacy were rampant out of doors, so much that the Privy Council was forced to issue declarations that the king had never married Lucy Walter. Even among the supporters of Monmouth, then, there were a variety of opinions regarding the nature of his claim to the throne, and both hereditary monarchy and contractual government theories featured in arguments supporting the Duke.

However, the diminishing importance of divine right theory in society is evident, and even for the Tory opponents of exclusion, those champions of sacred, absolute monarchy, arguments that relied on the constraints of common law on the prerogatives of the king were as important as those of divine right kingship. Clearly, the belief in an indefeasible, unchallengeable monarchy was no longer universally held, despite Charles’ diligent attempts to promote belief in his divinely mandated authority, in no small part through royal rituals like the touch. Arguments that relied on the nature of divine right alone were not enough, and the

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54 Charles Blount, *An appeal from the country to the city, for the preservation of His Majesties person, liberty, property, and the Protestant religion*, (London: 1679), 7-8.
55 Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
57 Harris, *Restoration*, 229-231.
supporters of Monmouth were ultimately drawn to him, not because they believed he was the legitimate son of the king, but because he was not the Duke of York. The rumors of his legitimacy were a retrospective attempt to try and justify his claim to the throne. Even among the commoners, with whom Monmouth was so popular, his legitimacy was not the real issue. They ultimately supported him because he was the ‘Protestant Duke’ who would prevent the arbitrary rule of a Catholic monarch. In such an environment, Monmouth’s uncertain and clumsy attempts at touching for the evil were met with dismay and embarrassment by many of his supporters, made obvious the openly propagandistic and political nature of the healing ceremony, and reopened the religious wounds that had long weakened its power.

The Western Progress and Touching for the King’s Evil

During the winter of 1680, Monmouth met frequently with Whig leaders. However, it was probably Shaftesbury’s sensational attack on the Duke of York as a common Catholic recusant that finally brought the two men together. Monmouth, whose feud with York had melded into outright hatred, could not resist the chance for revenge on his enemy, whom he held responsible for his disgrace from court, and he saw in Shaftesbury a clear path to reclaim his popularity and political importance. Whether Shaftesbury thought of Monmouth as the successor to the throne is a matter of debate, but it is clear that he found Monmouth’s popularity and appeal useful in gathering public support for exclusion, and he encouraged Monmouth to attend public gatherings of the opposition; Monmouth often dined with fifty to sixty Whig nobles and gentry at a time while in London.\(^58\) These public appearances were just the prelude, however, to Monmouth’s

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\(^58\) Clifton, The Last Popular Rebellion, 126.
grand summer journey through the west to canvass Whig support, and perhaps, to feed his self-worth and desire for approval. It was in late July of 1680 that Monmouth set out, in open defiance of his father’s orders, on what was to become a semi-royal progress through the south west of England, and it was during his journey that he first touched for the king’s evil.

Monmouth set out in July, traveling to various villages and towns in Western England to meet with leading Whig nobles and gentry, who hosted him lavishly and with ceremony befitting the Prince of Wales. While the journey many have not have initially been designed as a grand public spectacle, it quickly became apparent that Monmouth’s popularity was not confined to the London crowds. Everywhere he traveled, the villagers and townspeople from miles around came out to greet him, people “of all sorts, all sexes, all ages and degrees,” cheering the “Protestant Duke” with bells and bonfires. Monmouth traveled first to Bath, then Shaftesbury’s home in Dorset, and finally met the local Whig gentry in Wiltshire, Somerset, and Devon, and everywhere he went he was received with similar outpourings of support, from both the local Whig gentry and from the public. Monmouth’s journey quickly turned into a semi-royal progress, and the support he received undoubtedly bolstered the hopes of the exclusionists, and caused the king and court even greater dismay than before. It was also during this progress that Monmouth first touched for the evil, and his attempts did not go unnoticed.

However, it is unfair to claim that Monmouth set himself up as a royal healer, for the evidence we have indicates Monmouth had no intention of curing anyone’s scrofula when he set out on his journey. Instead, his singular touch for the evil was the result of an ‘impulse’ from a young woman who was inflicted with the disease. Elizabeth Parcer was a twenty-year-old widows daughter who lived in the town of Crewkerne in Somerset County. She had “languished

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under the sad afflicting Distemper of the Kings Evil” for nearly ten years.\(^6^0\) Her case was particularly gruesome, for she suffered from the virulent strain of scrofula known as the “Joint Evil.” Running, noisome sores covered her body, inflicting her hands, arms, breasts, and face with debilitating pain, and leaving her nearly blind in her left eye. Her mother, a poor widow with many other daughters, was unable to send Elizabeth to London to receive the king’s touch. She “went to the Chirurgeons for help, who tampered with it for a time, but could do no good”, and the touch of a seventh son was likewise ineffective. Elizabeth and her mother despaired of ever finding a cure, “and nothing was expected but a Grave” for the young woman.\(^6^1\) The desperation that scrofula, and all diseases, caused in Early Modern England is evident. In the face of deadly and debilitating sickness, people turned to anything that could potentially give them a cure, both the natural and the miraculous. While belief in the supernatural remained powerful, it is clear that many people were driven to these faith healers out of despair as much as genuine belief. The desperate efforts of the Parcer’s provide eloquent testimony that the popularity of the royal touch probably rested as much in the inadequacy of contemporary medicine as in wholehearted belief in the sacred qualities of the king. It is also notable that the king’s touch was only regarded as one option among many. Though the monarch’s healing gift was presented as a divine and sovereign cure, among the people who sought it out, it was simply another among an array of healing claims.

However, though all avenues had seemed to be exhausted, “God, the great Phisician” revealed to Elizabeth Parcer the path to a cure. A heavenly voice came to Elizabeth and told her that she “was to go and touch the Duke of Monmouth” if she sought to be healed. However, when the girl told her mother of the voice, she “reprov’d her for her foolish conceit.” Elizabeth

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\(^6^0\) Henry Clark, *His Grace The Duke of Monmouth Honoured in His Progress In the West of England*, (London; Printed for Benjamin Harris, 1680), unpaginated.

\(^6^1\) Clark, *His Grace The Duke of Monmouth Honoured*, unpaginated.
continued to entreat her mother, who was adamant that her vision was false. However, the girl was certain that the Duke of Monmouth was the solution to her ills, and resolved to find the Duke and receive his healing touch. When she learned that Monmouth was to meet with Sir John Sydenham at the White Lodge in Henton Park, she traveled there among the large crowd of her neighbors who sought to cheer on the Duke. She waited patiently for Monmouth to make his entrance into the park, and when she caught sight of him “she prest in amongst the croud, and catcht him by the hand.”62 However, Monmouth was wearing gloves, as was Elizabeth, who wanted to hide her gruesome sores. She was not satisfied with the first attempt, for to her mind, she had to touch some part of his naked flesh. Elizabeth, “between Hope and Fear”, waited anxiously for Monmouth to return. On the news that the Duke was passing by again, she tore off her glove in haste, in her desperation ripping away “not only the Sores, but the skin.” Fortunately, the Duke’s own glove was hanging down, exposing the upper part of his wrist. Elizabeth “prest on, and catcht him by the bare Hand with her running Hand; saying, God bless Your Greatness; and the D. said, God bless you.” 63 Elizabeth was understandably overjoyed at her success and the resolution of ten years of miserable pain and suffering. She told all her friends that she would be well, but her mother “reproved her very sharply for her boldness, and askt her how she durst do any such thing? and threatened to beat her for it.” However, Elizabeth’s divine voice proved to be right, for in five days the running sores on her arms and hands had dried up, within ten days the “bunch in her brest” had dissolved, and the eye that had been given up for lost was perfectly healed.

The extraordinary cure of the young widow’s daughter was attested to by “both Mother and Daughter, and Neighbours that know her.” However, it was the testimony of the leaders of

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63 Clark, *His Grace The Duke of Monmouth Honoured*, unpaginated.
the town that was most important. Henry Clark, the minister of the parish, recorded the miraculous cure, which was published by Benjamin Harris, the entrepreneurial London based Whig printer, in the broadside *His Grace The Duke of Monmouth Honoured in His Progress In the West of England*. Besides Clark, other prominent men of the town attached their names to the account, including Captain James Bale and Captain Richard Sherlock and the clerk John Stacky. The original copy of the document with their authentic signatures was kept at the Amsterdam Coffee-House in Bartholomew Lane, so that anyone who doubted the truth of the story might be satisfied “by sight of the Original under the hands of the Persons before mentioned.” As we have seen throughout, the testimony of reliable witnesses was paramount in establishing the truth of a story.

The London presses soon picked up Henry Clark’s account of Monmouth’s wondrous cure, and the story was printed verbatim by a number of different publishers. Most were interested in sales, for news of the Duke of Monmouth was a popular attraction during the exclusion crisis. However, outside of the residents of Crewkerne itself, there is no evidence that there was widespread Whig support for the idea that Monmouth’s touch could cure scrofula. Besides Benjamin Harris’ first printing, no other Whig propagandists printed the story or touted Monmouth’s miraculous cure as proof of his legitimacy. The story of the touch is curious, and most historians that have written about Monmouth and his journey in the west have held that he touched for the evil intentionally, in order to “signify his belief in his own royal dignity.”

However, the story of Elizabeth Parcer indicates that Monmouth probably had no intention of setting himself up as a royal healer. A girl who had long suffered from the debilitating illness of scrofula, and experienced a divine revelation that the handsome, popular prince possessed the

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64 Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 
healing gift, sought his touch out of desperation and divine revelation. It is not even certain that
Monmouth, whom no one accused of being modest, realized at first that the wretched young girl
clutched at his hand in order to rid herself of scrofula, and not out of awe and love for his
charismatic personage.

While Monmouth was never to outright deny that he possessed the royal touch, the Duke
and other Whig leaders did not again mention his miraculous cure in their efforts to establish
Monmouth as the alternative to the Duke of York. Whigs, needless to say, were not the strongest
supporters of divine right kingship, and many of them possessed strong dissenting religious
beliefs. The royal rite of healing was foremost in their minds as a symbol of monarchical
arrogance and excess, and a reminder of the arbitrary reign of the Catholic French king who also
claimed to posses the same gift. They would have had no desire or reason to promote Monmouth
as a healing prince, and the conspicuous lack of Whig propaganda on the event indicates that by
and large they did not. Monmouth’s own opinion on his miraculous cure is difficult to gauge.
When he was a young courtier, he was reproved by his father for following the advice of the
popular French astrologer Abbe Pregnani at the horse races (Monmouth lost miserably).  
Perhaps he came to share his father’s skepticism on miraculous phenomena, and so regarded the
cure of his touch as the product of simple fancy, as so many now did. Though Monmouth allied
himself with the Whigs, it is also difficult to determine the extent to which he shared their
attitudes toward government and religion, and so their beliefs toward royal ritual. Monmouth,
who always sought to establish himself as a worthy and legitimate son, and who grew up at the
Restoration court where Charles so frequently touched for the evil, may well have been flattered


65 Clifton, The Last Popular Rebellion, 84.
that some believed he possessed the royal touch. However, he never set himself up as a healing prince, and did not touch for the evil again during the rest of his western progress.

While Whig propagandists largely ignored the wondrous occurrence, Tories were quick to pick up on the story, and an anonymous broadside was quickly printed after Monmouth’s western journey in order to mock his supposed pretensions to the royal touch, and to the throne itself. Titled *A true and wonderful Account of a Cure of the Kings-Evil, by Mrs. Fanshaw, Sister to his Grace the Duke of Monmouth*, the broadside’s subtitle was *A good ingenious shamm story to ridicule that of ye cure done by ye Duke in the west*. A blatant satire throughout, the piece sought to ridicule Monmouth’s cure by spinning an absurd tale that Monmouth’s maternal half-sister, Mrs. Fanshaw, cured the king’s evil. The anonymous author was vicious in his mockery. He began by sardonically proclaiming that Monmouth’s miraculous performance “open’d the eys of the most Unbelieving, to see Heaven by this Miracle proclaim his Legitimacy, and God Almighty declare for the Black Box.” Anyone that doubted the reality of the cure was simply being foolish, as “according to the Apostle, Out of the mouth of Two or Three Witnesses; every word might be established”, an obvious attack on the paltry nature of the proof of Parcer’s cure, the signatures of a few unknown and unimportant country people.66

The story the author of the broadside created was designed to mock Elizabeth Parcer’s experience. The fictionalized account told of the journey of Jonathan Trott, a young, poor, widow’s son who had suffered from the evil for ten years. Neither physicians nor surgeons had been able to cure him of his disease, so finally the long suffering Trott and his mother resolved to travel to Charles himself and receive the royal touch. However, the night before they were to set out for Windsor and the king, a mysterious disembodied voice visited mother and son, and told

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66 Anon, *A true and wonderful Account of a Cure of the Kings-Evil, by Mrs. Fanshaw, Sister to his Grace the Duke of Monmouth*, (London; 1681), unpaginated.
them that the young Trott must be touched by Mrs. Fanshaw. Jonathan Trott and his mother were astonished, for they had never heard of Mrs. Fanshaw before. However, they soon discovered that she was the Duke of Monmouth’s sister. They reasoned that she possessed the healing touch “by reason of her near Relation to His Grace, and the Crown”, an obviously ridiculous possibility, and one that was designed to remind readers that Monmouth, the illegitimate son, had claimed to have such a power on similar grounds. In a particularly sly attack on the licentiousness of Monmouth, and his parents (and so a reminder of the Duke’s illegitimacy as well), the author explained that Mrs. Fanshaw had received “from her Mother the Curing of the Ills of Young Men by a Touch of her Naked Flesh, as well as the D. her Brother had from his Father the Curing of Young Women by a Touch of His.»

Trott managed to locate Mrs. Fanshaw near St. James’ Palace, and with her touch, was cured of his illness by the end of the week. Mrs. Fanshaw was then dubbed Princess Fanshaw by “the apple-women about these parts.»

However, the author of the pamphlet decided to go farther in his mockery, revealing in the process that he was probably not just an opponent of exclusion, but a supporter of the Catholic Duke of York, and may have even been Catholic himself. The author reminded all his Protestant readers that the gift of healing was first imparted to Edward the Confessor, generally acknowledged to be a “Good King, though a Popish Saint.” The reminder of the Catholic origins of the rite and of the beloved Catholic kings of England’s past may have been designed to puncture the rabid attacks on the Duke of York, but inevitably they brought home the essential disconnect of Protestant England believing in the royal touch in the first place. The author went on to mock the healing pretensions of Monmouth, the ‘Protestant Duke’, who was able to cure

67 Anon, *Cure of the Kings-Evil, by Mrs. Fanshaw*, unpaginated.
68 Anon, *Cure of the Kings-Evil, by Mrs. Fanshaw*, unpaginated.
scrofula without even having the crown, as all the kings of the past had been required to possess before they exercised the gift. Apparently “Protestants, though Two or Three Removes from the Crown, can do as much with a Touch, as Edward the Confessor, when he was not only a King but a Saint.”69 The author’s attack on the Protestant Monmouth as a miraculous healer only served to remind readers of the essential religious anachronism at the heart of the royal touch in England. Even royalist supporters could not hide the tenuous religious grounds on which the rite of healing stood, and the open mockery of Protestant acceptance of miraculous healing probably did more to decrease the majesty and influence of the rite than any outright attacks on it could.

The author of the pamphlet had one final attack on Monmouth, however. Because Monmouth was so desperate to prove his legitimacy, the author claimed Monmouth was preparing for one final stunt—he would enter the lion cage at the king’s menagerie. Ancient legend held that lions would not harm royalty, and so the author mockingly implied that if Monmouth was willing to go to the absurd step of touching for the evil to prove his right to the crown, he might as well present himself to the lions. The pamphleteer also took the opportunity to ridicule Monmouth’s supporters, claiming the disgraced soldier Thomas Armstrong, one of Monmouth’s staunchest and most unsavory supporters, would serve as his bed chamber man, attending him in the next empty room. Shaftesbury and the Earl of Essex were also supposed to accompany Monmouth to the trial. However, the author ended with a final sting, that if the lion did “not Declare a True Successor, yet He will shew another sort of Royalty, and Remove one of the worst sorts of the Kings Evil.”70 The trial by lions was never an important belief, and had not “penetrated into the collective consciousness” in any significant way, certainly not to the extent of the royal touch. In fact, it largely existed as a literary contrivance that appeared in fables and

69 Anon, Cure of the Kings-Evil, by Mrs. Fanshaw, unpaginated.
70 Anon, Cure of the Kings-Evil, by Mrs. Fanshaw, unpaginated.
The equivalency the pamphleteer makes between the royal rite of healing and the trial of the lions is noteworthy is evidence of the increasing irrelevance of the rite, then. To many people, the touch was becoming simply a story, a fable like the ones authors used in their romantic tales of the past, not to be taken seriously. That a staunch Tory and supporter of the Duke of York would degrade the royal touch so far is even more significant, and indicative of how, even among many of the defenders of absolute monarchy, the beliefs regarding sacred kingship had undergone a profound shift.

However, attacks on Monmouth and his healing touch were prime targets for Tory propagandists, and numerous other satirical pamphlets on the Duke were published after his western progress. The pamphlet *A Choice Collection Of Wonderful Miracles, Ghosts, and Visions* compiled many of the broadsides and attacks on Monmouth’s touch. Besides the original story of Monmouth’s cure of Elizabeth Parcer and the satirical *Account of Mrs. Fanshaw*, a number of other stories and poems were included. An advertisement was added to the *Account of Mrs. Fanshaw* to expand on the story that Monmouth had attempted to enter the lion cage to prove his legitimacy. Before marching on the lions, Monmouth had ordered his militia, which consisted of the “Porters, Tinkers, and Chimney-Sweepers and Broom-men of London” to follow him to the tower with several pageants representing the adventures of ancient heroes, “particularly, Don Quixote storming the Windmill for an Inchanted Castle,” denigrating both Monmouth’s followers as an uneducated mob (and revealing the continued fear Tories held toward common rebellions), and his pretensions to the throne as a foolish and doomed crusade. The little advertisement went on to proclaim that when Monmouth had arrived at the menagerie, he had found that “the malitious Papists” had poisoned all the lions in the tower, again, an

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attempt to mock the prevalent fear of Catholics and the Duke of York and play off their use as a scapegoat in seventeenth century England. Monmouth consulted with “his own Privy Council the Rabble” at the discovery. The rabble advised him to try the leopard instead, “who they say was certainly begot by a Lyon, as his Grace by a King.” The attacks on Monmouth’s followers and paternity continued apace.72

A broadside published in 1681 contained two anonymous poems that continued to mock the Duke of Monmouth and his supposed royal touch. The first poem, “The Oxford Alderman’s Speech to his Grace the D. of M.” mocked the welcoming reception Monmouth had received from the mayor and aldermen of Oxford when he stopped there at the end of his western progress, further attacking the ridiculousness of the ‘Protestant Duke’ setting himself up as a miraculous faith healer. Monmouth was compared to Hannibal, leading England to perpetual wars. The author remarked that Hannibal “was as good a Protestant” as Monmouth, and reminded his readers that the Duke had been educated in a Jesuit school in France for a time, though he “scorn’d to learn of Them to Write or Read.” Instead, Monmouth was “A Protestant! (the more to be Admir’d) That never were Instructed, but Inspir’d.” Monmouth’s Protestantism was essential to his popular support, and so opponents of the Duke and of exclusion sought to degrade his religious conviction. The poem went on to mock the reception of the Monmouth as the heir to the throne, comparing the transformation of the “Dough-bak’d Duke” to the Catholic ritual of transubstantiation, in which the holy wafer is believed to literally become the body of Jesus. The opponents of Monmouth and the Whigs were keen to point out the hypocrisy of their

anti-Catholic opposition, and enjoyed comparing Protestant beliefs to the Catholic ones that were so despised by their opponents.\footnote{William Wright, \textit{The Oxford alderman's speech to the D. of M. when His Grace made his entrance into that city about Sept. 1680}, (London, 1681), unpaginated.}

The same broadside also contained a final poem titled “A Canto upon the Miraculous Cure of the Kings-Evil, performed by His Grace the D. of M.” a final parting shot on Monmouth’s healing touch. The poem began by comparing Monmouth to St. Loy, the patron saint that “Popish Farriers” used to pray to and “Drink dead Drunk upon his Day.” Monmouth, through his cure of Elizabeth Parcer, proved himself to be the patron saint of the “Filly Foles that had the Bots.” Again, the author reminded his reader of the Catholic nature of the healing touch, which Protestants defenders, like Browne, fought so hard to deny. It was absurd that Monmouth, who set himself up as the Protestant Duke in opposition to the tyranny and superstition of the Catholic York, would embrace Catholic miracle. The poet went on to denigrate Parcer as “Drunk or Mad”, and Monmouth as foolish and insipid, again comparing him to Don Quixote, an “Ambitious Heroe pleas’d” by the young girls entreaties. The poet predictably went on to make a mockery of the cure itself, portraying Monmouth’s healing hand, not as a divine gift, but as “Some Sweaty Devil in his Palm [that] Transfuses Brine instead of Balm; And Brine You know is good fro th’ Itch, in any mangy Dog or Bitch.” Monmouth’s healing touch was not so unusual, and the poet reminded Monmouth “If Seventh Sons do Things so Rare, In You Seven-fathers have a share.”

Though satire was used to denigrate the opposition, it masked a real Tory fear of Monmouth and the Whig party. Though Monmouth was “so Kind and Civil,/ To Touch a Kingdom for Kings-Evil” his real intentions were “to make it (for its Health,)/ A Common Whore, a Common-wealth.” Republican anarchy and atheism were a real threat to royalists, and
they feared Monmouth and the Whigs were stirring up the people to “Vote (I fear,) No King, No
God.” The poet ended by denigrating Monmouth through a comparison to Valentine Graitrakes.
To the poet, “The stroaker Graitrix was a sot,/ And all his Feat-Tricks are forgot.” Obviously
Graitrakes had not been totally forgotten, or he would not have been brought up at all, but the
poet clearly shared the opinion of the royalist David Lloyd, and regarded the Irish Stroker as a
fraud and republican dissenter. Like Graitrakes, Monmouth set himself up as the “Great
Mountebank of our sick state,” and like Graitrakes, Monmouth was a drunken fraud who would
soon fall back into obscurity. The poet challenged Monmouth to perform one final miracle, to
“Shew us some more of these fine Mocks,/ Shew you Black Art, shew your Black Box.” 74

One Whig commentator took it upon himself to respond to the mockery and attacks on
Monmouth, the Whigs, and Protestantism, and published an anonymous broadside to refute the
Tory, and probably Catholic, propaganda tracts. An Answer to a Scoffing and Lying Lybel was
written as a direct rebuttal to an Account of Mrs. Fanshaw, though its response to the satire was
designed to refute all of the charges that Monmouth’s healing had brought about. The author of
the pamphlet was particularly distressed by the Tory mockery of Protestantism, and he attributed
the attacks on Monmouth, and England’s religion, to “one of the Popish Faction, some Jesuit, or
hotspur Dukist, for they are hardly to be separate” who took advantage of the disorder of the age,
“a time very convenient to put forth their Venom. 75 Clearly, the author sought to portray the
battle between the exclusionists and royalists as a religious battle between Protestants and
Catholics by emphasizing that the attacks on Monmouth and the Whigs came from papists.

After passing over the obvious fallaciousness of the Mrs. Fanshaw story, the Whig
pamphleteer examined the defaming papists’ goals. The first was self-evident, “the securing of

74 Wright. The Oxford alderman’s speech, unpaginated.
75 Anonymous. An Answer to a Scoffing and Lying Lybell, (London; 1681), unpaginated.
the Succession to the D. [of York] and the bringing in of Popery into England.” The second was to defame Monmouth “because a Protestant, and an obstacle to the designs of the Libellers”, namely, the succession of a Catholic king. The author of the broadside was clearly sympathetic to Monmouth, a person he wrote was “so innocent, and so considerable in the Eyes of all good Men, and loyal Subjects” that only a papist would dare to slander him. The papists feared that the tale of Monmouth’s cure “left in the Vulgars eyes should seem to give him any Title of claim to Legitimacy, and so to the Succession to the crown.” So the libelous story of the Duke’s sister Mrs. Fanshaw was born in order to “scoff at the Protestant Religion, and the Dukes Legitimacy.”

However, the Whig author rejected the entire premise of the papists’ response to Monmouth’s miraculous touch. Though the Tory propagandists had argued Monmouth set himself up as a royal healer in a crassly political attempt to prove his legitimacy to the public, such a claim was absurd, because everyone knew the curing of “this Evil Disease by stroaking; is no ways a mark of a Right and Legitimate Successor.” It would have been a “weak and most Rediculous thing in the Duke of Monmouth’s Creatures to raise such a story.” The Tory propagandists had simply created the narrative of Monmouth trying to present himself as a healing prince so that they might “raise Jealousies in his Royal fathers breast,” as well as mock the Protestant religion, not because they actually thought he had cured any one or feared that people would flock to him if they believed he possessed the royal touch. He further went on to deny the miraculous power of faith healing in his explanation of Elizabeth Parcer’s wondrous recovery. Once again, the author turned to the power of the imagination to explain the cure, which had clearly become one of the most popular explanations for miraculous healing.76 Though the pamphleteer still paid some lip service to the king’s touch, briefly mentioning it was

76 Anon, Scoffing and Lying Lybell, unpaginated.
“Intail’d… to the Crown itself”, it is clear that the basic message and the sustaining beliefs of the rite had been rejected by the author, and his naturalistic explanation of Elizabeth Parcer’s cure inevitably reflected on the royal touch itself.

The religious and political contradictions in Monmouth’s healing touch were obvious to the Whigs, who largely tried to ignore the peculiar event. It conflicted with their views on contractual, limited monarchy, and their hostility to Catholic ritual and miracle. They did not promote Monmouth’s touch, and when pressed, they denied that the Duke’s cure was miraculous at all, or if it was, that it proved his legitimacy. Many exclusionists had no difficulty in accepting an illegitimate heir to the throne, and so they did not feel the need to try and prove Monmouth’s legitimate birth, particularly by embracing such a decadent ritual; and in fact, only one Whig printer circulated the story of Monmouth’s healing gift. Tories, however, were quick to latch on to the tale of Elizabeth Parcer, and used it to attack and mock Monmouth’s pretensions to the throne. Most of the Tory pamphlets that attacked Monmouth appear to have been written by those who were Catholic supporters of York, for their polemics were keen to point out the hypocrisy of staunchly Protestant and anti-Catholic Whigs supporting the miraculous claims of Monmouth; though of course, their attacks were based largely on a straw man, as Whigs and even Monmouth himself did not in the end attempt to make such miraculous claims. However, their attacks inevitably raised serious questions about the royal touch.

While these questions were not particularly distressing to Whigs and other dissenting Protestants, who had little problem in rejecting the rite, it was mainstream Anglican Protestants, who were for the most part steadfast monarchical supporters during the Exclusion Crisis, that would have been particularly disturbed by the polemics against Monmouth. English royalists had
long reconciled the wonder working power of the king with their Protestant theology. However, the pamphlets against Monmouth made it painfully obvious to even royalist Anglicans that the king’s touch itself was an anachronistic Catholic survival in modern Protestant England. Aside from the religious mockery of the pamphlets, however, the Tory propaganda tracts implied that Monmouth’s cure of Elizabeth Parcer was a cynical and clumsy attempt on the part of the Whigs to prove Monmouth’s legitimacy and divine sanction. However, Monmouth did not set himself up as a royal healer, and no one flocked to him as one, so the Tory tracts were probably not especially convincing among those who were aware of Monmouth and his allies’ actual actions.

But there was another who did explicitly proclaim that he possessed a healing gift that symbolized the divine sanction of his rule—Charles II himself. During the height of the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis, security concerns lead to a reduction in the healing ceremony, and during the winter of 1678-9, when hundreds were usually ushered in to the Banqueting House to receive the king’s cure, Charles only touched twelve people. But after the dissolution of the Oxford Parliament in 1681, Charles resumed the ceremony with fervor, and in 1682, he touched almost eight and a half thousand people, more than in any other year of his reign, including his restoration in 1660.77 The dramatic increase in the practice of the rite, during the very height of Tory Reaction no less, was obviously no mere coincidence. The Tories who decried Monmouth for his clumsy propaganda efforts, then, were more accurately describing Charles II and his own use of the rite. While it is possible that the Tories who wrote the tracts were simply overzealous in their satire, it is hard to believe they would have been totally oblivious to the implications of their mockery. What were these Tories trying to achieve then, and who were they trying to convince?

It is evident that the Tories’ attacks were driven less by fear that Monmouth and the exclusionists would use Parcer’s story to build popular support for the Duke, then by a recognition that publicizing and mocking his ‘miraculous’ cure would undermine approval for the Whigs. It is possible that the pamphlets attacking Monmouth were actually aimed at the Whigs themselves, particularly those Whigs and Whig sympathizers who were not closely involved with Monmouth or the political intrigues of London. These more peripheral Whig supporters among the gentry and public would have shared the same distaste for absolute monarchy and Catholic rites as the active London Whigs, and were likely to hold skeptical Protestant religious feelings. Perhaps the pamphlets, which seem almost like Whig attacks on mainstream Anglican acceptance of the royal touch, were designed to erode support for Monmouth by characterizing him as a fool with pretensions to divine right kingship. If this was the motivation of the Tory propagandists, than it speaks to just how political the touch had become for elite politicians. The Tories clearly recognized the contradictions that lay at the heart of royal healing, and when it served their purpose, they fully exploited them; but when they defended the king, they simply ignored them.

However, it is just as possible that their audience was not only staunch Whigs, but also moderate and royalist Anglicans; and in reality, the Tory pamphleteers must have known that many people would read their attacks. While it remains possible that the Tory propagandists were simply oblivious to the problematic questions they raised for royalist Anglicans, they must have recognized to some extent the conclusions to be drawn from their attacks. Clearly, then, they recognized that, although many moderate royalists and Anglicans accepted the royal touch because of the weight of history and its obvious political usefulness and popularity among the masses, they really quietly regarded the king’s touch as an outmoded ritual. The sight of
Monmouth trying to cure some poor peasant girl did not raise consternation or anxiety among them, but ridicule. However, we must remember during this same period Browne was writing his defense of the royal rite, and many royalists continued to champion the wonder working power of the king. What we see, then, is the end of a broadly based consensus on the royal touch. Aside from the obvious Whig abandonment of the traditional symbols of sacred rule, it seems that many moderate Protestants and royalists harbored some skepticism towards the rite, if not openly; and even staunch Tory propagandists were aware of the contradictions in the ceremony and happily exploited those contradictions to advance their political agenda. While many Tories continued to fervently defend divine right monarchy and the royal touch, its politicization was clear, and it no longer had the power to inspire widespread respect or awe.

While the debates surrounding Monmouth’s cure indicate that elite attitudes towards the royal touch were increasingly ambivalent, if not outright skeptical, the beliefs of the lower classes are less clear. The massive numbers who flocked to Charles in the 1680s are particularly noteworthy, and on their own reveal no significant popular disengagement with the rite from its practice at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Did any of the elite skepticism and cynicism towards the touch reach the lower classes? And if the royal touch and miraculous healing continued to be so popular, why did Monmouth so utterly fail to attract any attention as a healer? It is a puzzling and complex question, but there were probably a number of factors at play. Supernatural beliefs in ghosts, witches, demons and faith healers, while entering a rapid decline among the upper classes, remained powerful and vibrant forces in the poorer populations. The intellectual developments of the seventeenth century had, as Keith Thomas remarked, “greatly deepened the gulf between the educated classes and the lower strata of the rural population.”

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This was perhaps the most significant factor in the continuing popularity of the touch. While the development of rational Protestantism and mechanical philosophy allowed people to understand and explain the world without reliance on the supernatural, these ideas were largely disseminated among the educated classes, not the poor.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that the divisions in English society were strictly binary. The seventeenth century was a time of unprecedented literacy and political engagement throughout England and among all classes, and the ideologies and beliefs of the Whigs and the Tories were known throughout the country. Whig skepticism and ideas about republican government were circulated throughout the population, and many commoners embraced Whig attitudes and rejected traditional monarchy and its sacred character. Rational Protestant repudiation of modern day miracles was also not solely the province of the elites, and in fact many dissenting and Puritan sects that were opposed to absolute monarchy and to the royal touch arose among the lower classes.  

So, while the number of people who continued to attend the healing ceremony is impressive, it is not proof that popular culture continued to enthusiastically embrace the rite. While many of the people who attended the ceremony were fervent believers in the king’s power, even Browne admitted that many others were driven by a desire for the gold touch piece; and of course, the painful and debilitating diseases of the seventeenth century must have inspired many to travel to the king out of desperation, not genuine faith. And despite the huge crowds that flocked to Charles, we must remember that most English people did not in the end receive the touch. Although there was clearly a divergence between elite and popular attitudes toward the miraculous and the monarchy, and many thousands of people continued to believe wholeheartedly in the healing power of the king, skepticism and doubt affected all of

society. Monmouth’s failure to attract any attention as a healer probably rested as much on the
Whig skepticism that many of his popular supporters embraced as on the ‘orthodox’ belief that
only a legitimate, properly anointed king could cure scrofula. What we see during the Exclusion
Crisis is a breakdown in popular, widespread acceptance of the royal touch. Religious
skepticism, political secularization, and naturalistic explanations all contributed to a rapid
decline in the power and prestige of the rite in the popular conscience.

Monmouth returned from his western progress to a London still in turmoil. Two more
Exclusion Bills were debated in Parliament, but Charles peremptorily dissolved the sessions, and
for the last four years of his reign he governed alone. Though at times it seemed as if
reconciliation between Charles and Monmouth might be achieved, Monmouth’s own sense of
honor, and outright enmity with York, scuttled any chance of his restoration at court. When
Charles had Shaftesbury imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1681 on suspicion of high
treason, Monmouth stood by him, visiting him at the Tower and attending his trial. Monmouth
even stood bail for Shaftesbury, who was quickly acquitted by the Whig jury.80 Throughout the
early 1680s, Monmouth maintained his popularity among the crowds, and he continued to be
toasted as the ‘Protestant Duke’, and cheers of “No Popish successor, no York, a Monmouth”
were frequent during the time, particularly during the turbulent holidays for the anniversaries of
Queen Elizabeth’s coronation and the Gunpowder Plot, which often turned into anti-Catholic
festivals where the Pope was burned in effigy.81 However, with the permanent dissolution of
parliament, and the conservative Tory reaction that began to regain control over the political
apparatus of the country, the Whigs became more desperate in their attempts to prevent York’s

80 Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.
81 Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.
succession. When Charles fell ill again in the summer of 1682, Shaftesbury convened an emergency meeting of Whig leaders, including Monmouth, where they apparently planned a rebellion to take the throne if Charles died. Though Charles recovered, Tory successes in local elections, and consequently Tory control over the courts, forced the exclusionists’ hand, for they could no longer rely on sympathetic juries to protect them from imprisonment, fines, and even execution.

Shaftesbury and his fellow conspirators decided an armed insurrection was the only method to prevent popery in England, and in the summer of 1682 various Whig conspirators were sent out to gather support throughout England. Monmouth was sent on another western progress through Coventry, Nantwich, and Chester. The nature of the trip was much more explicitly political than the last one, and the prospect of rebellion dampened the mood. However, Monmouth was still celebrated by the commoners as he traveled. Somewhere between Liverpool and Wallasey, Monmouth touched again for the evil, for the second and last time. A man had brought a young child, afflicted with scrofula, to the Duke, hoping his touch might relive the child’s suffering. Monmouth consented, touched the boy, and said to him “God bless you”.

There is only one mention of the event in the Calendar of State Papers, in contemporary accounts. Though Monmouth’s touch had caused a minor pamphlet war a few years earlier, it appears that the controversy had been spent, and the event was quickly forgotten.

Despite the Whigs efforts, the conspiracy soon fell apart, and on 28th November 1682 Shaftesbury, fearing a royalist reprisal, fled to Amsterdam, where he was to die a few months later. A newly reformed Whig council, consisting of Monmouth, Essex, Algernon Sydney and a few others, continued to pursue the idea of an uprising. However, a splinter group, led by Robert

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82 Calendar of State Papers Domestic Series, 1682, Sept. 23.
West, decided to assassinate Charles and York at the Rye House while they were returning from the Newmarket races. A fire that broke out in Newmarket, however, which forced Charles and York to change their travel plans, ruining the Rye House plot. However, Monmouth and his group of conspirators pushed ahead with their planned uprising, and contacted the Earl of Argyll in order to coordinate a simultaneous rebellion in Scotland. Before anything could come of their conspiracies though, the government discovered their plots. The Whig conspirators scattered, and Monmouth went into hiding at the country home of his mistress, Henrietta Wentworth (to whom he had become deeply attached, and considered his wife under the eyes of God).

Charles was deeply distressed when he learned his son had been involved, but he knew he needed Monmouth’s testimony to convict the other conspirators. Monmouth, however, had perhaps tired of the conspiracies and the political whirlwind he had been drawn into, and after a few conciliatory letters, Monmouth finally surrendered himself to his father on November 24. He acknowledged his guilt and confessed everything he knew about the conspiracy, on the condition it would remain secret from the public. Charles quickly called his Privy Council, revealed Monmouth’s confession, and ordered all criminal proceedings against his son to be stopped. For a few days, Monmouth appeared to have finally reconciled himself with the court. However, a copy of his confession to Charles was published in the Gazette, and Monmouth, who valued his honor above all else, was outraged that his betrayal of his fellow conspirators had been made public. He openly denied that he had made the confession, and Charles, the credibility of his case against the conspirators at stake, felt he had to secure a written confession from Monmouth. On November 6, Monmouth was somehow convinced to sign a vaguely worded document

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83 Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.
84 Clifton, The Last Popular Rebellion, 120.
85 Clifton, The Last Popular Rebellion, 141-3.
affirming his role in the conspiracy (but not in the assassination plot). However, Monmouth asked for the confession back the very next day, his honor and his fear that the document would be used to convict and execute his friends and fellow conspirators overcoming his desire for peace and security. Charles granted his son’s last wish, but ordered him to never return. Monmouth complied, and fled to Europe.

For a time it seemed like Monmouth would remain peacefully in exile. His mistress Henrietta Wentworth traveled to the Low Countries to be with Monmouth, and he lived in comfort with an annuity from the governor of the Spanish Netherlands and a position as colonel of a Spanish regiment. Perhaps still held out hope of rapprochement with his father, but Charles died suddenly on the February 6, 1685. The Duke of York, now James II, immediately ordered William of Orange to arrest Monmouth, evidence of the depth of the animosity between the two men. However, William allowed Monmouth to flee. He traveled first to Rotterdam, then to Brussels, before finally finding refuge at Gouda. Perhaps the actions of his uncle had renewed his rebellious anger, for in February 1685 he traveled to Amsterdam to confer with the Scottish and English exiles that were planning a rebellion against James II. It was quickly decided that Monmouth would lead an uprising in England while the Earl of Argyll would lead the Scottish dissidents. Preparations for the uprisings were quickly undertaken, and it was decided that the best time to launch the rebellion would be shortly before parliament met on the May 19, because the Tory lords would all be in London. When Monmouth sent word to his supporters in England, the replies he received were hesitant, and his allies warned Monmouth that the time was not right to launch a rebellion, as public opinion had largely accepted James II as king. However, he had already given his word to Argyll, and he could not stop the rebellion. His honor led him on, and

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86 Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
87 Clifton, *The Last Popular Rebellion*, 149-152.
Argyll and Monmouth determined to set sail for Britain in May. However, Argyll set out on 2\textsuperscript{nd} May, while Monmouth’s lengthy preparations, and contrary wind, delayed his departure for weeks. It was not until the 24\textsuperscript{th} May that Monmouth, along with three ships and eighty-three men, departed for western England, the site of Monmouth’s triumphant progresses a few years earlier.\footnote{Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography}.}

The invasion plan was doomed from the start. Argyll was an incompetent leader, and failed to rally the support of the clans. He had also landed much earlier than Monmouth, preventing a simultaneous attack on two fronts, and by June 19\textsuperscript{th} his small band had been dispersed and Argyll himself captured and peremptorily executed. Monmouth did not arrive in England until June 11\textsuperscript{th}, landing at Lyme Regis, Dorset. At his arrival, he issued a declaration, probably written by the radical pamphleteer Robert Ferguson, which accused the English monarchy of turning into an absolute tyranny and James II of usurping the throne and subverting the law. Notably, the declaration did not proclaim Monmouth to be the king, but left the decision to “the determination thereof of the Wisdom, Justice, and Authority of Parliament, legally chosen and acting with Freedom.”\footnote{Anon. \textit{Declaration of James, Duke of Monmouth.} 1685. P 7} Even when Monmouth and his supporters had declared war on James II, they did not insist on Monmouth’s divine right to the monarchy. Clearly, secular beliefs about government, beliefs that naturally precluded the royal touch, had become an entrenched strain of belief in English society.

However, Monmouth’s rebellion was not as popular as he had hoped, and a general uprising of the people and the gentry did not materialize, in part perhaps, because his political agenda remained too radical for most English people; mostly, however, it was because there was no desire for another civil war, and York’s accession to the throne had not led to Popish tyranny.
as the Whigs had predicted. However, Monmouth set out on another journey through western England, trying to gather supplies and troops. The city of Taunton proved most supportive, but at its peak, his army never reached more than three thousand men. Many of his supporters were dissenters, but for the most part they were Protestant urban craftsmen who feared popish, absolutist government. Unfortunately, they were not enough to win a battle, and Monmouth was convinced by some of his councilors that in order to attract the support of the gentry, he needed to declare himself the legitimate king, which he did on 20th June. However, the support did not materialize, and his declaration may have even lost him allies among the more radically republican Whigs who desired the establishment of another commonwealth. With the failure of a general English uprising and the defeat of Argyll’s rebellion, Monmouth considered abandoning the revolution. However, Lord Grey convinced Monmouth that such an act would be “so base that it could never be forgiven by the people,” and Monmouth was unwilling to betray his honor by abandoning the venture, however doomed it was. After a brief chase through the countryside, Monmouth’s rebels launched a daring night raid against the royalist forces encamped at Sedgemoor. While Monmouth showed his tactical skill and bravery during the battle, his smaller, ill-trained and ill-equipped rebels could not stand up to the royalist forces he had once led, and were quickly routed. Monmouth was found two days later hiding in a ditch, battered and bloody, a far cry from the handsome, carefree Duke of his youth.

Monmouth was imprisoned in the Tower on the July 12, his execution set in three days. James II granted Monmouth a few last acts of mercy, permitting him the quick death of the executioner’s axe, and allowing his children to visit him one last time. The Bishops of Ely and Bath were sent to give Monmouth his last rites on the day of his execution, but Monmouth

refused to acknowledge his affair with Henrietta Wentworth, the greatest love in his life, was wrong, and the so Bishops would not administer the holy communion. Monmouth marched onto the scaffold on the morning of July 15, made no speech, but produced a letter disclaiming all right to throne, admitting Charles had never married his mother, and imploring the king to be kind to his wife and children. As a final indignity, the executioner, the infamous Jack Ketch, butchered the work, failing to sever Monmouth’s head with the first stroke. Monmouth purportedly raised his head in bloody anguish after the first blow, and it took four more swings for Jack Ketch to finish the job.\textsuperscript{91} Monmouth had been decisively defeated, and the notorious ‘bloody assizes’ were established to punish the rest of the Monmouth rebels. The vast majority were found guilty and either sentenced to immediate death, or to transportation to the West Indies. Monmouth’s English titles were forfeited, though his widow Anna retained the Scottish peerage. His mistress and greatest love Henrietta Wentworth, who was only twenty-six, was to die within the year, some said of a broken heart.\textsuperscript{92} James II had quickly and easily contained the challenge of the Monmouth and the Whig conspirators, and for a time, peace seemed to have settled over the kingdom. Within four years, however, James’ reign was to end in disaster.

\textsuperscript{91} Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography}.
\textsuperscript{92} Harris, ‘James, duke of Monmouth’, \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography}.  

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Epilogue

The Whigs appeared to have been wrong—England did not descend into tyranny and popish slavery when James took the throne. Charles II’s death on 6 February 1685 did not cause the immediate collapse of English law and government, and the transition to his brother was as smooth as any Tory could have dared hope. Immediately upon Charles’ death, James assured the Privy Council that he had no designs to arbitrary power, and was dedicated to protecting the established law and Protestant religion. His speech was widely republished among the London newspapers, to the assurance and relief of the English people.\(^1\) In fact, James’ accession was widely celebrated. The day of his coronation, April 23\(^{rd}\), was met with rejoicing and celebrations throughout the country. Though the local authorities and churchwardens, who provided money for alcohol and bonfires, initiated many of these public demonstrations, numerous outpourings of support were spontaneous, and there was clearly a genuine level of support for the new king. Four hundred and thirty-nine loyal addresses supporting James and hereditary monarchy and decrying the plots of the Exclusionists were issued from towns across England, Ireland, and Scotland.\(^2\) The Tory Reaction of the early 1680’s appeared to have been extraordinarily effective; the popular fear of the Catholic James had dissipated and the Whig challenge had been contained. During the first parliamentary elections, only fifty-seven Whigs were returned from five hundred and thirteen seats.\(^3\) The rebellions of Argyll and Monmouth were paltry affairs that were easily and quickly put down. At the beginning of his reign, James was secure in his authority, and seemed to enjoy a broad base of popular support.


\(^2\) Harris, *Revolution*, 49.

\(^3\) Harris, *Revolution*, 55.
However, it would be wrong to conclude that the Whig party, and Whig sentiment, had been wholly eradicated. The overwhelming success of the Tories in the parliamentary elections was due in part to aggressive governmental interference. The *quo warranto* proceedings that Charles had initiated at the beginning of the 1680’s had allowed the crown to purge many Whig officeholders and replace them with loyal Tories, who carried out the crown’s will. Electoral malpractice was rampant, and Tory agents did everything in their power to prevent the election of Whigs, like holding the polls secretly in the middle of the night, refusing to count the votes of dissenters, and threatening Whig canvassers with prosecution and tavern owners who hosted Whigs with loss of license.\(^4\) There were also numerous cases of local people expressing hostility to James, or support for Monmouth.\(^5\) Although Monmouth had not managed to attract a large number of troops, he remained popular among Whig commoners. Though the propaganda of the Tories under Charles had undoubtedly weakened Whig support, and governmental pressure had pushed them underground, Whigs remained an important, though veiled, group in society.

However, even Tory support for James was not a wholehearted defense of absolute, divine right monarchy. While many Tories and Anglicans continued to stress the themes that Browne had emphasized, like the divine, unchallengeable nature of the monarch, there was an important undercurrent of reserve in their proclamations. Their proclaimed loyalty to James, and to hereditary monarchy, was absolute, but only if James upheld the existing Protestant establishment in Church and law. Clearly, then, their support was not absolute, but conditional on the protection of Anglican dominance. These Tories held a ‘Church of England loyalty’ first.\(^6\)

When the monarch was a Protestant, there was no conflict between their royalism and their

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\(^4\) Harris, *Revolution*, 55-6.

\(^5\) Harris, *Revolution*, 62-5.

\(^6\) Harris, *Revolution*, 59-61.
Anglicanism, and they freely pronounced divine right theory and non-resistance. James, however, was Catholic. He had come to the throne promising to defend the existing Anglican establishment, however, and his proclamation had assured the Tories that they had nothing to fear, and so they continued to profess their support for the hereditary monarchy. Their support was misguided, however, for James was soon to embark on a disastrous policy that brought his reign to an end, and changed the relationship between the monarchy and the people forever.

For by the end of 1685, James had begun to show troubling signs he would fulfill the dire prophecies of the Whigs. He had dramatically increased the size of the standing army, ostensibly in response to the Monmouth rebellion, from 8,565 to 19,778 troops. Besides the threat to liberty a standing army posed, it engendered anger and hostility toward the king, as the troops quartered throughout the country often ran roughshod over the local populations, refusing to pay for board and stealing food items. James also appointed fellow Catholics to the army and government, in a blatant violation of the Test Act of 1673, which prohibited Catholics from holding office. Many staunch Tories spoke out against James’ increasingly arbitrary rule, and fierce debates broke out over the army in parliament. James, exposing his arbitrary streak and his belief in his own sovereignty, dissolved his first, and last, parliament, and set about dismissing those who had opposed him, including any Protestant army officer who had voted against his interests, the Earl of Halifax, and Bishop Compton.7

Throughout James’ four-year reign, he managed to alienate most of the English population, both upper and lower classes, Anglicans and dissenters, Whigs and Tories. In fact, some of the greatest opposition to his reign came from those Anglican royalists who had been his chief supporters during the Exclusion Crisis, and had championed indefeasible, unchallengeable

7 Harris, Revolution, 95-100.
divine monarchy. His expansion of the standing army, the Declaration of Indulgence that suspended penal laws against Catholics, his promotion of Catholics to positions of power in government and education, and his flagrant attempts to pack the second parliament with his supporters all contributed to the widespread hostility toward James’ regime as his reign wore on. Even the royal touch was not safe from his Catholicizing efforts, and soon after he took the throne he instituted a decidedly Catholic ceremonial for the healing rite. A pamphlet was published in 1686 by the royal printer Henry Hills entitled *The ceremonies for the healing of them that be diseased with the kings evil, used in the time of King Henry VII, Published by his Majesties command*, to make public to all that James had not only made one of the cherished rites of Tory Anglicans Catholic, but that he was only bringing the rite back to its original form. The Catholic origin of the rite of healing was again brought home to the English people. The theological influence of the rite could not be denied or disguised, and Browne’s justifications and assertions that the royal touch was not a superstitious Catholic ritual were openly exposed as hollow and flimsy rationalizations, if not simply overt and cynical political propaganda.

In fact, the nature of James’ reign threatened not only the religious rationale of the ceremony, but also the very basis of belief in the royal touch—divine right monarchy. In all of his controversial actions as king, James asserted his divine sovereignty and prerogative rule. The Tory championing of absolute, divine right kingship came back to haunt them, as many of James’ actions were in accordance with the prerogative legal power of the monarch, and were certainly supported by divine right theory. While Whigs had already largely abandoned strict belief in absolute, divine right monarchy, and consequently, faith in the royal touch, Tories had

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9 Anonymous, *The ceremonies for the healing of them that be diseased with the kings evil, used in the time of King Henry VII*, (London: printed by Henry Hills, printer to the King's most excellent Majesty for his household and chappel, 1686).
continued to champion divine right theory and the reality of the monarch’s healing gift. James II forced them to confront the natural consequences of their belief, and ultimately, most chose in favor of the Anglican Church rather than the absolute authority of the king. For a time, the English people held out hope that James would die without an heir, and his Protestant daughter Mary would take the throne and end the march toward Popish absolutism. However, when James’ wife Maria gave birth to a healthy boy on June 10, 1688, the prospect of a permanent Catholic dynasty became a reality. The reign of James II was to end within six months, almost to the day.\(^\text{10}\) The ‘Immortal Seven’, a coalition of both Tory and Whig nobles and one bishop, sent an invitation to William of Orange, James’ nephew and son-in-law, on June 18\(^{\text{th}}\), assuring him that he could expect widespread support in an invasion of England to end the reign of the Catholic king. By November, William had landed his expeditionary force in England, and within a month James was to flee his kingdom in the face of popular disaffection amongst his subjects and his army, never to sit on the throne again.

The nature of the Glorious Revolution has been endlessly debated. Was it a true revolution, or simply a dynastic coup? How radical was the settlement that brought William and Mary to the throne? Was it a victory for the Whigs, or a conservative Tory affair that changed little? These questions have been answered in every way imaginable throughout the centuries, and will probably continue to be debated for all of history. However, despite the intentional ambiguity in the English settlement and the Declaration of Rights that allowed Tories, Whigs, Anglicans and dissenters to read their own personal victories into the settlement, 1688 was indeed a revolution. The Declaration of Rights, though a moderate document, ultimately sided with parliament’s reading of the law, and so in an important sense it limited the powers of the

\(^{10}\) Harris, *Revolution*, 1-2.
crown and established the sovereignty of parliament.\textsuperscript{11} The Glorious Revolution initiated a fundamental shift away from divine right, personal monarchy towards the “limited, bureaucratic and parliamentary” government England became in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{12} To be sure, belief in sacral kingship did not just disappear in 1688, but it was no longer a universal conviction; and the establishment and entrenchment of the political party system ended the societal consensus through which the English monarchy had previously governed.\textsuperscript{13} The revolution marked the beginning of the end for divine right theory, and even among those who still believed in sacred monarchy, God was to become an increasingly distant and remote providential actor in the affairs of government.\textsuperscript{14} Inevitably, the royal touch was to become one of the first casualties of this revolution in belief.

When William of Orange became king in February 1689, he silently abandoned the royal touch. William was a deeply religious man, a Protestant Calvinist, who sought to bring a simple godliness to the court after the excesses of Charles and James II.\textsuperscript{15} William shared something with James I, the first Stuart monarch of England, who held a similar Protestant skepticism about superstitious ceremony. In a way, William’s attitude toward the healing gift was arguably what any devout Protestant should have held without the weight of English history and precedent influencing them. William, of course, was a foreigner who had come to the throne in a revolution, and had not been raised with the legend of the royal miracle, and so found it easier to abandon the superstitious rite. However, English society showed no signs of widespread

\textsuperscript{11} Harris, Revolution, 486.
\textsuperscript{12} Harris, Revolution, 494.
indignation at William’s refusal to touch, and there were no popular calls for William to renew the ceremony.\textsuperscript{16} Part of it may have been because he was a foreigner, but it is clear that a shift had occurred in attitudes toward the monarchy and the miraculous. While among the elite classes Jacobites and some Tories still professed belief in the royal touch, and the lower classes continued to accept the miraculous, beliefs had changed. It was possible for a monarch to govern without the healing ceremony, and as a whole English society was not particularly distressed. The royal touch no longer exercised a deep or profound hold on the consciousness of the people.

The royal touch was to have one last blaze of glory, however. Queen Anne, James II’s younger daughter, and the last of the Stuarts, came to the throne on March 8, 1702, after William and Mary died without heirs. She did not immediately begin touching for the evil however. Her first ministry, predominately Tory, had to convince her to resume the royal rite of healing, though it took almost a year for her to reinitiate the ceremony, a far cry from the immediate and almost frantic touchings that Charles had held when he first returned to England in 1660.\textsuperscript{17} The ceremony itself was shortened and simplified; a notable shift in light of Anne’s usually punctilious attention to court formality and ceremony.\textsuperscript{18} Anne’s initial neglect of the rite, only resuming it at the insistence of her advisors, exposes the gulf that had opened in elite opinion of the rite in the decades since Charles II’s restoration.\textsuperscript{19} The gift of healing had become an openly political tool used by the newly formalized party politics of the era to advance their agenda, and while some Tories and Anglicans continued to profess belief in the rite, its prestige and power had suffered a steep decline. However, Anne’s touch remained popular among the common people, and many continued to seek the royal cure. Unfortunately, we do not possess accurate

\textsuperscript{17} Bloch, \textit{The Royal Touch}, 219.
\textsuperscript{19} Bloch, \textit{The Royal Touch}, 219-20.
accounts for the number of people Anne touched during her reign, but there is no evidence that there was a dramatic drop off in petitioners. Indeed, the infant Samuel Johnson was brought to the queen on the recommendation of a physician, though her touch was ineffective, and he later underwent surgery for his scrofula that left him with permanent scars.

The royal rite of healing was to be performed for the last time by an English monarch on April 27, 1714, a little more than three months before Anne’s death. George I, of the German House of Hanover, assumed the throne in October, marking the end of the reign of the Stuarts, and the end of the royal rite of healing. However, the deposed Stuarts, first James II, and then his son, continued to touch for scrofula in exile. A few hard-line Jacobites continued to celebrate the healing power of their kings, and stories of ill sufferers who traveled to the exiled court and were instantly cured on the touch of the rightful king were circulated throughout England. However, the Stuarts’ use of the touch only served to emphasize how overtly political and propagandistic the rite of healing had become, and their stories, even among most Jacobites, never gained much traction or popularity. In fact, now that England had been freed from the wonder working monarchy, open skepticism and mockery of the rite became frequent.

In 1722, forty-two years after John Browne’s *Adenochoiradelogia*, another surgeon, William Beckett, published an account of the royal touch titled, *A free and impartial enquiry into the antiquity and efficacy of touching for the cure of the King's evil*, addressed to one of the royal physicians, in which Beckett openly denied the miraculous efficacy of the touch. A sober and moderate work, Beckett praised the “free and inquisitive” age he lived in, where everyone had the “Liberty of exercising his Enquiries with a becoming Freedom.” Beckett concluded that the seeming efficacy of the royal touch “was without Difficulty reducible to the Power of the

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Imagination,” as were the supposed cures of “Charms, Relicks, and such other Affairs.”

Beckett’s work stands as powerful testimony to the rapid shift in attitude toward the miraculous and supernatural in the eighteenth century, and the wide acceptance of empirical philosophy and the new science. However, as we have seen, these ideas were present throughout the seventeenth century and in the reign of Charles II in particular. John Browne directly addressed the same scientific doubts about the touch and its religious contradictions in his book. The reign of the Hanoverians did not usher in a new way of thinking about the world, but allowed previously suppressed or minority beliefs to be expressed freely. With no royal miracle worker above them, men like the Virtuosi who had puzzled over Valentine Ggreatrakes could freely draw the inevitable conclusions about the royal touch they had not been able to under the rule of the Stuarts, and the free exchange of these ideas only hastened the death of the healing gift in men’s minds.

Not all works were as academic as Beckett’s, however, and numerous articles were written that mocked the royal touch. No doubt many of them were driven by Whig propaganda efforts against the exiled Jacobites, but again, they only served to underscore the political nature of the touch, if not its superstitious Catholicism. When Thomas Carte, a staunch Jacobite non-juror who refused to take the oath of loyalty to George I, wrote his *General History of England*, he included an anecdote about a resident of Wells who had been cured of scrofula in 1716 by one of the exiled Stuarts. His Jacobite propaganda was not unnoticed, and the City of London withdrew the conscription with which they had honored his work, and Whig newspapers were

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filled with complaints and protests for several months.\textsuperscript{24} The attacks on the royal healing power only continued throughout the eighteenth century, and in David Hume’s 1755 *History of England*, he simply remarked that the royal touch had been discontinued by the Hanoverians “who observed, that it could no longer give amazement to the populace, and was attended with ridicule in the eyes of all men of understanding.”\textsuperscript{25} While David Hume was a particular zealously empiricist, his claim was obviously largely true, at least among the learned. In a few short decades, the royal touch went from a celebrated and widely popular ritual and symbol of the monarch’s sacred rule, to an anachronistic, if not embarrassing, survival that was quickly dropped with hardly a patronizing backwards glance. However, while the end of the royal touch can be precisely dated to the accession of George I, it would not have been possible without profound changes in belief, beliefs that were strengthened, if not formed, by the Restoration settlement and the reigns of Charles II and the last of the Stuarts, beliefs that I have attempted to uncover in this thesis.

So what were the beliefs that informed the king’s touch at the end of the seventeenth century? As we have seen, royal healing cannot be studied in isolation, and beliefs regarding the touch were inescapably bound up with contemporary views on politics, religion, and science. We have seen throughout that these beliefs were neither static nor universal, but were marked by deep divisions, divisions in large part wrought by the Civil War and the Restoration polity that Charles had inherited. However, the cases of Valentine Greatrakes, John Browne, and the Duke of Monmouth shed a great deal of light on contemporary opinions regarding the whole enterprise of miraculous healing, and of the royal touch in particular. Their stories help us understand the

\textsuperscript{24} Bloch, *The Royal Touch*, 221.

crucial social and intellectual developments at the end of the seventeenth century that led to the
demise of the royal touch in England.

The royal touch was intimately bound up with the religious and the political. At its heart
lay the theory of divine right, sacred monarchy, the bedrock of the English state for centuries.
The monarchy was a divinely ordained form of government, and the king served as God’s
representative on earth, his vicegerent, and a sovereign and unchallengeable ruler. In the
medieval environment steeped in the miraculous and supernatural, and nourished with the stories
of holy miracle workers, it seems almost natural that a sacred king would possess a healing
power. From its origins in the twelfth century under Henry I, the royal rite of healing grew in
prestige and grandeur throughout the years, up to the seventeenth century, when it reached
perhaps its ceremonial peak, only to suffer a precipitous fall. However, the seed of its demise lay
earlier, in the sixteenth century, and the English Reformation. Catholic ritual and Catholic
miracle had sustained the religious aspect of the rite for years. England’s break from the Church
of Rome and adoption of Protestantism was the first, and one of the fundamental blows to the
royal touch. Protestantism rejected the superstition and elaborate ceremony of Catholicism;
however, it was those very things that underlay the rite of healing. By the seventeenth century,
Protestant religious scruples had developed a theology that denied the presence of contemporary
miracles, a theology where ‘the age of miracles’, the miracles of the Bible, had passed. Such
beliefs might have ended the royal ceremony, but it was sustained through both the weight of
history and precedent. It was sustained too by the continuation of the political basis of the touch,
for divine right theory entered the seventeenth century as strong as it had ever been. At the
beginning of the century, most Protestants had learned to reconcile their religion with their
support of the king, and so accepted the reality of the royal gift of healing.
However, this consensus was not to last long, as the seventeenth century was marked by fragmentation in the political, the religious, and the intellectual culture of the whole society. The Civil War, the execution of Charles I, and the rise of republicanism all put an end to the consensus belief in the sacredness of kings, and with it, widespread acceptance of the royal touch itself. However, England’s experiment in republicanism was to be short lived, and within ten years the monarchy was to return. Upon his Restoration, Charles II set about restoring the prestige and power of the monarch, and royal ritual, particularly the king’s touch, was an integral part of his efforts. However, society had been fractured, and the fundamental beliefs that girded the royal touch were no longer universally held. Political secularization, scientific empiricism, and rational Protestantism all led to a decline in acceptance of royal healing.

Throughout the seventeenth century, the rise of the ‘new science’ wrought profound shifts in ways of thinking about the world, and consequently, about the royal touch. The stir caused by Valentine Greatrakes exposed the change in attitudes toward the miraculous that were occurring under Charles’s reign. The Virtuosi, so intrigued by Valentine Greatrakes, ultimately concluded that his cures were natural. The mechanistic belief in a universe that operated according to predictable, explicable laws inevitably excluded the miraculous, and though it was not openly admitted, their conclusions regarding Greatrakes could not help but reflect on the wonder working power of the king; and this experimental philosophy was not only held by a few elite scientists, but was rapidly gaining traction in society at large. Charles II himself chartered the Royal Society to encourage the new science, and was a keen amateur chemist. The empirical worldview inevitably led to a decline in acceptance of miracle, and of the royal touch itself. Indeed, as we saw in all of our case studies, one of the most popular explanations for the

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cures wrought by the king’s touch was the power of the fancy, the imagination, to influence the physical body, a thoroughly natural and explicable rationalization, and one that has to a large extent been born out by modern medicine.

Political secularization was perhaps even more essential to the end of the rite. Liberal Whig thinkers like John Locke and authoritarian theorists like Thomas Hobbes all served to desacralize monarchy in the seventeenth century. The Restoration polity that Charles had inherited was intrinsically unstable, and held within it the beginnings of party politics. The Exclusion Crisis only exasperated the divisions in the kingdom, and the rise of the Whig party did much to propagate ideas on contract theory and limited monarchy throughout the country. Such beliefs naturally precluded the role of a divinely ordained, absolute monarch, and so precluded the royal miracle of healing itself. The Duke of Monmouth’s tentative cure of the king’s evil reveals the unease, if not the hostility, many Whigs held toward divine-right monarchy and royal healing. Their worldview did not require, and had no place, for a wonder working king. They had moved past the need for sacerdotal kingship, and so the royal touch, as the ultimate symbol of sacred monarchy, was at best an unnecessary survival, at worst a sign and support for absolute, arbitrary rule.

Underlying both these scientific and political changes lay the growth of rational Protestantism. The nature of God’s relationship to the world informed the empirical scientists and contract theorists, and their God was an increasingly remote deity. The miracles of the Bible were true, but that ‘age of miracles’ had passed, and contemporary wonder working claims of Catholics and cunning men were invariably false. In such a religious view too, kings were not seen as God’s actual vicegerents on earth. Government was a man made institution, a contract

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27 Harris, Restoration, 15.
entered into by the people for the common welfare. Protestant theology initiated doubts about the wonder working power of the king, but political theories that abandoned divine right kingship and led to opposition against the monarch helped finally turn people away from the royal touch. And naturalistic, scientific explanations of the world allowed doubters to account for the cures of the royal hand without reliance on the supernatural. The Virtuosi who fatefully pronounced on the case of Valentine Garetrakes may never have meant their conclusions to be drawn so far as to doubt all supernatural occurrences, and many Whig partisans never sought a total end to divine right monarchy, but inevitably, their ideas came to forever change the nature of the English state.

However, there remained many who continued to defend the supernatural, the divine monarchy, and the royal touch. Royalist Anglicans, who would come to be known as Tories, continued to promote the belief in a sovereign wonder-working king throughout Charles’ reign. However, they no longer faced a consensus in society as to the nature and power of the king, if there had ever been one, and were forced to contend with these political, religious, and empirical objections to the rite. Staunch Anglicans and royalists like David Lloyd learned to reconcile their faith in the king with their Anglican theology and rejection of other miracle workers like Valentine Garetrakes. John Browne provided the most robust, but notably the last, great defense of royal healing in Adenochoiradologia. A characteristic royalist screed, Browne sought to prove through historical precedent, religious reasoning, political philosophy, and specific examples the reality and efficacy of the royal touch. Inescapably bound up in his defense of the royal touch was a defense of divine right monarchy itself. However, he could not ignore the popular objections to the king’s touch that had arisen in society, and he tried to defend the rite from superstition and Catholicism and claims that the cure only occurred through the operation of the fancy or other natural means. The pressure of these doubts, however, and the political thread on
which defenders of the rite still relied on, exposed the increasing politicization of the royal touch at the end of the 1600’s. During the reign of Charles II, conflicts between religion and politics, science and the supernatural intensified, and any consensus that had existed toward the touch was lost.

However, despite this wide spectrum of belief, events at the end of the seventeenth century and the last years of the Stuarts shifted the entire discourse away from the ideological bases that defenders of the rite relied on. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 forced many Anglican Tories, the steadfast supporters of divine monarchy, to support the overthrow of James and the installation of a new ruler. The revolution ushered in a new era of government, however timid it may have initially been. The political rationale that had allowed so many Tories to continue to support the touch faded, and the religious, scientific, and social contradictions inherent in the rite could were not suppressed by overt political consideration any more. The last Stuart monarch, Queen Anne, carried the touch to her grave, and never again did an English monarch practice the sacred rite of healing. There was no great outcry for the House of Hanover to resurrect the rite, and within a few decades many writers had taken to openly deriding the royal touch.28

However, we must remember that despite these elite developments in ideology, thousands continued to flock to the monarch’s touch throughout the reigns of Charles, James, and Anne, and many still professed belief in the royal miracle. However, that is not to suggest elite skepticism towards the rite was unknown or rejected by the poor. The failure of Monmouth to gain any traction for his touch indicates that the Whig rejection of miraculous monarchy did penetrate popular society to a certain extent, and the lack of any public outcry at the cessation of

28 Bloch, *The Royal Touch*, 221.
the touch when William III, and later George I, took the throne is even more suggestive. We must also remember that despite the impressive numbers recorded by Browne, most English people never received the touch, and that the number of people who continued to seek the cure of the king is not necessarily indicative of widespread or broad based support for the rite; it may only indicate that a dedicated segment of the population continued to be devoted to the supernatural and the royal miracle. However, it is indisputable that superstitious beliefs retained their power and mystique much longer among the lower classes of society than among the elite.^[29]

What we see, then, at the end of the reign of the Stuarts, is a fragmenting of belief. Perhaps there was never a time when a broad political and societal consensus existed in England, but the Restoration and the Glorious Revolution ushered in a new and unprecedented era of ideological division. Attitudes towards monarchy, religion, and the miraculous had irrevocably changed, and the clash of partisanship became the norm at the turn of the eighteenth century. However, despite the wide spectrum of beliefs that we observed, there was a fundamental, if subtle, shift away from the supernatural in everyday life and the divine in the monarchy. The royal touch was an inevitable casualty.

I was first intrigued by the king’s touch because it was weird, because it was strange. How could so many people believe in such a foolish thing for so long? It is easy for us moderns to look back with a patronizing smile, if not outright disdain, at the credulity of the past, at the colossal folly that led so many people to believe wholeheartedly in the miraculous claims of a king. If I have learned anything from this journey, however, it is how wrong that approach to our past is. Belief in the royal touch did not arise out of stupidity or ignorance, but out of genuine

efforts to explain the world and the individual’s place within it. These beliefs were real and powerful to millions of people for centuries, and they served an essential role in constructing and defining society. People were not empty vessels, blindly accepting whatever they were told. They struggled with their beliefs in an effort to understand the nature of their government and their world, and these struggles remain with us today. That is not to argue human progress is an illusion, or that value judgments have no place. But to treat unseriously the discarded supernatural beliefs of the past as a risible sideshow to the political clashes that moved nations is to ignore a fundamental aspect of the human experience. The royal touch has been abandoned so totally that most people are no longer aware it ever existed, but while the belief in royal healing may have ended, the struggles, the aspirations and the questions that informed it remain with us today, for they lay at the heart of the human experience.
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