

Frederick William Parham / [E. Denegre Martin].

Contributors

Martin, E. Denegre.

Publication/Creation

Chicago : Surg. Pub. Co., 1929.

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/rwdqy36r>

**wellcome
collection**

Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

91000

ROY MOODIE
COLLECTION.

3

Reprint from
SURGERY, GYNECOLOGY AND OBSTETRICS
October, 1929, pages 566-568

MASTER SURGEONS OF AMERICA

FREDERICK WILLIAM PARHAM

E. DENEGRE MARTIN, M.D., F.A.C.S., NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

IN the death of Frederick William Parham, on May 7, 1927, the medical profession lost one of its ablest and most beloved surgeons. He was born in New Orleans on March 20, 1856, the son of John Greenway and Mary Blount Parham. His early education was received in the public schools of his native city and his collegiate work done at Randolph Macon College of Virginia. He studied medicine at the University of Louisiana, now Tulane University, and later did post graduate work in Philadelphia.

Essentially a scholar, a student not only of medicine, to which he devoted his life, but a lover as well of art and music. He had a keen analytical mind and sound medical judgment. It was his great devotion to surgery and his untiring efforts to improve this branch of medicine which inspired his associates to greater deeds, and it was their co-operation which had much to do with firmly establishing aseptic surgery in the wards of the Charity Hospital of New Orleans.

The history of his life's work would be incomplete without a short sketch of his accomplishments in this great institution, for it was here he spent his spare moments and gave freely of his time, not only for the advancement of surgery, but to the establishment of new regulations in the management of the hospital tending toward the improvement of standards and the betterment of the staff.

It is astonishing that a man of such frail physique could accomplish some of the herculean tasks he undertook, for in those days reforms were slow to introduce and accepted only after convincing proof. From the time he entered the hospital as an interne in 1877, a position he won in competitive examination, until his death fifty years later, his interest never ceased.

It was through his direction, while assistant house surgeon 1885-1887, that a system of antiseptic methods was established in the obstetrical wards, which practically eliminated the scourge of puerperal infection from this department.

In 1889, immediately after his return from the European clinics where he studied under such masters as Czerny, Bramann, Hohen and Ewald, and where he gained a thorough knowledge of the teachings of Lister and Pasteur, Dr. Parham established in his wards at the Charity Hospital, at his own expense, a sterilizing outfit and faithfully carried out the directions for the sterilization of hands, dressings, instruments and ligatures, as well as the preparation of pa-

tients. For this achievement he soon had the satisfaction of seeing the gospel of asepsis spread through other wards, especially by those of his disciples who were converts and who later equipped for this work, through their own efforts, services to which they were assigned. The relation of such an incident may seem strange in this era, but it was not an easy matter at that time to convince the older heads of the profession that their ideals were false. The proof, however, was so convincing that they too soon joined the ranks of the progressives.

Dr. Parham's wards were a veritable laboratory of research, and one experiment after another was tried until a satisfactory solution could be reached.

In those days the hospital was filled with chronic ulcers of every description. Relief must be given these poor sufferers, and for a long period of time leg ulcers became the absorbing question. Every form of graft was tested until it was fully demonstrated that autografts alone could be depended upon.

The mortality in compound fractures ranged as high as 70 per cent prior to the application of aseptic treatment to wounds, but once established, men who only a short while before were compelled to sacrifice a leg to save their lives, walked out of the institution with useful limbs. It was in this work that his interest in the treatment of fractures was first stimulated, and though devoid of any mechanical skill, he called to his assistance those who could supply this defect. After years of labor, and largely through his efforts, this branch of surgery progressed to the dignity of a specialty, and today fractures in the hospital are segregated and treated by his pupils who have thought it worth while to devote much of their time to this branch of surgery.

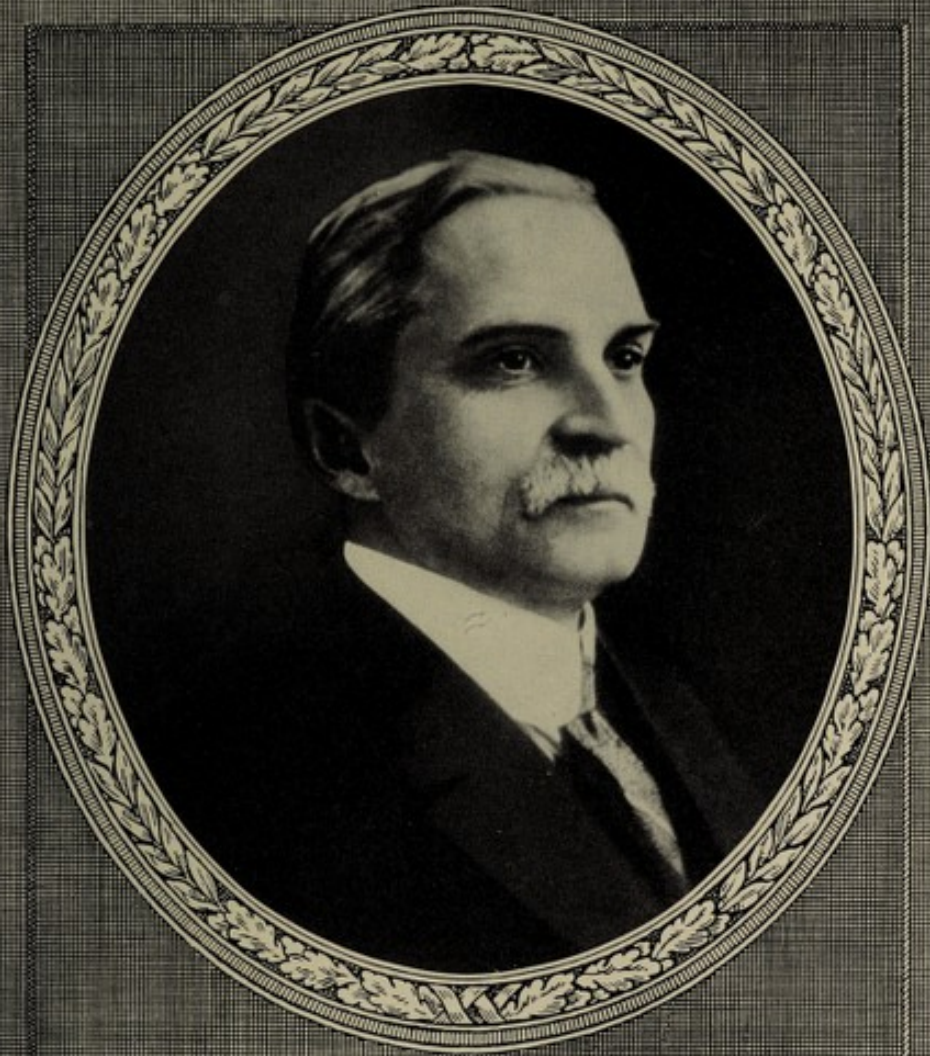
It was in the Charity Hospital that Dr. Parham did his first thoracotomy for tumor of the thoracic wall, which later made his name international.

Perhaps the greatest piece of constructive work done for the institution was the reorganization of its staff, and to none is more credit due than to this one man. This work stands today as another monument to his untiring energy and great desire to put the hospital on the same basis as other institutions of its kind in America.

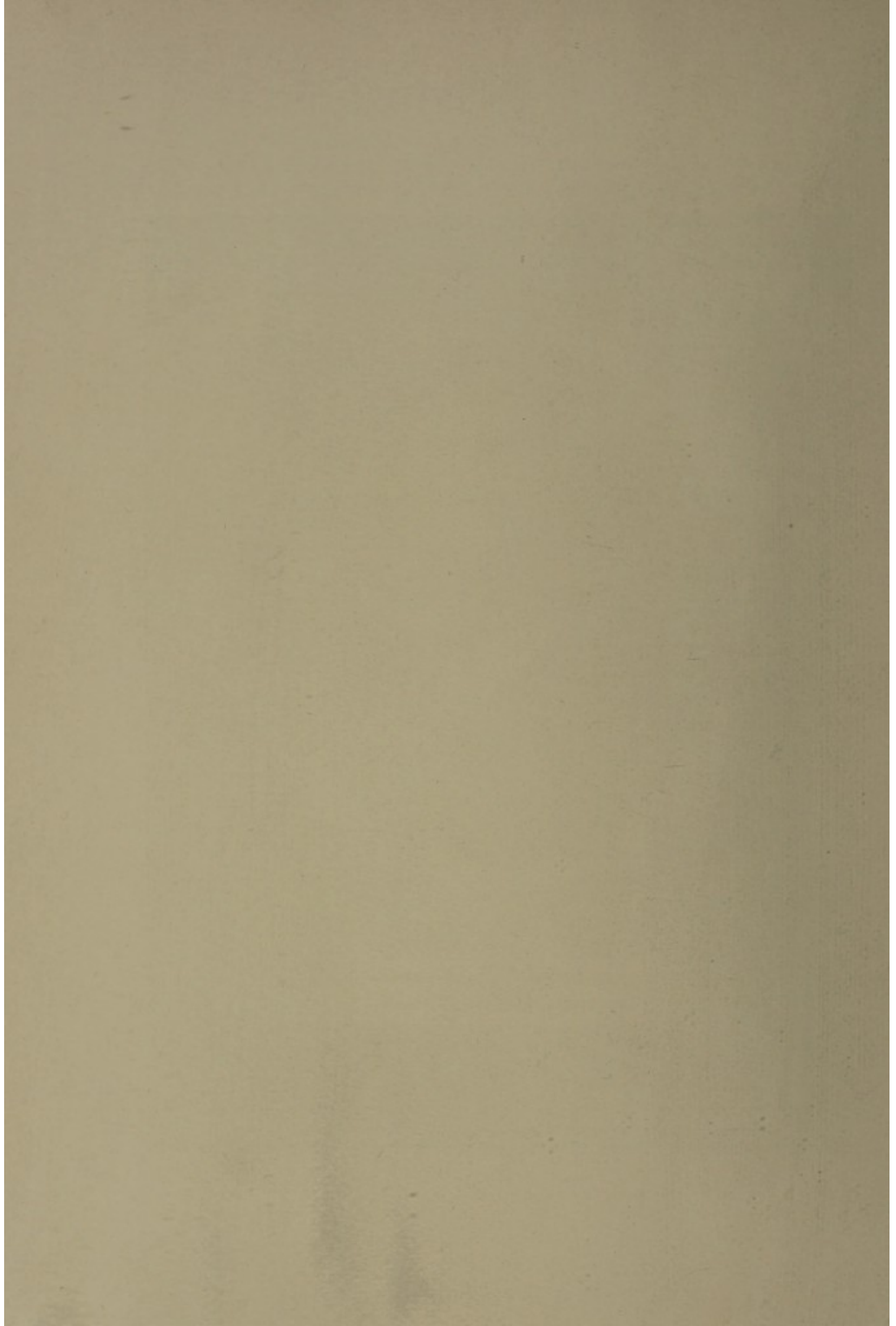
In recognition of his services a life-size portrait, the gift of the staff, hangs in the library of the Charity Hospital with the following inscription: "Frederick William Parham—1856-1927—Surgeon, Teacher, Administrator, Friend."

Dr. Parham devoted much time to sanitation, and under his direction while sanitary inspector in the nineties, the first clinical laboratory was installed in the City Board of Health, where under his supervision cultures were made, and with the co-operation of the profession the mortality in diphtheria alone was reduced from 35 to 8 per cent.

Like a great general, Dr. Parham thought not of his own glorification, nor the financial benefits to be gained, but always of the great good that others might derive from his efforts. Whatever he found of benefit to mankind he gave



FREDERICK W. PARHAM
1856-1927



eagerly to the profession. One has only to read his publications to appreciate the character of the author. Although modest and retiring in the extreme, at times even diffident, he wielded an influence among his fellow men which few have ever enjoyed; he was quick to extol virtue and merit, but even quicker to condemn quackery and unethical practices. These characteristics were particularly noticeable during the more recent epidemics of yellow fever. Once the disease had been recognized he opposed concealment, believing that truth was always the better policy. In all matters of health or sanitation his advice was sought, and none was more active than he in fighting for the suppression of a disease so injurious to the good name of New Orleans. No matter what members of the profession thought of him personally, they knew that his opinion in any controversy was based upon facts and given only after convincing proof.

Dr. Parham was recognized by his fellow practitioners, not only for his skill as a surgeon, but likewise for his ability as a diagnostician. Well equipped with a knowledge of the principals of surgery and with years of experience, he was always a reliable consultant. Nor could he be persuaded to operate on any patient unless he was reasonably certain of giving relief to the sufferer.

Though honored by every association to which he belonged, these honors came unsought. He was president of the Southern Surgical Association; vice-president of the American Surgical Association; president of the Louisiana State Medical Society and the Orleans Parish Medical Society. He was also a fellow of the International Society of Surgery; he was a founder of the American College of Surgeons and served for many years as a regent of this association. At the time of his death he was consulting surgeon of the staff of Touro Infirmary and Charity Hospital. He was one of the organizers of the Graduate School of Medicine of Tulane University and professor of general and abdominal surgery in this institution from 1896 to 1914, and from 1925 until his death.

For many years he was chairman of the Medical Advisory Committee of the Board of Administrators of Tulane, and it was during this régime that many of the reforms which marked the advance of the history of the school were introduced. It was in recognition of his outstanding work as a surgeon and his self-sacrificing efforts in the interest of medicine that Tulane University conferred upon him the degree of doctor of laws, in June, 1925.

Among his most valuable contributions to the profession are "Resection of the Thoracic Wall for Tumor"; "Vesico-Intestinal Fistulæ"; "Inaccessible Vesico-Vaginal Fistulæ"; "Hypospadiæ"; "Head Injuries Marked by Intracranial Tension"; and numerous articles on fractures and other subjects.

His own interest was always sacrificed for the good of others. He loved his work as a means of affording relief and comfort to the poor and suffering. His good deeds alone are on record, for his ideals were the highest and noblest.

