

WILLIAM OSLER.

THE LIFE OF SIR WILLIAM OSLER. By Harvey Cushing. 2 Vols. 37s. 6d. net. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

"*Mémoires pour servir*"—merely the outlines for the final portrait of the subject—is the description which Mr Cushing gives of his Life of Sir William Osler, running, in two handsome Clarendon Press volumes, to full 1400 pages. Certainly there are no lack of outlines and substantial materials for the picture of one who, in his chosen sphere and out of it, and on this and on the other side of the Atlantic, won love and veneration such as are given to few. But we have also in abundance the "colours, lights, and shadows" which—the lights especially—play so constantly and so strongly about the spirit and personality, the words and the actions, of the late Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford; and these come directly from Osler's own notes and letters, or are reflected from the warm friends and close intimates with whom, as he deserved, he was blest beyond almost any man of his time. What the biography seems to need in order to be made more useful and satisfactory to the general run of readers, and even to Sir William Osler's students and admirers in special branches of medicine and of literature, is that his innumerable activities and achievements, in different regions of work and of thought, should be brought more into focus, proportion, and relation; and through this process a good deal of space and time might have been saved.

Osler's life naturally divides itself into three periods—that spent in Canada, from his birth in 1849 at Bond Head, Ontario, to his removal from his chair in McGill University, Montreal, to that of Clinical Medicine in the University of Pennsylvania in 1884; the United States period, from 1884 to 1905; and, lastly, and in every way most noteworthy, his Oxford period, to his death in 1919. Even before, in "the midpoint of life," he left McGill, he had made his name and had already hosts of friends. He was chosen by Philadelphia as "a young man known more for his scientific papers and his interest in research than for any proved clinical ability." But in a short span of years at Montreal he had:—

"Stirred into activity the slumbering Medical-Chirurgical Society; he had founded and supported a students' medical club; he had brought the Veterinary School into relation with the University; he had introduced the modern method of teaching physiology; had edited the first clinical and pathological reports of a Canadian hospital; had recorded nearly a thousand autopsies and made innumerable preparations; had written countless papers, most of them on topics of live interest, and some of them epoch-making; had worked at biology and pathology, human and comparative, as well as at the bedside; had shown courage in taking the smallpox wards, charity in his dealings with his fellow-physicians in and out of his own school, generosity to his students, fidelity to his tasks; and his many uncommon qualities had earned for him popularity unsought and of a most unusual degree."

Needless to say, these qualities had fuller exercise, and his popularity and reputation obtained larger range in the John Hopkins University; in the States he established his claim to rank as one of the leading clinicians of his time, part of that claim being recorded in the dedication of those volumes to medical students, and "particularly to those in America, lest it be forgotten who it was that made it possible for them to work at the bedside in the wards." It was on this side of the water, and specifically from his Regius Chair at Oxford, that Osler gradually revealed himself as a vivid and outstanding figure in the life of the nation and of the Empire, as well as in many special departments of medicine, education, and letters; and was hailed as a type of the "Good Physician" on earth, and, when war came, as the "Consoler-General of the British Army." No man knew better how to relieve work with play, and to mingle gaiety with the serious business of life. He worshipped children, and in their company was the youngest and most frolicsome of the crew. What was a rarer gift, he knew how to write to them, and his letters to his many pets in the nurseries of his friends are among the most natural and delightful missives of their kind extant; they gather a shade of pathos from the death of his own child—a boy who was to him comrade and confidant—in the Flanders battlefield. To whatever soil he was transplanted, the same Osler grew and flourished, modifying his environment more than it modified him:—

"It is interesting to see how consistently he began anew in Oxford with precisely the same projects as those which had engaged him in Montreal, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. A consuming interest in libraries and librarians; the revivifying of an old medical society or the organisation of new ones; the establishment of a medical journal; the bringing together of discordant elements in the profession, and the raising of money when money was needed. Lavish with his own when it came to giving, he must have been a hard man to refuse when, in an off-hand way, he asked for help."

If his sympathies and activities centred at Oxford, they extended to the ends of the earth. Hospitality he practised for behoof not only of his friends, but of all and sundry, and his house was known as the "Open Arms Hotel." Books came next in his love to the human kind; he was an enthusiastic collector as well as an industrious reader and absorber, and, as is well known, he had his special favourites, chief of all, perhaps, his "hero," Sir Thomas Browne, after the editions of whose "*Religio Medici*," as of rare specimens of Thomas Burton, Isaac Walton, and other quaint authors he was constantly on the prowl. Osler had many friends in Scotland, and came frequently to it on lecturing missions or for holidays—to Colonsay, to Glencoe, to Lochinver, to Lochalsh. The scenes that attended his stormy and unsuccessful candidature for the Lord Rectorship of Edinburgh University are not yet forgotten in the classes and quadrangle; the figures, at a time of keen political rivalry, proved at least the growth of Osler's popularity among the students. The baronetcy conferred upon him in 1911 called for universal approval and brought him congratulations from all countries and classes of men. To none was the war a greater surprise or heavier blow. But he flung himself into the cause of his country with tireless energy and enthusiasm. Come of a long-lived race—he crossed the Atlantic to be present at the centenary birthday of his mother in 1906—the labours and anxieties of the years 1914-18, and the personal sorrow they brought, must have shortened his life; and although he had reached the limit of three score years and ten, he may be said to have died prematurely of pneumonia—a physician who was a benefactor to his kind; a pioneer and standard-bearer in medical research and in educational and sanitary reform; a man beloved by all who were brought into touch with him.