CHARLES HARRISON FRAZIER
TANGIBLES AND INTANGIBLES*
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The reconstruction of a personality fifteen years after his death is difficult. If the individual in whom one is interested has left few or no personal records that can be drawn upon, the tendency is either towards idealization or the reverse. Some of you have known Dr. Frazier, a few longer than I have, but none of you more intimately, except possibly Munro, Gardner, and Watts. And knowing Dr. Frazier as I did, I am sure that he would have wished me to draw as accurate a picture of him as I can, both favorable and unfavorable. His most outstanding characteristic was a very keen sense of justice and a demand for the whole truth.

When I was about ten years of age, in the summer in Maine sailing and boathandling were my delight. My father was a grand person on anything that sailed and I was broken to the water at a very early age. Small boat racing was one of the amusements indulged in at that time. A dozen of us youngsters who knew the jib from the mainsail used to be put in a crew pool and issued to racers who did not have a regular crew. I usually raced with my father, but when he had guests or when I was in disgrace for any reason, he wouldn’t take me and threw me into the pool. And so I, rather glumly, was assigned to race on a boat I knew was fast, but I wasn’t sure who was going to sail her. So I rowed out and saw a slim trig man with a little moustache and the most piercing pair of blue eyes I can remember. He looked at me and welcomed me with a perfectly charming smile. He drove us hard all through the race, knew his business thoroughly, sat on my father’s stern during a spinnaker run to the finish, and when my old man made a remark or two about what would happen if we luffed him again, Charlie Frazier replied in kind and put my old man in his place. I learned two or three new words I had never heard before and we wound up by beating my father by about three quarters of a length.

Naturally, Dr. Frazier was my man. He had outsailed and outtalked my own father. That night at dinner when my mother heard of it she said, “I am glad he won, he is going to marry Mary Gardner.” Now Mary was one of my idols. She was the oldest, by four years, of a family of six who lived on a lovely point of land which was ideal for cops and robbers. Her four younger brothers and sisters and others of us were turned over to Mary to look out for. She was a lovely person. When I knew she was Charlie Frazier’s girl my admiration for him was complete. I raced with him twice more that

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summer, saw him in Maine once or twice in the meantime, but my next direct contact was fifteen years later in the Medical School. His service was my first experience as an intern in 1919. He was stationed at Cape May at Base Hospital No. 11, coming up to Philadelphia twice a week to operate. The first patient I had with him was a fifteen-year-old boy with a presumed pituitary tumor. He told me to have the youngster ready for a transphenoidal hypophysectomy. That name was completely strange to me nor could I find anything about it in the surgical textbooks available. So to be on the safe side I shaved the boy’s head, eyebrows and all. Dr. Frazier came back three days later and looked at the boy very puzzled. He said, “The family have decided against operation. What have you done to him?” I said, “It’s his eyebrows.” “My goodness!” is what I’ll say he said for this company, “Don’t you know that they will probably never grow back?” I didn’t, and seeing the boy three months later, they hadn’t; and they didn’t, until he died six months later. The family was so angry about it they nearly sued Dr. Frazier for malpractice because they said he had changed their son’s appearance completely.

Charles Harrison Frazier was born in Philadelphia on April 19, 1870. His father, W. W. Frazier, had served with honor as captain in the Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry during the War of the Rebellion. After that war he had taken a prominent part in the social and business life of his city. His mother, Harriet Morgan Harrison, came of a family long prominent in civic affairs and closely connected in their interests with the University of Pennsylvania.

After graduating from the Episcopal Academy in Philadelphia in 1886 and receiving his A. B. degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1889, Dr. Frazier cast about for a career. His two elder brothers, George and William, having entered the Franklin Sugar Refining Company with their father, his mother insisted that he choose a profession. He agreed to enter the Medical School of the University of Pennsylvania for a year to discover whether or not he found medicine sufficiently interesting to pursue it further.

According to all reports he had a very unhappy time during his first two years in the medical school, fainting twice in the dissecting room. But his father compelled him to stick it out. It was amusing to learn this the other day from Dr. Frazier’s sister. My grandfather and Dr. Frazier’s father were captains together in the Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry during the Civil War and great friends afterwards. My memory of the two old gentlemen fighting the War again is quite clear. When irritated, old Mr. Frazier looked and talked like a captain. I am sure if he told his son to stay in the medical school, he stayed. Dr. Frazier inherited many of his father’s characteristics.

After graduation from the medical school in 1893 well up in his class, he served internships in the Episcopal and University Hospitals under Dr. John Ashhurst and Dr. J. William White. Ashhurst in those days was the last of the surgeons to wear a frock coat in the operating room. White was his assistant and enthusiastic over the newer methods advocated by Lister