

From The General Press Cutting Association, Ltd.

ATLANTIC HOUSE,
45-50, HOLBORN VIADUCT, E.C. 1.
TELEPHONE: HOLBORN 4815.

Cutting from the Birmingham Post

Address of Publication _____

Issue dated 5.5.25

REVIEWS.

SIR WILLIAM OSLER.

The most practical gift for a young man or woman standing on the threshold of medicine would be "The Life of Sir William Osler," by Harvey Cushing (Clarendon Press—two vols., 37s. 6d.; India paper, one vol., 50s.) For the most part the story is told by Osler's own letters and extracts from his writings and addresses, and they convey the spirit of the great teacher as no mere obituary notice could do. It is an inspiring record of a life spent in pursuit of the highest ideals of the medical profession. Osler was one great clinician, but first and foremost he was one who "loved his fellow-men," and it was this which called forth an immediate response from all those with whom he came in contact. His sympathetic touch brought healing to the sick, but the magic of his personality was shown even more markedly by the enthusiasm with which he inspired his fellow-workers, so that every man who came within his sphere was moved to give out the best that was in him.

Wherever he went he sowed the seeds which became a crop of societies or a band of research workers, all units in the army which he was ever recruiting in his great fight against disease. Few men travelled more widely throughout America and Europe, so that even were it possible to omit the vast influence of his writings there is probably no man to whom modern medicine owes more. Indeed, the story of his life is to a large extent the story of modern medicine. He was a young practitioner when the theory of germs as the causation of disease began to struggle for recognition. Pathology was an unrecognised science at the beginning of his career—but he fought to have it established as part of the indispensable groundwork of medicine. Public health work in its preventive aspect was unknown, but he made it his battle-cry and inaugurated campaigns against malaria, typhoid fever, and tuberculosis. Over-drugging was the fashion in his young days, but he set drugs in their proper place in the physician's *armamentarium*, and showed how many self-limited diseases could be treated without the aid of drugs at all. His industry, he has said, was "his only virtue." Certainly it was one of his most marked characteristics, and perhaps the one most difficult to emulate. The successive changes which took him from Toronto to Montreal, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and finally to Oxford were not the result of the spur of ambition, but each fresh field of labour promised some temporary respite from the vast amount of work which he inevitably attracted to himself. Even his illnesses, which were all too frequent, were made the opportunities for study in the wider field of literature, and it is entirely characteristic that even on what he knew would prove his death-bed he kept careful notes of his last illness, showing an impersonal attitude towards his sufferings to which few men could rise.

The story of how the son of the Cornish missionary born in the back-woods of Canada came to be the Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford is a fascinating one, and may be read for its human as well as its scientific interest. We see Osler at play as well as at work, and few men had a greater sense of fun. We see how a chance introduction to the "Religio Medici" of old Sir Thomas Browne made that book one of the guiding influences of his life and was the means of starting him on his career as a bibliophile—an interest which came second to medicine all his life, and which eminently fitted him in late years for his position as one of the curators of the Bodleian Library. Of special interest to the present generation are the chapters which tell of his work during the years of the late war. His habit of taking wide views stood the country in good stead, and his advice pertaining to the health of the army and his insistence upon the need for special hospitals and careful records must have saved thousands of lives, whilst his individual care of patients and relatives well earned him his unofficial title of Consoler-General to the British Army. The death of his only son in France was not allowed to affect his public duties, but the blow undoubtedly undermined his health, and when two years later his own call came he was ready to obey it.

Dr. Harvey Cushing has selected his material with judgment and has successfully woven it into a connected narrative. The volumes, properly illustrated by photographs, are fine examples of the best work of the Oxford University Press, and the thought which inevitably arises to the reader is how much Osler in his capacity of book-lover would have enjoyed turning the pages.