

FRANCIS HEED ADLER, MD

BY William H. Spencer, MD



ON AUGUST 14, 1987, FRANCIS HEED ADLER DIED AT HIS HOME IN CHESTNUT Hill, Pennsylvania. Doctor Adler's 92 year life span was characterized by an unusually broad spectrum of superlative intellectual and professional accomplishments. His vigor, integrity and sincerity, together with his clarity of thought, gentility and commitment to moral rectitude earned the admiration and universal respect of his colleagues. In addition, he possessed a fine, modest, self-deprecating sense of humor. These qualities almost automatically caused patients, students, friends and colleagues to place their trust in him and to seek his leadership. Thus he was elected to the presidency or chairmanship of practically every important ophthalmological institution or organization and was the recipient of virtually every form of award, honor and appreciation.

Doctor Adler became a member of the American Ophthalmological Society in 1930. He was awarded the Howe Medal in 1951 and became

President of the Society in 1962. His thesis "An Investigation of the Sugar Content of the Ocular Fluids under Normal and Abnormal Conditions, and the Glycolytic Activity of the Tissues of the Eye" (*Transactions American Ophthalmological Society*, Volume 28, page 307, 1930) reflected his lifelong interest in ocular physiology. For many years, he produced a steady stream of lucid, scientific contributions in this and related fields commencing in 1923 with a report of "The Action of Atropine in Ocular Inflammation" (*Archives of Ophthalmology*, Volume 55, page 484, 1923). His splendid discussions correlating ocular form and functions with clinical disease and his textbooks (*Clinical Physiology of the Eye*, *Physiology of the Eye*, *Clinical Application*, "*Gifford's Textbook of Ophthalmology*") remain entrancing and provide the reader with wonderful insights about the subject he so dearly loved.

Born and educated in Philadelphia and based at the Department of Ophthalmology at the University of Pennsylvania (where he served as Chairman of the Department of Ophthalmology and William F. Morris and George E. de Schweinitz Professor of Ophthalmology), Doctor Adler added greatly to the luster of his native city. What a wonderful asset he was to his university, to his colleagues and to the medical profession. His willingness to encourage students and to counsel young physicians was legendary.

Doctor Adler also excelled in his many non-professional activities. An accomplished violinist who was the owner of violins made by Stradivari and Guarneri, he served as a long-term member of a prestigious chamber music quartet and was one of the founding members of the New School of Music in Philadelphia where he served as Chairman. He also held office as a Trustee of the Free Library of Philadelphia. An avid trout fisherman, he thoroughly enjoyed his visits to the lakes and streams of the Poconos. His culinary skills were marvelous. One could be certain that a meal prepared by Francis and Emily Anne Adler did not come out of a can. Ingredients were often home grown and this writer can attest to the delights of sampling Doctor Adler's masterful creations. His interest in horticulture was reflected in the beauty and diversity of his garden. A student of nature and bird life, he was rarely without a handy pair of binoculars when outdoors. He also enjoyed flying and obtained a pilot's license during the early days of flight.

Upon retirement from the University of Pennsylvania, Doctor Adler turned his energies toward guiding the American Board of Ophthalmology. He had been certified by the Board in 1929 and served as an Associate Examiner and Consultant between 1950 and 1965. He then became Secretary/Treasurer of the Board, a post he held until 1980.

During this interval, he reshaped the Board, made lasting improvements in the quality of the written examinations and developed higher standards for the oral examination. The Board office was based in his home and, together with his wife, Emily Anne who served as administrator, he totally immersed himself in Board activities, providing exemplary leadership and a youthful approach to each challenge. He vigorously opposed those who would narrow the scope of ophthalmology and championed the concept that a competent clinical ophthalmologist should have a sound broad education and a full understanding of the medical and basic science aspects of ocular disease. It was at the oral examinations that his warm consideration and almost fatherly interest in individual candidates became evident. He was truly concerned for their welfare but never deviated from the goal of providing a thorough but fair examination in order to ensure the certification of capable ophthalmologists who could serve the public well.

Doctor Adler is survived by his wife, Emily Anne McDonald Adler of Philadelphia, his daughters, Lynn Adler McAllister of Berkeley, California and Jeanne Adler Morris of Palo Alto, California; a stepson, John Murdoch Clark of Vinyard Haven, Massachusetts, six grandchildren, four step grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

The world of ophthalmology has lost one of its finest masters and role models. One who embodied the spirit, intelligence, compassion and selfless devotion of the true physician. By any measure, Francis Adler was a wonderful gentleman and a force for good. Over the years he painted a magnificent self-portrait upon the canvass of life. It remains as a cherished treasure for those of the present generation who have been blessed by his companionship, and as a masterpiece for future generations to honor and emulate.