

**DICKENS'S DOCTORS: A  
PAPER READ  
BEFORE THE PHILOBIBLON  
CLUB, MAY 28, 1903**

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Da Costa

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**JOHN CHALMERS DA COSTA**

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## Dickens's Doctors

*One Hundred and Fifty Copies  
of this book have been printed*

# Dickens's Doctors

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE  
PHILOBIBLON CLUB  
MAY 28, 1903



BY

JOHN CHALMERS DA COSTA, M.D.



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## Dickens's Doctors



HARLES DICKENS was incomparably the master. His most notable strength was in the marvellous exactitude of his powers of observation. He saw a hundred things, where ordinary mortals would see but one. Pathos was his forte; humor, an integral part of his nature. The writings of no other man impress us so much with the close and vital relationship between humor and pathos. He was fond of oddity and revelled in the whimsical. He loved bravery, honesty, simplicity, and generosity, and always gave them praise. He detested falsehood, pomposity, meanness, presumption, and pretence, and abhorred all quacks and impostors with the hearty hatred of a vigorous, truthful, and clear-headed man. He never hesitated to attack wrong with splendid power, even though it sat upon a throne, and even though that throne were twined with the ivy of precedent and green with the moss of tradition. He was always examining, exposing, analyzing, dissecting, and cauterizing; and no one who merited it was too high or too powerful to escape exposure or castigation.

Dickens has given us numerous pictures of lawyers,

and he seems to have known the legal profession thoroughly, from its highest, the Lord Chancellor and Mr. Tulkinghorn, to its lowest, Dodson, Fogg, Brass, and Pell. We remember Uriah Heep, Spenlow, Jorkins, Stryver, and Vholes. We are obliged to acknowledge, too, that the majority of his pictures are the reverse of complimentary, although he names some decent ones, among whom are Jaggery, Lightwood, Perker, Wrayburn, Wickfield, Traddles, Sergeant Buzfuz, and Sergeant Snubbin.

For honest, virtuous clergymen he had nothing but regard; but he often paid his compliments to ranting and hypocritical preachers. He drew as types—which, we regret to say, are not uncommon in this country—Mr. Chadband, Melchisedech Howler, and Mr. Stiggins. Among the good ones we recall Septimus Crisparkle, and Frank Milvey.

It has occurred to me that it would not be uninteresting to learn his views about doctors, and discover what types of medical men he has drawn in his stories. In that early contribution known as the *Report of the Mudfog Association* we have set before us some physicians whose words and whose views are depicted in a spirit of the broadest caricature. The Mudfog Association was a meeting of scientists, assembled to discuss notable advancements and achievements, and the book is really a species of parody upon the proceedings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, which had then been but recently organized. For instance, at this meeting Dr. Kutankumagen, a distinguished practi-

tioner from Moscow, reports a case of extraordinary interest. He had taken a perfectly well man and subjected him for a definite period to the recognized treatment of blood-letting and purgation; and he reports to the society the interesting fact that, by persistence in these beneficial measures, he has succeeded in making his patient now able to walk about with the slight assistance of a crutch and a boy. He now eats little, drinks little, sleeps little, and never laughs.

Before this same association, Mr. Knight Bell reports the very remarkable case of an individual who had swallowed a door-key. When the post-mortem examination was made, an unscrupulous student took a cast of the mould in the stomach wall made by the retention of the key; he then had a door-key made from this cast, and by means of it succeeded in entering a house and committing a most extraordinary robbery.

Another gentleman reports to this association a peculiar case of monomania; and still another presents some interesting experiments upon a dog by means of Prussic acid. The dog objects, and the experimenter laments "that the interests of science should be sacrificed to the prejudices of a brute creature." There is no character of a physician drawn in the article. With broad humor, Dickens satirizes some of the profound convictions of the time,—for instance, blood-letting and purgation. The papers show Dickens's abhorrence of the practice of vivisection, and his appreciation of the owl-like solemnity with which our learned bodies sometimes debate perfectly obvious propositions. He like-