Three Poems by Dr. Frederick Fraley

From his birth in 1876 until his death at the age of eighty-three, Dr. Fraley was the very pattern of a proper Philadelphian. Graduating from Episcopal Academy in 1892, he went to the University of Pennsylvania and in 1899 emerged as a member of Zeta Psi and an M.D. A short internship at Blockley was followed by an internship at the Pennsylvania Hospital, where he became Resident Physician.

In 1907 he married Mary Pyle, and began an exemplary career as a husband and son-in-law. Few men who undertake to live with their mother-in-law expect her to reach the age of 104. Until 1918 Dr. Fraley practiced as a pediatrician, with an office in Pine Street and a position on the staff of the nearby Children’s Hospital. After a few months at Base Hospital 76 in France during 1918, he returned to Philadelphia, where he gradually gave up his local practice and became the favorite physician of all summering Philadelphians at Northeast Harbor, Maine. There he sailed and played tennis, a game in which his long arms and legs gave him a great advantage.

One of his greatest pleasures was his membership in the Shakspere [sic] Society of Philadelphia. In addition to regular meetings at the Philadelphia Club (where Dr. Fraley became its expert on the Bard’s medical allusions), this Society has an annual dinner meeting at the residence of a member. The 1955 dinner at Dr. Fraley’s was unusual because the host had composed five quatrains on “Othello” and a poem of thirty-eight lines on “Hamlet,” which he distributed to his guests.

The three poems selected for publication here deal with other of his interests. His love for sailing in Maine is captured in “The Morning Watch,” written in 1926, and his sense of history and feeling for the venerable Pennsylvania Hospital is reflected in his verses, composed in 1952, on its historical library. These are simply entitled “The Library.” The third poem, “Fish House Punch, Insidious,” catches the Doctor’s sense of fun. Like all old Philadelphians, he was
familiar with the potent brew habitually served by the Citizens of the Schuylkill Fishing Company of the State in Schuylkill when convened at their Castle. This drink, a combination of brandy, rum, and fruit juice, is remarkable for its deceptively mild taste.

Philadelphia

George B. Roberts

THE MORNING WATCH

Wide waste of waters, dim receding stars,
The breeze of dawn that barely fills the sail.
The rhythmic flow of ocean’s heaving pulse,
The vagrant seaweed slipping past the rail.
Creak of the rigging, gently furrowed wave
Under the bows that answer to the swell.
Set sails, wet deck, breath of the salty air
And clear resounding stroke of brazen bell.
“Our little life is rounded with a sleep,”
Strangers and sojourners we are with Thee.
But, we who sail the reaches of the deep
Feel of its might, know its serenity.
Look for the sun in measured course to keep
Appointment with The Morning Watch at sea.

THE LIBRARY

Enter here with veneration,
Silent stand in grateful praise.
Born ere founding of the Nation,
Guiding light for future days.

See, its shelves of volumes treasured
Mark, its windows filled with light,
Scan its walls with cases measured,
Framed in beauty to our sight.

See, the long and polished table
Where the Managers first met,
Where the sage, far-seeing Franklin
Minutes kept, of record yet.
Think, how thousands came here seeking
Ever better ways to serve.
If their voices could be speaking,
Here the noble words preserve.

Look about with awe and wonder
On this well-nigh holy ground
Pause; and with due reverence ponder
On the blessings that abound.

FISH HOUSE PUNCH,
INSIDIOUS

They handed me a glass of punch,
Agreeable to the taste,
Then kindly they refilled my glass,
It was too good to waste.

The night was young and so was I
With glad anticipation.
I did not know that Fish House Punch
Had such a reputation.

The party was well under way
And everything seemed fine,
So carefree and so very gay
I felt the world was mine.

I asked them for another glass,
Delicious and so mild,
For in my simple mind, I thought
This could not harm a child.

But not long after when I danced
To music's cheerful sound,
I suddenly became aware
The room was going round.

So for a moment I sat down
To take a little rest,
Still thinking that the mellow punch
Was quite the very best.
And then a friend brought one and said,
"Just take a drink of this
To brace you up, don't be afraid,
The fun you must not miss."

And so I grasped the tempting cup
And said, "Well here it goes,"
And felt a pleasant tingling,
In fingertips and toes.

The girls were never quite so gay,
And altogether charming.
There was no warning voice to say,
"Your symptoms are alarming."

All was still rosy when I felt
A happy relaxation
That signified the onset of
Suspended animation.

It was that last and fatal cup,
I wish I had forsaken.
How could I know that creeping up,
The punch had overtaken.

That's about all, I must confess,
Some gathered round about me.
The party was a great success
But it went on without me.