

**THE MEDICAL SIDE  
OF BENJAMIN  
FRANKLIN**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649118588

The medical side of Benjamin Franklin by William Pepper

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Cover @ 2017

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**WILLIAM PEPPER**

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FIG. 1.—Benjamin Franklin. Physicien et Philosophe. From an engraving by Ambroise Tardieu, after the portrait by Duplessis. In the author's collection.

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BY  
WILLIAM PEPPER, M.D.

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PHILADELPHIA  
WILLIAM J. CAMPBELL  
1911

TO THE MEMORY

OF MY

GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GRANDFATHER

*Special Edition Limited to 250 Copies, of  
which this is No. 210*

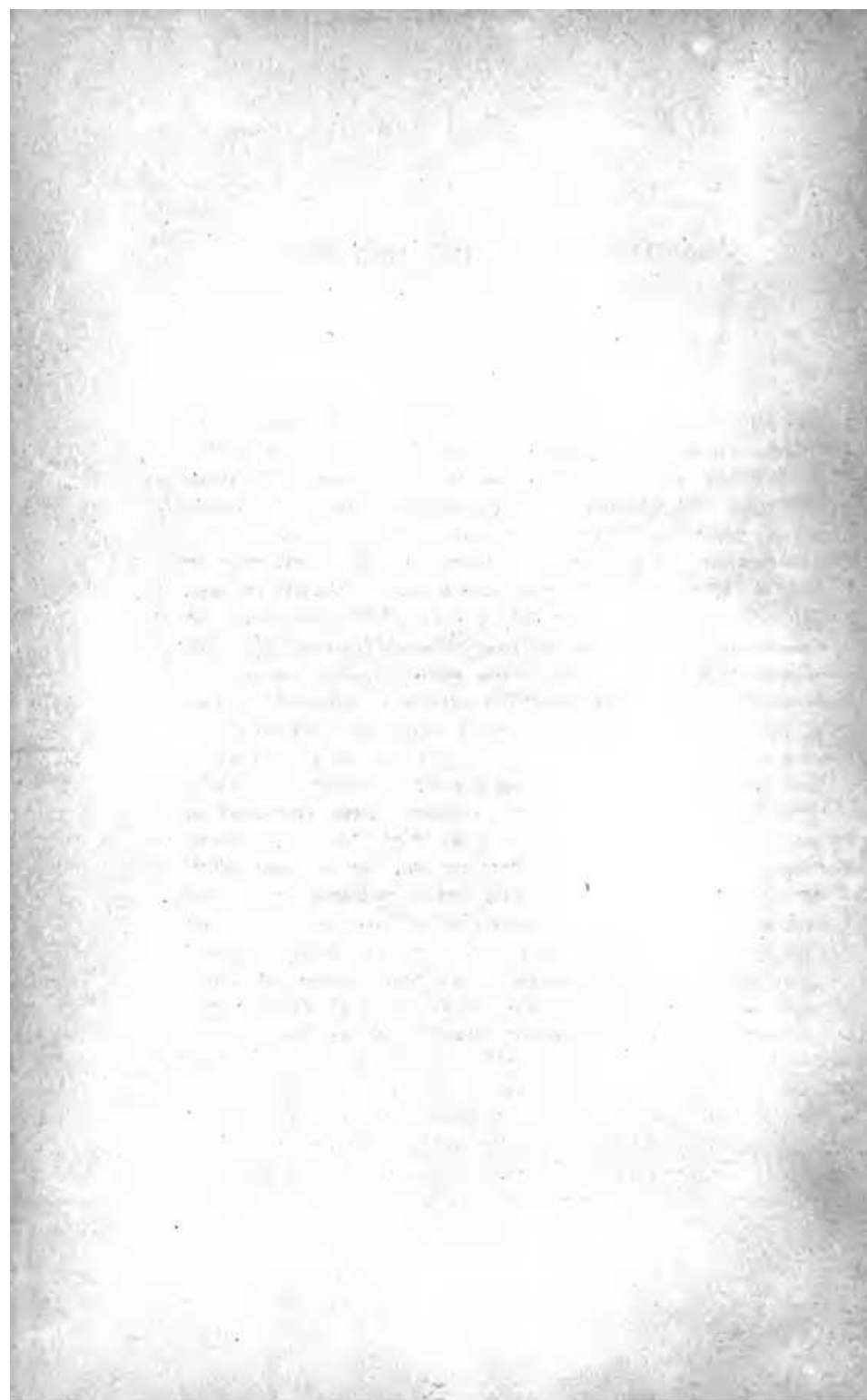


## PREFACE

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IN 1905, when the first volume of *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin, Collected and Edited, with a Life and Introduction*, by Albert Henry Smyth, appeared, I decided to read seriatim each volume as it arrived from the publishers. I feel sure that I would never have had the moral courage to have undertaken such a task, albeit a pleasant one, had the ten volumes appeared simultaneously. Apropos of this, I remember as a child my father buying for me a complete set of Dickens' works, and wisely secreting them and giving me on successive Christmases two or three volumes, which naturally I read with avidity, and thereby formed a great fondness for these wonderful novels. Let me recommend this plan to parents—to publishers it would hardly appeal. As I read through the ten volumes of Franklin's writings I marked all the references or allusions to medical matters, and their number amazed me. Some of these I read several years ago at a meeting of the Section on Medical History of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. Later, having collected a number of engravings representing many of Franklin's medical friends, I delivered, on December 7, 1909, an illustrated address upon the "Medical Side of Benjamin Franklin," before the Baltimore City Medical Society. This address was published in the *University of Pennsylvania Medical Bulletin*, and finally I have now republished it, with some slight changes, in its present form. A comprehensive index has been included in order to offset the rather disconnected narrative which is arranged chronologically and not under subjects.

W. P.



# The Medical Side of Benjamin Franklin

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## CHAPTER I

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN lived in an age when men of education and genius in varying paths of life did not consider it strange or peculiar to think, discuss, or write about medical matters. These men did not feel that they were intruding on any ground sacred to the physician in so doing. Thus we find Mathew Carey, the publisher, who worked so heroically on the committee of safety during the yellow fever epidemic of 1793 in Philadelphia, writing an *Account of the Malignant Fever*, that ran through four editions within two months; Noah Webster, the lexicographer, compiling a *History of Epidemic and Pestilential Diseases*; Thomas Jefferson receiving from Edward Jenner vaccine virus, of which he made good use. Franklin, however, just as he surpassed in some other lines of thought these men, outdid them in his knowledge of medical affairs.

"The study of medicine was one of Franklin's chief interests, and it is one of the least known," said Professor Smyth in the introduction to his splendid edition of the *Life and Writings of Benjamin Franklin*; and so, although perhaps few new facts can be added, the compilation of the following abstracts from Franklin's writings, together with a few statements taken chiefly from Smyth, from Paul Leicester Ford's *The Many-sided Franklin*, and from Sydney George Fisher's *The True Benjamin Franklin*, will impress upon us how much of a physician Benjamin Franklin really was. The recently published calendar of the *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, in the library of the American Philosophical Society, so ably edited by Dr. I. Minis Hays, has also been a great help in discovering references to medical matters in the many letters to Franklin in that large collection. As Atkinson says in his *Medical Bibliography*: "We must all plagiarize from each other, or little will be made out, in so intricate an art as medicine. When a writer affects to despise the works of others, and ventures to produce