

Charles V. Morrill

March 9, 1884 — July 24, 1970

Dr. Charles V. Morrill died July 24, 1970. He was 86 years of age. He was born in New York City, March 9, 1884. He received his A.B. in 1903 from City College of New York, and his A.M. (1906) and Ph.D. (1910) from Columbia University. He was appointed to the staff at Cornell in 1915 and retired as a professor of anatomy in 1952.

Dr. Morrill was one of the last of the class of people whose entire professional lives were dedicated to the teaching of gross anatomy. As far as I know he did no original research after his doctoral thesis, at least none that he ever mentioned. His two outstanding contributions to the field were (1) providing an appreciation of and a solid foundation in gross anatomy to many classes of medical students at Cornell, and (2) a textbook on gross anatomy.

During his tenure, gross anatomy was taught six days a week for twenty-two weeks. Each day started with a one-hour review session in the amphitheater. The students arrived before him and quiet occurred when Dr. Morrill announced his presence by tapping his pipe against the metal ashtray in the hall. There are probably many physicians around the country who would still come automatically to attention at that gentle sound, even though they wouldn't know why. I never heard him give a lecture. Rather he would ask a student a question and carefully guide the discussion. If a student showed he was lost, Dr. Morrill would quickly shift to another student. If there was more general confusion, or if a point was raised that required elaboration, he would step in. The blackboard usually contained a number of drawings that he anticipated would be used. So smooth was the transition from student to student, or from the asking of a question to clarification and elaboration on obscure points, that these sessions combined the best features of both the lecture and individualized tutorials.

His textbook, *Regional Anatomy: Descriptive, Topographic, and Functional*, was never commercially published. It was privately printed M Edwards Bros. (1946) It was one of the earlier attempts at producing a regional textbook of anatomy that have subsequently become so popular. It was remarkable in several respects. Although it consisted of fewer than eight hundred typewritten pages, it was in no sense intended as a synopsis, nor did it omit significant details. In contrast to many currently popular texts it contained no mnemonic aids. Both its conciseness and its readability were achieved by preciseness of expression. Dr. Morrill would say something once and say it so clearly that it was understood and remembered. The text was not only used successfully at Cornell, where the author was present to interact, but in at least three other medical schools. This was true despite the fact that he never got around to providing illustrations, a fact that would render most texts unusable and may have been the reason

it was not acquired by a commercial publisher. To this day I find myself turning to this source when I want an accurate and concise description of an anatomical relationship. These volumes were sold to the students at cost, but Dr. Morrill found he had a slight profit, so they were distributed free for the last one and a half years in order for him to come out even.

Dr. Morrill never married, and he appeared to be a lonely man in his later years. He had cared for his mother until her death, at which time he was 55. He had no close relatives, and friends of earlier years had either died or moved away. Nevertheless he enjoyed companionship when the opportunity presented itself. He was a connoisseur of fine foods, good spirits, and according to his own reports, of attractive women. At age 65 he was still willing to demonstrate his considerable ability in ballroom dancing, if asked, at student parties. He was immaculate in his dress, having a tailor come to his office to fit his lab coats.

I met him when I was a first-year student, six years before his retirement, and I suppose I still picture him with some of the awe of those early years; but I do have some personal recollections that may help portray the man. Although we spent many hours talking about many things, I somehow never got around to inviting him home for dinner and an evening. This was because he had spoken so often of just how food should be prepared, that we were afraid we might make a mistake. I once had anxiety which seemed directly related to giving a certain lecture, and decided to confide in him. He related that a similar thing had once happened to him. He had gone to an internist who told him that such things could be due either to something in the mind or to something in the diet, and that he had more success in treating the diet. For a year or more I was probably the only medical student who found tranquility in ascorbic acid. He was very sparing in his compliments, but when he did say that you were good at something, it somehow caused you to want to make it true, even if it were not entirely warranted at the time. It may interest those who, like myself, may remember this man as a distinguished and scholarly gentleman, that he spent two years of his life as a ranch hand in Montana before the turn of the century, before returning East to get an education.

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