

**Samuel David Gross / [J. Chalmers Da Costa].**

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## SAMUEL DAVID GROSS

SAMUEL DAVID GROSS, the elder Gross, as we all called him in order to distinguish him from his brilliant son and successor, Samuel W. Gross, my old master whom I loved and admired with all the enthusiasm of boyhood more than 30 years ago, was born in Easton, Pennsylvania, in 1805.

His great-grandparents came from the Lower or Rhenish Palatinate in one of the emigrations of the Seventeenth Century, from that portion of Germany which, before its devastating wars, had been a veritable garden spot. The soldiers of Louis XIV had interpreted literally the order of the Sun King to Louvois to burn up the country. They killed three-fourths of the people and destroyed four-fifths of the property. In the Palatinate, Wallenstein and Gustavus Adolphus, Tilly and Spinola, Condé and Turenne performed some of their most sanguinary actions. They left the Palatinate a gory wilderness with the blackened ruins of homesteads, buildings, and churches and the land harried by great flocks of ravaging wolves.

In the veins of Gross ran the blood of the calm, scholarly, patriotic, broad-minded, deep-thinking, home-loving, and philanthropic Palatines; of those men who abandoned home and country for the rights of free speech, of liberty, and of conscience.

Gross was brought up on a farm. He loved the country all his life and he knew and appreciated its magic. Nature was to him an endless pleasure. Birds, animals, the woods and especially flowers were to him a source of the utmost delight. He loved the sunrise with its glory of color and the sunset with its splendor of flame. He loved the blue depths of the heavens, the sea, the majesty of the storm, the starlight, and the stream.

He knew familiarly the flora of this entire region of Pennsylvania. He always kept flowers in his office and about his house, and he insisted on seeing them in hospital wards. Once in a hospital I saw him tenderly lift a flower, sadly comment upon how soon it would fade, saying: "It has but one Spring and we mortals go almost as quickly for we have but a few Springs." He had within him something of the Wordsworth feeling: "It is my faith that every flower enjoys the air it breathes."

He was educated in the common schools and started to study medicine under Doctor Swift, of Easton. After he had begun his study in Doctor Swift's office he made up his mind that he had not sufficient education for the proper study of his profession and he went back to school, finishing in the famous Academy at Lawrenceville, New Jersey. He then renewed the study of medi-



cine, entering the Jefferson Medical College of Philadelphia, and being an office student of the celebrated Dr. George McClellan.

On his graduation he started practice in Philadelphia and eked out a livelihood by hack literary work and translations. He spoke German and he acquired a knowledge of French in the course of a few months in order to translate Alphonse Tavernier's *Elements of Operative Surgery*, in 1829. He translated the *Manual of General Anatomy*, by Bayle and Hollard, in 1828, and Jules Hatin's *Obstetrics* in the same year. In 1829 he translated Johann Valentin von Hildenbrand's *Treatise on the Nature, Cause, and Treatment of Contagious Typhus*. Tavernier's was the first treatise on operative surgery published in America and attained great success.

In 1830, two and a half years after his graduation, he wrote a work on *Diseases and Injuries of the Bones and Joints*, and although the book became popular, the liberal publishers never paid him a cent. Want of practice in Philadelphia obliged him to move back to Easton. After remaining there for a time, he went to Cincinnati and from there to Louisville, where his fame was made.

In 1839 he published his great treatise on *Pathological Anatomy*, the first in the English language. He received not a single cent for the first edition. The work was a great success and made him broadly known in this country and in Europe. The book was a popular textbook for more than a quarter of a century.

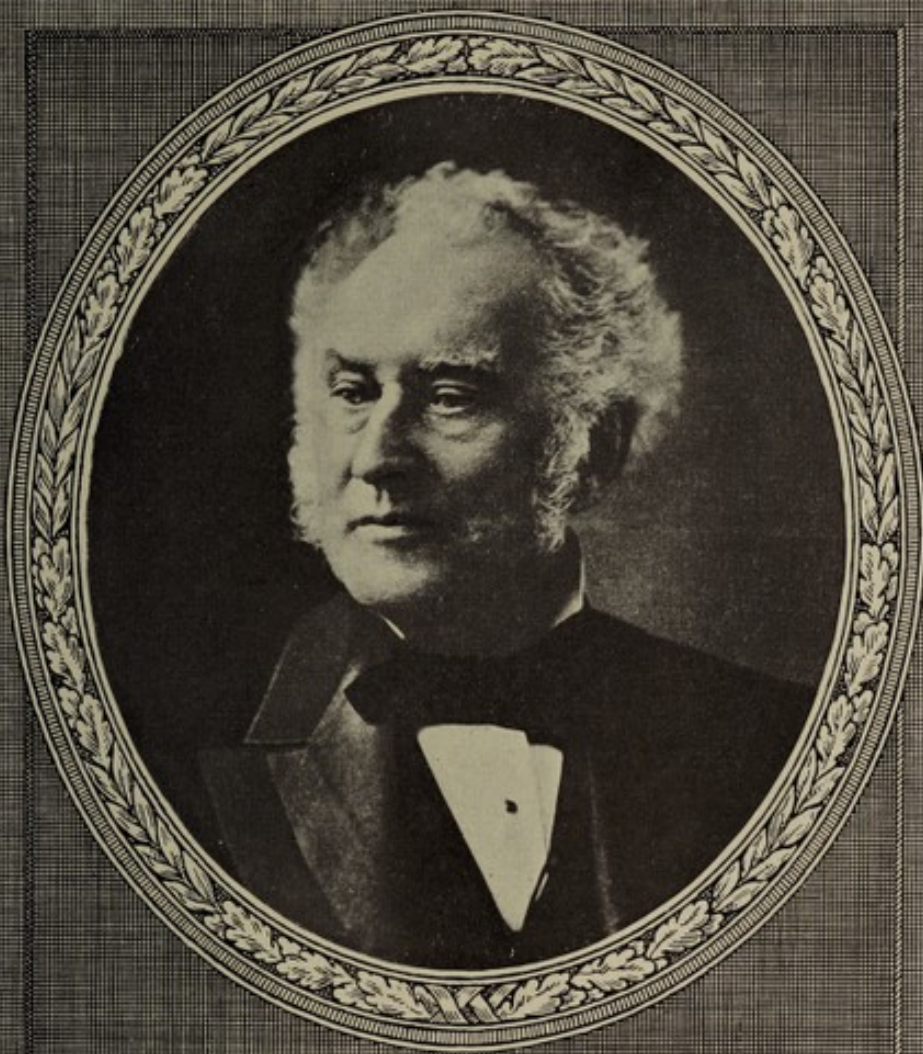
In 1851 he published a treatise on *Diseases of the Urinary Organs*. Up to this time there had been no satisfactory treatise in the English language, the only two existing being Brodie's *Lectures on the Diseases of the Urinary Organs* and William Coulson *On Diseases of the Bladder and Prostate Gland*, both published in 1842. This book, edited by the younger Gross, was still a popular textbook at the end of the 80's in the last century.

In 1854 he published his noted treatise on *Foreign Bodies in the Air Passages*. This was the very first attempt that had been made to present the subject in systematized form.

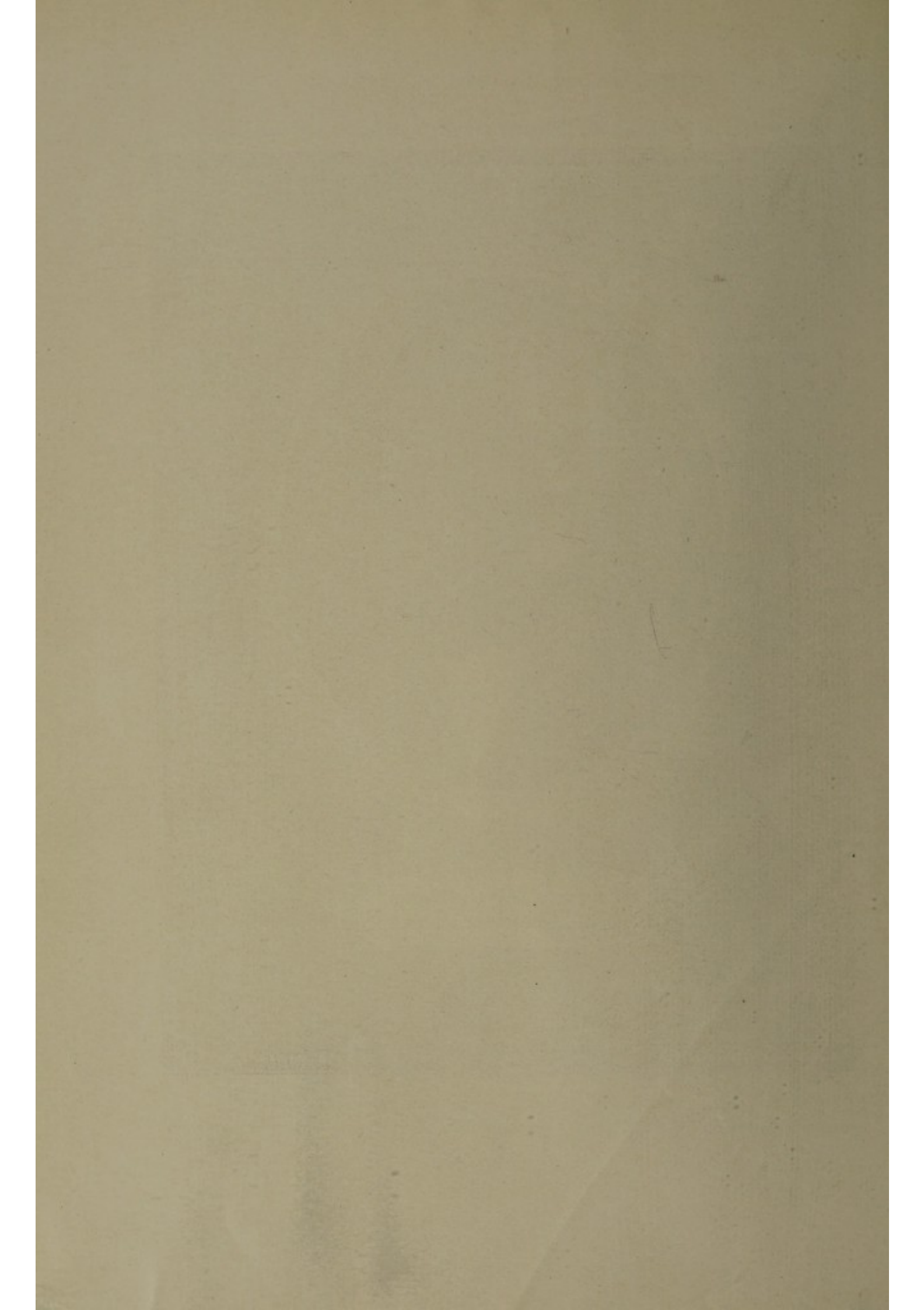
In 1859 he issued the first edition of his magnificent textbook on surgery; the greatest of his day, the first from America and probably the greatest ever written by one man. Recall the comprehensive nature of the title: *A System of Surgery, Pathological, Diagnostic, Therapeutic, and Operative*. The sixth edition was issued in 1882.

In the beginning of the Civil War, he wrote a *Manual of Military Surgery*. In 1861, he edited the *Lives of Eminent American Physicians and Surgeons of the Nineteenth Century*, writing several of the biographies himself. At times he edited medical journals. He contributed a multitude of articles to medical





SAMUEL DAVID GROSS  
1805-1884





journals and had made some original researches of the first importance, especially those upon gunshot wounds of the intestines.

He had been a teacher in Cincinnati, in Louisville, in New York City before he came to his real home as a professor of surgery in the Jefferson Medical College. He was one of the greatest of surgeons and teachers. He founded the American Surgical Association. He was long the most influential member of the American Medical Association. He presided over the International Congress of Surgeons in 1876. He received high public honors in Germany, and was given the D.C.L. of Oxford, the LL.D. of Cambridge, the LL.D. of Edinburgh, and when actually on his deathbed, the LL.D. of the University of Pennsylvania.

His intellect was of the most comprehensive and luminous sort. He was a real surgical philosopher. Probably no greater mind was ever devoted to the science and art of surgery. He was a great man, a good man, and a gentleman; a master teacher and one who commanded not only the respect but the affection of the entire profession.

His old friend, Doctor Yandell of Louisville, wrote an epitaph which contains a just estimate of him. In this, Yandell states that Gross's life was one "unbroken process of laborious years," that he "filled chairs in four medical colleges in the Union and added lustre to them all." That "he recast surgical science, as taught in North America, formulated anew its principles, enlarged its domain, added to its art, and imparted fresh impetus to its study." Among the many books he composed is "*A System of Surgery* which is read in different tongues, wherever the Healing Art is practiced." "With a great intellect, carefully trained and balanced, he aimed with undivided zeal at the noble end of lessening human suffering and lengthening human life, and so rose to the highest position yet attained in Science by any of his countrymen."

The writer of this brief memoir beheld the mighty leader a great many times, heard him lecture frequently and watched him operate, and in him always saw the embodiment of surgical learning, dignity, and distinction, and felt that fifty years of American surgery were speaking through his lips.

J. CHALMERS DACOSTA.

