

MASTER SURGEONS OF AMERICA

WILLIAM LOUIS RODMAN

WILLIAM LOUIS RODMAN was the second son and the fourth child of John and Harriet V. Rodman, having been born at Frankfort, Kentucky, on September 5, 1858. At the time of Dr. Rodman's birth his father was attorney general of the state and enjoyed a large law practice in Frankfort. Dr. Rodman received his early schooling in Frankfort and at the Kentucky Military Institute from which he graduated with the degree of master of arts in 1877. His early interest in medicine was stimulated by his kinsmen, Drs. W. B. and James Rodman, each of whom had been successful in his chosen field of general practice and neuropsychiatry, respectively.

William L. Rodman entered Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, in the fall of 1877 and graduated in 1879. He and his close friend, Dr. W. L. Kneedler, then became the first two internes in the Jefferson Hospital where he served during the years 1879 to 1880. It was in this Hospital that Dr. Rodman came under the stimulating influence of that master of surgery of his day, Dr. Samuel D. Gross, and of the latter's gifted son, Dr. Samuel W. Gross. From the younger Gross he received his early training in surgery of the mammary gland, a subject which later in his life commanded a large part of his interest.

Upon finishing his year of internship at the Jefferson Hospital, Dr. Rodman entered the Medical Corps of the United States Army as a contract surgeon. He was stationed at Fort Sill, then Indian Territory, for 18 months and had, during that time, many interesting experiences in Indian raids. In the service of the Army he made many friends whom he enjoyed throughout his life; in fact his last act was to help to secure the passage through Congress of a bill in which the Medical Corps of the Army was vitally interested. He also made many friends among the Indians, seeing much good in the traits of the best of them.

The Medical Corps did not offer him, he believed, as good an outlet for his surgical ambition as did civil practice, so in 1882 he resigned, returned to his native state of Kentucky to marry Bettie Crawford Stewart, the eldest daughter of Dr. J. Q. A. Stewart, and as at the moment there was no opportunity for him there, he accepted an offer to assist his cousin, Dr. John Rodman, with a rapidly growing general practice at Abilene, Texas. He spent two very busy years at Abilene but feeling that the ambition of his life to practice and teach surgery

could no longer be delayed, returned again to Kentucky where he established himself in Louisville. Dr. Rodman was again fortunate in that he then became associated with Dr. David W. Yandell, the professor of surgery at the University of Louisville and the most gifted of southern surgeons. Dr. Yandell had few equals as a teacher of surgery and it was from him that Dr. Rodman received his start in surgical teaching, a part of his work which he always enjoyed. For 7 years he served as prosector, demonstrator of operative surgery, and chief of clinic under Dr. Yandell at the University of Louisville. In 1891 he became professor of surgery in the Kentucky School of Medicine in Louisville, serving in this capacity until he accepted the chair of the principles and practice of surgery in the Medico-Chirurgical College in Philadelphia, in 1898. His work both in the operating theater and in surgical literature during these years won for him national recognition, as is evidenced by his election to the chairmanship of the surgical section of the American Medical Association in 1898 and also to fellowship in the American Surgical Association. He served at one time as president of the American Medical College Association.

Dr. Rodman's career from the time of his coming to Philadelphia in 1898 to the time of his death in 1916 was varied in its interests between teaching, an active surgical service in several hospitals, and the affairs of the American Medical Association. He served the latter body as trustee after being chairman of the surgical section, and in 1915 was elected its president, holding this office at the time of his death in March, 1916.

The two subjects which occupied his greatest surgical interest were the mammary gland and the stomach. In 1908, he published his monograph on "Surgery of the Mammary Gland with Especial Reference to Carcinoma." The technique for radical amputation of this gland evolved by him at that time and used so successfully by him and many others since, was one of his chief contributions to surgery. In his oration in surgery in 1900 to the American Medical Association, he was the first to advocate partial gastrectomy for ulcer of the pylorus, a principle which has proved so sound as to be the accepted practice of the day. In 1915 while president of the American Medical Association he founded the National Board of Medical Examiners. He did not live to see its first examination held in October, 1916, but this board has since its organization grown to an established place in medicine in this country and abroad.

He died of pneumonia on March 8, 1916, after an illness which had lasted only 5 days. He was then but 58 and at the height of his usefulness. Dr. Rodman had during his day no superiors and but a few equals as a surgical teacher. His command of English was exceptional as shown in his lectures and many contributions to surgical literature. He was a natural leader of men and left the surgical world the better for his having played his part.

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