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A HEALTH CRUSADER.

Life of Sir William Osler.

THE LIFE OF SIR WILLIAM OSLER.

By Harvey Cushing. Oxford University Press. Two volumes. 37s 6d.

Sir William Osler occupies an honourable niche in the world of medicine. It is true that his name is associated with no epoch-making discovery, as are the names of Jenner and Pasteur and Lord Lister; nevertheless, the profession of medicine, as well as mankind at large, owe a great debt to the famous Canadian physician. He was philosopher as well as scientist, lover of literature as well as friend of humanity. As Mr F. C. Shattuck says: "No one in our day has in his life, teaching, and example so radiated far and near an inspiration to his fellow-physicians."

Mr Cushing's two volumes cover in vivid detail the story of Sir William's busy life, from his birth in Canada in 1849, to his death in Oxford in 1919. Within the compass of these 70 years was crowded a life of strenuous effort, of far-reaching achievement. The first volume deals with his life and work in Canada and in the United States; but though those days were spent at Montreal and Baltimore, the fame of his achievements had spread throughout the whole world of medicine. His magnum opus, "The Principles and Practice of Medicine," established for him a foremost place as a medical authority, and the exhausting survey of the "System of Medicine" added to his reputation on both sides of the Atlantic. His eminence in his profession was recognised by the Universities of Aberdeen and Edinburgh; and in the autumn of 1898, when he paid his first visit to Scotland, he was able to write to one of his American friends: "Two Scotch LL.D.'s warrant the addition of a Mac to my name."

Honours, indeed, seem to have fallen thick and fast upon Osler during his sojourn in this country, for in a letter to his family at Brooklyn he writes: "Two LL.D.'s, a D.C.L., and the F.R.S. make 1898 a pretty full year in the life of your old man." After receiving his LL.D., degree at Aberdeen on July 21, he travelled south to Edinburgh for the meetings of the British Medical Association, and speaks very warmly of the welcome accorded to the delegates: "Scotch hospitality at its best, to haggis and pipers."

It was in 1905 that Dr Osler was appointed Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford. By that time his fame was world-wide. He was 56 years of age, however, and the transplanting of the eminent medical scientist to British soil seems to have had a somewhat disturbing effect at first. No transition, as Mr Harvey Cushing says, could have been greater.

From a noisy Baltimore corner and the hurly-burly of the preceding month to the quiet of an Oxford suburb where they were kept awake by the wood pigeons, which sat on the chimney and cooed: from sweltering Maryland to an English May, so cold and raw that it penetrated to one's bones. They promptly built a fire in the dining-room, which greatly shocked the warmly-dressed Oxonians who first dropped in on them.

Mrs Osler notes, however, in a letter to her mother, that they were "feeling very happy and not so strange as you might imagine," and adds that Mrs Max Muller

had been most kind in every way. Soon the new professor fitted harmoniously into the academic life of Oxford; and for 14 years—until his death in 1919—he continued to fill with distinction the Chair of Medicine at the English University. Frequently, too, he was brought into touch with social and academic life of other centres in England, Scotland and Ireland; and the reader obtains characteristic glimpses of Sir William at Cambridge, at Edinburgh, at Dublin, and elsewhere. He assisted Lord and Lady Aberdeen to launch their health crusade in Ireland—"fussing with Lady A. over tuberculosis" runs one note in the family diary—and in the autumn of 1908 he accepted the invitation of the Edinburgh students to become a non-party candidate for the Lord Rectorship. Two other candidates entered the field—Mr Winston Churchill, then in the Liberal phase of his political transition, and Mr George Wyndham, supported by the Conservatives. Sir William was beaten, but, as his biographer cheerfully affirms, "He made a good run for his money—for his brother's money, for, as it was an expensive business, Sir Edmund footed the campaign bills." To one of his former pupils the rejected candidate wrote: "The Lord Rectorship contest took place to-day. The politicians were too strong. Wyndham was elected. An Independent has not been elected since Carlyle defeated Dizzy. I am not a Carlyle. I did not expect it." A motor run in Scotland about this time also brought him into closer touch with his medical friends north of the Tweed.

In the summer of 1911 the honour of a baronetcy was conferred on the eminent physician. "They have been putting a baronetcy on me—much to the embarrassment of my democratic simplicity"—he wrote to one of his Maryland friends—"but it does not make any difference to my internal sensations." Osler despised anything that savoured of title-hunting; but, as he said to one of his friends, "I think I will have to accept. Canada will be so pleased. There's only one Canadian baronet."

Sir William's interests, however, were not confined to the principles and practice of medicine. They embraced the whole of life, of religion, of literature and philosophy; and his treatises on "Science and Immortality," "Counsels and Ideals," and "The Way of Life" reveal the wide scope of his sympathies.

Varied though his activities may have been, there will be a wide measure of agreement with the view of Mr Harvey Cushing that "Osler's greatest professional service was that of a propagandist of public health measures." His beginnings in this direction, given even in his youthful days at Montreal, were, he adds, actively continued at Baltimore, when he was constantly crusading against malaria and typhoid, not only in wards but on public platforms. With this same movement he energetically allied himself while at Oxford. And this role is assuredly as important as that of the laboratory scientist whose cloistered studies supply the knowledge on which our whole public health movement is based. Mr Harvey Cushing's biography is a worthy record of a noble and worthy life.

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