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# MASTER SURGEONS OF AMERICA

JOSEPH PANCOAST

WILLIAM SNOW MILLER, M.D., Sc.D., MADISON, WISCONSIN

JOSEPH PANCOAST, the son of John and Anne (Abbott) Pancoast, was born near Burlington, New Jersey, November 23, 1805. Nothing is known of his early education. In 1828, he graduated from the medical department of the University of Pennsylvania and immediately began the practice of medicine in Philadelphia, specializing in surgery.

In 1830, the Philadelphia Association for Medical Instruction was formed. This was a quiz organization which consisted at first of Drs. Parish, Wood, S. G. Morton, John R. Barton, and Franklin Bache. Later Joseph Pancoast was connected with the organization. It was, however, short lived, for at the end of six years it disbanded.

The Philadelphia School of Anatomy was opened by Dr. James Valentine O'Brien Lawrance in 1820. He died in 1823 and the school passed into the hands of the gifted Dr. John D. Godman. In 1826 Godman went to Rutgers College as professor of anatomy and Dr. James Webster assumed charge of the school. Webster accepted in 1830 the chair of anatomy in the Geneva Medical College and in 1831 Joseph Pancoast, the fourth to take charge of this celebrated school, began his brilliant career as an anatomist and surgeon. On October 7, 1835, he was elected physician to the Philadelphia Hospital (Blockley), and soon after physician-in-chief to the Children's Hospital in the same Institution; from 1838 to 1845 he was one of the visiting surgeons to the same hospital. In 1838 he was called to the chair of surgery in the Jefferson Medical College, made vacant by the retirement of Dr. George McClellan, and gave up his charge of the Philadelphia School of Anatomy.

During the seven years he was connected with the school of anatomy he devoted much time to study and writing. In 1831, he translated Lobstein's *De nervi sympatheci humani fabrica et morbis*, Paris, 1823. This treatise contains an account of the first case of Addison's disease on record, though it was not recognized as a distinct disease until Addison published, in 1855, his classical work on the diseases of the suprarenal capsules (Henry). Later he edited Manec's *Great Sympathetic Nerve* and his *Cerebrospinal System in Man*, and fitly closed his career in the school of anatomy by editing, in 1838, a new edition of Wistar and Horner's *Anatomy*, to



which he added numerous notes, chiefly histological. This he still further remodeled in 1842 and again in 1846. For years this was the text used by the students at the Jefferson Medical College until it was supplanted by the excellent manual of Erasmus Wilson which eventually gave way to the familiar "Gray." In 1844 he published his *Treatise on Operative Surgery*, which passed through three editions; the third appearing in 1852. He contributed numerous articles to the *American Journal of the Medical Sciences*, *American Medical Intelligence*, *Medical Examiner*, besides publishing many papers on surgical and pathological subjects, introductory lectures, and, in 1856, his well known *Professional Glimpses Abroad*.

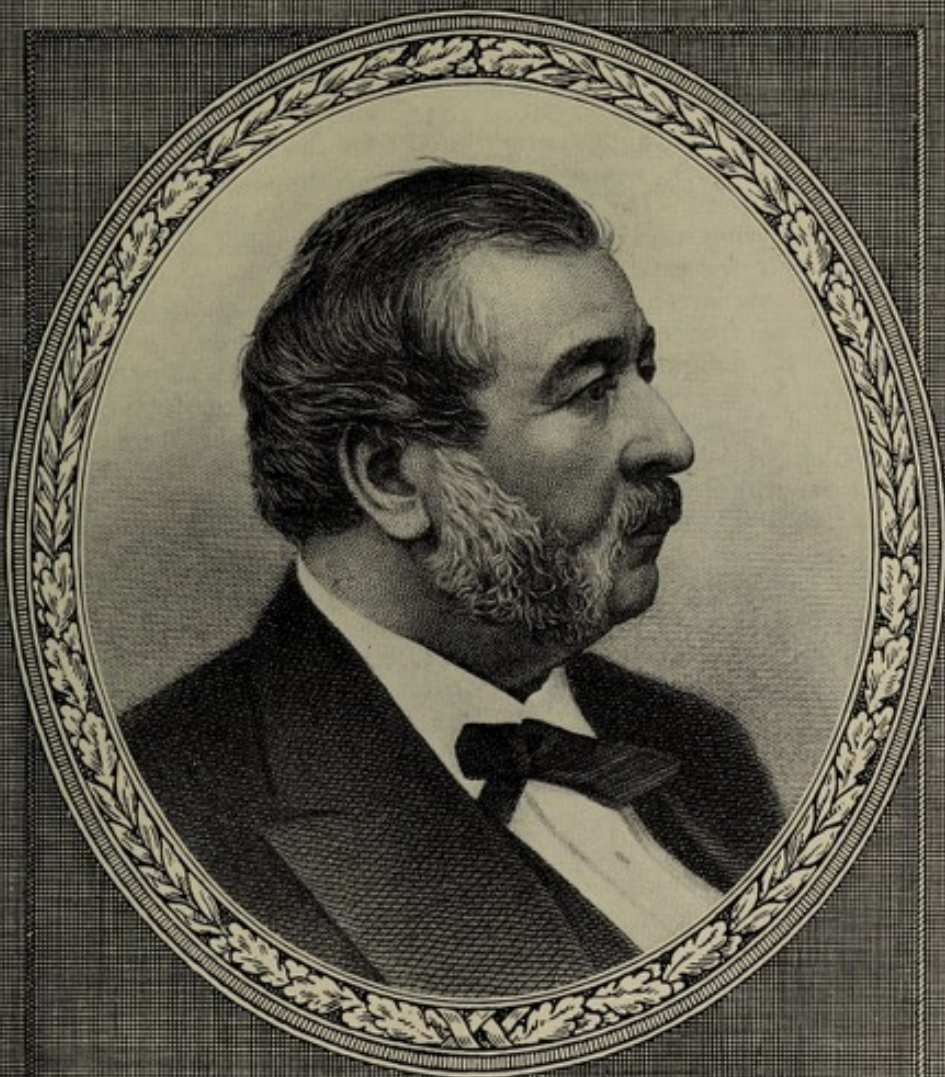
In 1841 Pancoast was transferred from the chair of surgery to that of anatomy which he resigned in 1874, after having filled for 36 years two of the most important chairs in the Jefferson Medical School: surgery and anatomy. In 1854 he was elected to the medical staff of the Pennsylvania Hospital and resigned in 1864. He was a member of his state, county, and city medical societies; the American Medical Association, Academy of Natural Sciences, College of Physicians of Philadelphia, and of the American Philosophical Society.

Surgery is indebted to Pancoast for a number of new operations. He devised the plow and groove, or plastic suture, by means of which four raw surfaces, the bevelled edges of the flap, and the margins of the groove cut by the side of the nose, to receive the flaps, come together. He used this suture in all his rhinoplastic operations with uniform success. He devised a fine needle, turned near the point into a hook, which he introduced just behind the cornea, through the anterior part of the vitreous humor, between the margin of the dilated iris and the lens. By means of this needle he was able to cut deeply the soft parts of the lens and withdraw along the line of entrance of the needle any hardened nucleus leaving the piece in the outer border of the vitreous humor. The operation was usually followed with little irritation.

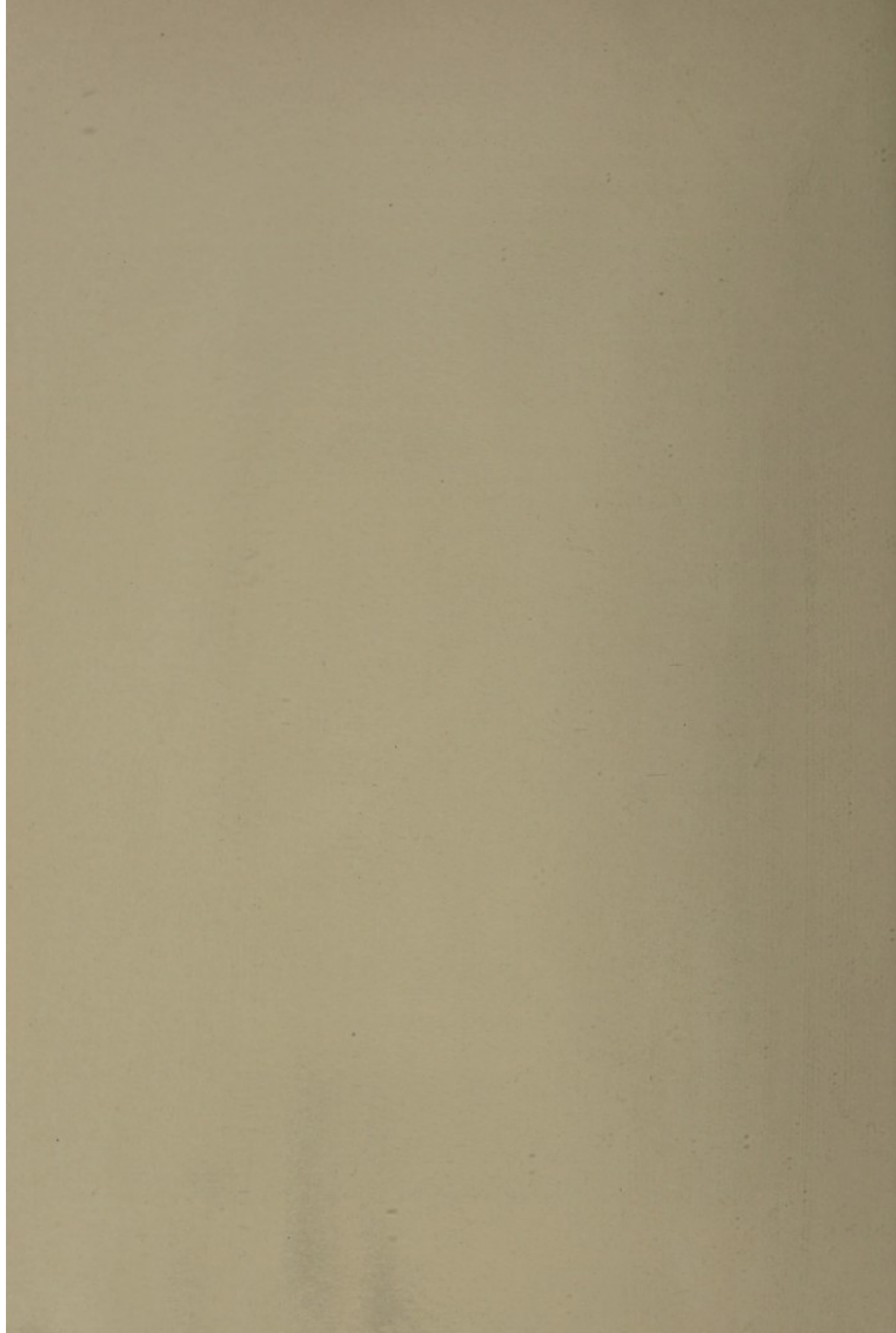
For occlusion of the nasal duct in ordinary cases of epiphora he devised a small hollow ivory tube, from which the earthy matter had been removed, which he introduced from in front by a puncture of the lachrymal duct and left it to be slowly dissolved. In bad cases of internal strabismus he found that the tendon of the internal oblique muscle was often encircled by rigid connective tissue, and it was only by drawing the tendon out by means of a blunt hook and dividing the tendon that the strabismus could be corrected. In the case of large abscesses lying between the colon and cæcum and in front of the quadratus lumborum muscle, he performed successfully a lumbar operation. By cutting the posterior muscles of the velum palate and dividing any attachment they might have made to the pharynx, he several times restored a voice that had previously been unintelligible.

In empyema he raised a semicircular flap over the ribs, and, puncturing the pleura near the base of the flap, introduced a short catheter down to the inner





JOSEPH PANCOAST  
1805-1882





end of the puncture and secured it with a string, thus forming a fistulous opening with the movable flap serving as a valve when the catheter was removed. In 1862, he performed, for the first time, division of the trunks of the fifth pair of nerves as they emerge from their foramina, at the base of the skull, as a cure for *tic douloureux*. He devised an abdominal tourniquet, in 1860, which, by compressing the lower end of the aorta, shut off the arterial blood from the lower limbs, thus preventing death from loss of blood in amputations at the hip-joint or high up on the thigh. In cases of extroversion of the bladder he turned down cutaneous flaps from the abdomen and groin over the hollow raw surface of the open bladder. This operation was first performed by him in January, 1868.

"During the last fifteen years of his life writing had no charms for him, and when spoken to on the subject he said he thought he had done enough of that kind of work." Dr. Pancoast married, in 1829, Rebecca, daughter of Timothy Adams, of Philadelphia. He died March 7, 1882, in the seventy-seventh year of his age, "beloved and honored by all who knew him."

