

through the snow with the doctor. His prompt action probably saved my mother's life.

Mine was a dry birth and I weighed twelve pounds and measured fourteen inches across the shoulders. I had to be taken with instruments. After this frightful delivery, Dr. Dunning sat for several hours beside my mother, holding together the edges of a torn artery. At one point, he thought that she was certainly dying and asked: "Are you afraid?" My mother said: "Doctor, the Power that brought me here will take me away again." She said "Power" because she belonged to a generation of intellectuals for whom the word God was already a little embarrassing. But the calm with which she accepted the possibility of death was a quality that she transmitted to me; it is part of my heritage from my mother.

My mother overcame her memory sufficiently to bear a second son, my brother, Richard Godfrey. But my terrible birth was fixed indelibly in her mind. Throughout my boyhood and my youth, she repeated to me the circumstances of that ordeal until they were vivid to me. They made me acutely unhappy, and her repetition of them made me even unhappier (for it seemed to imply a reproach). But I never told her so.

This is such a startling passage that I was moved to try to determine the factual accuracy of Chambers' account. Its most extraordinary feature, that at the time of birth he "measured fourteen inches across the shoulders," transcended whatever obstetrical experience I had had as student and intern. But three professors of obstetrics, all eminent specialists in this area, were consulted, and all three declared the story to be hardly believable. "Old wives' tales" was the verdict of those to whom I submitted this matter. The medical records themselves proved to be unavailable;¹ there is no way of determining precisely how difficult the delivery was.

Other aspects of Chambers' curious story were open to inquiry. The ominous cemetery that waited outside his mother's room was indeed present; in fact, there were two nearby.² On the other hand, the snow that Chambers explicitly described as part of the forbidding landscape during the night of his birth on April 1, 1901,

. . . snow was falling . . . it soon turned into a blizzard . . . she wondered if she would soon be lying under the snow . . .

¹ Chambers refers to "Dr. Dunning." A Dr. Thomas S. Dunning did indeed practice in Philadelphia at the time when Chambers was born, and his signature appears as the reporting physician on Chambers' birth certificate. Dr. Dunning died in Philadelphia in 1945 (aged ninety-six). The Physicians' Records Section of the American Medical Association informed me that they were unable to locate what medical records Dr. Dunning may have left.

² The United American Mechanics Cemetery, started in 1848, was directly across the street from the house at 2232 Diamond Street. The Odd Fellows Cemetery was west of the house and on both the north and south side of Diamond Street. It probably was visible from the marble stoop in front of the three-story red-brick row house. (B. Chardale of *The Evening and Sunday Bulletin*, Philadelphia, to the author, June 18, 1962, via Abe Mellinkoff, city editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*.)