

Dr. J. H. Tilden's Biographical Sketch — 1851 - 1940



Frederic N. Gilbert writes with editing and additions by Victoria BidWell: John Henry Tilden was a United States physician, son of Dr. Joseph G. Tilden. John was born in Van Burensburg, Illinois, on January 21, 1851. He first studied medicine under the supervision of his father. And by the age of seventeen, in September, 1868, he entered the office of Dr. J. Fellows, of Nokomis, Illinois, and continued his studies for another two years. He graduated from the Eclectic Medical Institute of Cincinnati on May 21, 1872. This was a medical school founded in 1830 as a protest against the allopathic and homeopathic schools of medicine of that time. Dr. Tilden began his own practice at Nokomis, for eight years. While there, in the spring of 1877, he took a post-graduate course at the American Medical College at St. Louis, Missouri.

Let us back up to Dr. John Henry's parents so that we may see where Dr. Tilden got his spiritual background so heavily emphasized in his teachings. Dr. J. G. Tilden, our subject's father, was a native of Vermont. He received an exceptionally fine education in the schools of his native State and was graduated when quite young from the University of Norwich, Vermont, after which he taught school and read medicine. Subsequently, he attended medical lectures in Castleton and Woodstock, Vermont. Two years later, he was graduated from the medical department at Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, where he was afterward employed as instructor in chemistry. In 1841, he removed to Highland, Illinois, where he practiced medicine and taught school. Two years later, he went to Vanburensburg, in that State, and opened a drug store. There, he successfully carried on his profession in connection with the drug business for several years. In 1871, he made another change of residence, moving to Raymond, Illinois, where he made his home until his death, which occurred December 8, 1887, at what was in those days an advanced age of seventy-seven years, six months and nineteen days. He was one of the first practicing physicians of the Prairie State, locating there when the country was rough and sparsely settled. His practice extended many miles. His journeys were performed on horseback over the broad prairies and swampy lands of Illinois. For many years, Dr. J. G. Tilden was a faithful and honored member of the Methodist Episcopal Church. During his long practice, he made many warm and life-long friends and was the beloved physician and counselor in many a household. At his death, he left an aged wife and six children, all grown to maturity, to mourn the loss of a kind husband and father. His wife, Ann W. (Hill) Tilden, was born in Illinois in 1819. Her parents were among the early settlers of Montgomery County, Illinois, going there from Kentucky.

Now, to continue with Dr. John Henry Tilden — the most famous even to this day of the 6 Tilden children. He married in 1873, to Miss Rebecca Maddux, a native of Hillsboro, Illinois and daughter of Nathaniel Maddux. They had two children, a daughter Edna, born in 1876, and Elsie in 1878.

Dr. Tilden was a prominent member of the National Eclectic Medical Society and also of the State Medical Society, of Illinois. In 1879, Dr. Tilden moved to St. Louis and was engaged for two years as lecturer in anatomy and physiology at a medical college there. In 1881 he moved to Litchfield, Illinois. Dr. Tilden continued practicing there for four years and established a solid and admired reputation. His thorough knowledge of medicine, and skill in surgery, won for him the confidence of the people to such an extent that, although comparatively a new-comer of this city, his success was already an assured fact.

It was during the early years of his practice in Illinois, that Dr. Tilden began to question the use of medicine to cure illness. His extensive reading, especially of medical studies from European medical schools, his study of The American Pioneers in natural healing, and his own thinking and experience led him to the conclusion that there should be some way to live so as not to build disease. And in this period, his thoughts on “toxemia as the one cause of all disease brought on by wrong living habits so that there is an energy crisis in the unhealthy body and subsequent development of disease began to formulate and materially develop.” From the beginning of his practice in Denver, the Doctor used no medicine but practiced his theory of clearing the body of toxic poison and then allowing nature to make the cure. He thus taught his patients how to live so as not to create a toxic condition and to retain a healthy body free of disease. An uncompromising realist and a strict disciplinarian, the Doctor wasted no time on those who would not relinquish degenerating habits. But to his patients and disciples, he was both friend and mentor.

In June, 1882, Dr. Tilden was elected Adjunct Professor of Anatomy in the college in St. Louis. He moved again in 1886 to Wichita, Kansas, until 1890, when he moved to Denver, Colorado. While in Kansas, a local paper had this to say:

“His thorough knowledge of medicine, and skill in surgery, have won for him the confidence of the people to such an extent that, although comparatively a newcomer of this city, his success is already an assured fact.”

In the early 1900s, during the worst pneumonia epidemic America had ever seen, which was at that time the number one killer, Dr. John H. Tilden while in Denver, Colorado, had the highest success in healing pneumonia of any other medical doctor. During that epidemic, most doctors lost hundreds of patients to that deadly plague. Dr. Tilden, however, even though he had more pneumonia cases than any other doctor in the country, never lost a patient! What made him different? He used no drugs. And he cleansed the colon of each patient. He used water therapy and administered natural live foods. His success was considered miraculous because other doctors, who were relying on drugs, continually met with failure!

In Denver, Dr. Tilden located in the downtown business section, in an office with other doctors. Later he established a sanitarium in an outer section of the city. This sanitarium and school, he conducted until 1924. He then sold the Institution, for about half of what he had plowed into its development, to a Dr. Arthur Voss, of Cincinnati, Ohio. Dr. Tilden then intended to devote himself to writing and lecturing. However, he soon became discontented without his school. And after a period, he bought two residences on Pennsylvania Avenue, in Denver, united them into one, and opened a new sanitarium and school, having to borrow from a friend a part of the money with which to make the purchases. This probably was in 1926. This school continued until the Doctor’s death, on September 1, 1940.

In 1896, Dr. Tilden began publishing a monthly magazine called “*The Stuffed Club*,” which continued until 1915, when he changed the name to “*The Philosophy of Health*.” In 1926, he changed it again to “*Health Review and Critique*.” His writing for these publications was almost entirely done in the early hours, from 3 A.M. until 7. The purpose of these publications was not to make money but to spread knowledge of the Doctor’s teachings. In time, it attained a wide circulation, not only in this country but abroad, even in Australia. But it never produced revenue. For the Doctor refused to make it an advertising medium, as often urged to do by advertising firms. As his death revealed, after 68 years of practice, the Doctor had accumulated only an exceedingly modest estate. His life was pre-eminently one of self-sacrifice and of devotion to service, searching after truth, with an indomitable will and with an intense fortitude to adhere to the truth when discovered. In his day, the Doctor’s thoughts received no support from the established medical profession but brought the strongest of opposition and condemnation.

Victoria BidWell continues:

All of this factual information about Dr. Tilden's life is all very well and good and very interesting. But let me take the life of Dr. John Henry Tilden deeper and more personal!

I first read Dr. Tilden's *TOXEMIA EXPLAINED — THE FULL INTERPRETATION OF THE CAUSE OF DISEASE* in 1976 at Dr. Shelton's Health School. It was shockingly well-written, short and sweet, and easy to read compared to reading Dr. Shelton's works! I remember, after starting to work for T. C. Fry in 1983, I read *TOXEMIA EXPLAINED* 4 to 6 times a year, every year, cover-to-cover. I needed that repetition to get the ideas forever firmly planted in my brain! The book can easily be read in a sitting of a few hours. I kept thinking: "Here it is! Every Health Seeker should have this one book to start off their Natural Hygiene education! There was no *HEALTH SEEKERS' YEARBOOK* to start them off at that time. But I urged all of my GetWell Friends to get this book! And I so urge you now! It is Dr. Tilden's landmark book — AND OURS! It would be many years before I would pay much attention to what else Dr. Tilden had ever written — or to the man himself. But when I acquired Dr. Vetrano's professional library? There they all were: 27 years of his 3 magazines and 16 of his books! I encourage you to start with *TOXEMIA EXPLAINED* and continue on with all this teachings. www.health4thebillions.org has them all — digital downloads and hard copies, alike. You, too, can become familiar with this wonderful man, even though he is long gone!

Besides the simplicity and clarity of *TOXEMIA EXPLAINED*, I was struck with the kindness of Dr. Tilden's temperament through his writing. It is obvious that this man was a Christian and that he held so much love in his heart. His tone was a far, sweet cry from Dr. Shelton's agnosticism and anger and sarcasm and derision that peppered his works. Both Dr. Shelton and Dr. Tilden did, however, take the same stance against what I have come to call "The Medical Mentality at Its Worst." And they did both write with a sterling condemnation of the practices of that Mentality.

Remember: Dr. Shelton picked up the leadership torch of The Natural Hygiene Movement when Dr. Tilden died in 1939. That very same year, Dr. Shelton put out his very first issue of his magazine, clearly naming it after Dr. Tilden's. While Dr. Tilden's third and final magazine was named: "*The Hygienic Review & Critique*," Dr. Shelton's first and only magazine was named: "*Dr. Shelton's Hygienic Review*." It is a shame that the 2 men were not close friends. Dr. Shelton could have learned so much from Dr. Tilden. As it so happened, the young Dr. Shelton in 1940 only 31 years old, had written to Mrs. Dr. J. H. Tilden for use of her husband's mailing list after the Doctor's funeral. She refused to share it with him. While unpacking Dr. Vetrano's library, I held Mrs. J. H. Tilden's letter in my hands and had to wonder at the real cause of her refusal to share the Dr. Tilden names and addresses with Dr. Shelton.

Interestingly enough and unlike Dr. Shelton's Health School in San Antonio, Dr. Tilden was financially successful with his sanitarium in Denver. His magazines are not full of pleadings for donations. As you read through his 27 years of magazines, you come to appreciate the typical daily life led by Dr. Tilden and to understand his teachings thoroughly. You will love reading his magazines! From the few pictures of his sanitarium, you can see his place was a thriving and going concern! In my imagination, I have connected the Hollywood movie of *TOMBSTONE* with Dr. Tilden and the teachings of the day. Doc Holliday is told by a medical doctor while down in Tombstone that Doc needs "complete rest" — a term right out of Natural Hygiene! And in the end scene of the movie, Doc — in his last days of life — has travelled to Denver and checked into a sanitarium in Denver. The facility looks uncannily like Dr. Tilden's pictures! One can only wonder if the screenplay writer had not known of Dr. Tilden and his sanitarium and put them into the *TOMBSTONE* movie! At any rate, Dr. Tilden's sanitarium and his pocketbook both thrived compared to Dr. Shelton's — a fact you cannot overlook while reading their magazines.

While looking at the Dr. Tilden's offerings at www.health4thebillions.org, I also urge you to get *Dr. Tilden's Philosophical & Health Epigrams*. I have edited these 2 little books for capitalization, punctuation, bold-facing, and the like to better emphasize his epigrammatic teachings. I have not altered the actual arrangement of his words or the content of these teachings. These epigrams teach The Health Seeker to look to what lies in the soul for healing of the habits that have brought on any disease. The word "soul" is defined as "the thoughts of the mind, the feelings of the heart, and the choices of the free will." It is those choices that get us sick or keep us well!