

Extract from

METHODIST RECORDER,
LONDON.

A Week-End Gossip.

AN OXFORD WELCOME.

SOME time ago I dealt with the first volume of the *Biography of Sir William Osler*, by Dr. Harvey Cushing, of Boston, published by the Oxford University Press in two volumes. Most of the reviewers handled one volume only, and a few of them were rather perfunctory. How the book has gone I do not know; all I know is the two volumes have remained at my right hand for reference and refreshment. My last Gossip left Dr. Osler at Oxford unpacking his boxes in his rooms at Christ Church, "with a full moon outside, the distant sound of chimes and of undergraduates singing in their rooms." How did this newcomer fare and what did Oxford make of him?

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THE enquiry seems to me to be of some general interest. At one time or another a great many people go to Oxford; those who have never been have hardly sufficiently explored their own country, and those who have never lived there have not quite realised the possibilities of romance and the English tradition. What happens to undergraduates when they go is a matter closely concerning many homes. What happens to distinguished visitors, or to teachers brought from far, is not unrelated to international peace and good feeling. Here was a distinguished Canadian; Oxford sent for him; he came at the call; from the time of his arrival Oxford claimed him for her own and he took to Oxford as one to the manner born. They tried to get Dr. Osler back; there was nothing doing. There he was and there he remained. The repute of him, coming from afar, incited Oxford to enquire upon his disposition. Knowing little of the inside life, touched by the courtesy of the offer, fired by the hope of doing something for the science he served, not unfamiliar with ideals of the British Empire, Dr. Osler left his fatherland and staked his all. It was somewhat of an undertaking; moreover, it was also somewhat of an adventure, a risky adventure. Still he pulled it off and Oxford pulled it off, too. The two of them pulled together. Osler was in some sort a man from the wilds. Oxford is mediæval and quite awfully civilised. This Canadian was by way of making traditions, not submitting to them. His friends prophesied upon their knowledge of the great English school—upon the literature and the ideals of it; and they did not prophesy smooth things. They were not willing that their hero should be swallowed up among infinite nothings and infinite nobodies—as most Oxford "bodies" appeared to Western minds. Yet, in spite of all, Osler packed his boxes, tore up his roots, made his journeys and there he was—a full moon outside and the distant sound of chimes." Well do I remember something, not too unlike that, in my own life, the first night I lay down to sleep within the sound of Tom Tower. Believe me, it is not all romance. A great deal of it is anxiety; some of it is marvel and awe that ever such things should be. Many and many a lad has put himself to bed and remained awake for hours—wondering, fearing, exulting, dreaming and perchance saying a few prayers. That ancient sea is so big and your little boat so frail; the waves are so many and the lights so deceitful, you wonder whether you will ever see any familiar shore again; or, if in confusion and coldly judged of all, you will go down derelict—through ambition or misjudged kindness of folk who trusted you were worthy, when you were really nothing of the sort.

thing. New blood." "Too untried—terrible risk, terrible risk." And they passed on. His position as Regius brought him into a good many things—councils, University Press, Bodleian, and what not. Osler took everything that came, and took it with gusto; every part of Oxford he took, as he took the whole of Oxford, unafraid and unashamed—a very undergraduate for innocent appreciation, only more so and kept up longer than in the case of most undergraduates. I remember an American undergraduate, now an American Bishop, in my time, at his studies in Oxford, coming to make enquiries of me about a certain celebrated preacher of those days—enquiries I tried to meet with my most circumspect measure of reticence. I was able to keep him off for a while; then he would have no more of my so obvious circumspection; he broke out upon me—"But what is there to him." I had never heard the phrase before, though I have heard it often since, and all I could reply was, "Well, if you will have it, there isn't twopence." "I thought as much," said he; and, having got all he wanted, away he went. They have no time to waste—these Americans who mean to be bishops. Well, you couldn't say that of Osler. There was plenty "to him." The fact is you never knew how much till you touched him in a quite unfamiliar place, amazed to find the fountain gushed there, just as in other places expected and ordered for fountains. Office after office—formal and stately, he took and filled. So much so that, later on, Mr. W. L. Fisher—now returned to Oxford from his incursion into politics—is courageous enough to hint that he had his doubts whether, in his later life, Osler really kept in touch with the progress of medicine as a Regius might be expected to do—making up for it, by his immense and indeed immeasurable gift of relating things, linking up and so bringing out lights, unities and vaster possibilities of large achievement. "He builded," says Dr. Fisher, "better than he knew"—which always strikes me as a rather left-handed compliment.

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I DO not suppose Osler could have made ruts for himself. There was too much of him and he saw so many sides to life, enjoying them all—fun with little children, practical jokes, old books, old friends, sanitation, poetry, Sir Thomas Browne and old melancholy Burton, Ewelme, Christ Church high table, visiting Americans, brain-dusting in Egypt and over Europe, to the bounds of the Atlantic, also "week-ends in America," guests and leaping frolics with child—of whom more anon. All these things would keep breaking in. How could he get ratty, since they crossed each other, these interests, at every conceivable angle in his daily work. I am afraid the Church in Oxford didn't appeal to him. The Regius in Theology at that time was Dr. Sanday. To some of us, to see Sanday along the street was a sort of benediction. When Osler saw him in the pulpit he was "a dry old stick." So, discontinuing the Cathedral worship, he went to the Radcliff Infirmary on a Sunday morning and there made himself available for all country doctors who cared to come in and ask his advice. Who will say that is an irreligious way of escaping a dry old stick in a pulpit—even though the stick be Dr. Sanday? We cannot all take our religion as Dr. Sanday used to give it to us, no more than we can all take our physic as doctors give it to us.

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AS I said, Osler pulled it off. It came on this wise, so far as I can see—he was just himself. He didn't pretend to be anybody and didn't want to be anybody, save a man from afar; he was not ashamed to be what he was, to the very marrow of the bones of his soul. He couldn't help being what he was; was indeed happy in his nature, trusted his nature, was loyal to it with a certain large disarming innocence sure to make friends anywhere and particularly in Oxford. By the side of that, however, and as a compliment to it, you must place a very definite and conscious delight in the place itself, its history, its long, long history, and the august memorials thereof. From an "unfinished" land, if I may so put it, Osler came to dwell where art, learning, poetry, piety had made their home, from ever of old. Oxford was Oxford when the lands he had been nurtured in were unmapped and unbroken, whether by the plough, by human devices and desires. He knew that and the contrast struck him deep and moved him much. Himself a child of schools and studies and of the right, stock-father and mother from the large West and glory of England—he felt, in his blood and bones, that this was really where he belonged, this was his heart's desire. Here he could serve God and his fellow-men and lodge the somewhat that was in him—"right here," as the Americans say, within an ancient centre whose circumference was everywhere in the Empire. That was his secret thought, his guiding star; as much as that he brought with him from Canada and America. No doubt he kept it to himself—largely. You'd better, if you go to Oxford. Still it was there, a dream to reconcile the past and the present. No more than a dream—a dream that changed to a nightmare on occasion; the actual waking and daily consciousness of him, however, was that it was very good indeed to be here. He would shake himself at times, perhaps pinch himself, and certainly he gave signs of hugging himself as he said to his wife—"Really, my dear, this is a very pleasant place to live in, such heaps of nice folk!" That, to me, is the primary secret of Osler's conquest of Oxford.

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CERTAINLY he *did* conquer Oxford. Not, however, all at once. Two elderly dons, strolling by the river one evening, were heard to say, "How do you feel about this new Regius getting so many appointments?" "Oh, a good

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THE Oslers kept open house—quite ridiculously open, so open as no English born man could quite tolerate. It all helped. Oxford used to call it "The Hotel," or, with a truly Oxford touch, "The Open Arms." Once, as he was going out, he said to Lady Osler—"There will be a few fellows in to tea." "How many?" "Oh, about twelve." A visitor happened upon a card on the Professor's table; it turned out to be an invitation to a garden-party. When the guests turned up, they were nearer a hundred than twelve—if I remember rightly, twelve or so over the hundred. Yet Lady Osler carried it off, without anyone knowing. And that brings me to their one boy. The boy was with them; grew into Oxford with his first growth; took to Oxford, as only boys and girls who begin young really can take to it. There were grown folk, as children for this child; they loved him, not alone for his own sake, but as of the house of his father and because his father loved all who loved that apple of his eye. The child would *not* have let them leave Oxford, if they had wanted to; they couldn't deny him anything—an indulgence father and mother never repented. The boy didn't take much to learning. He *did* take to fishing; so to beguile him into books Osler gave his son, very early, Walton's *Compleat Angler*. Art? Yes—artful, with the artfulness of a father's love and a bookman's pride. Henceforth in the letters, the boy is always "Isaac," or even "Ike." Yet, always in those letters, there is no vain pretence about learning. He declared again and again—"Not much at his books; but a great fisherman." Then, came the War! The boy was of age; he had to speak for himself. What Osler felt no man knows to this hour. He had a way of keeping himself going, by keeping others going. But, when the lad went the way of so many, Sir William Osler began to change. "After this it was noised abroad that the Valiant-for-Truth was sent for by a summons, by the same post as the other, and he had this for a token that the summons was true—that his pitcher was broken at the fountain." Unlike Mr. Valiant-for-Truth, Osler did not, when he understood it, call for his friends and tell them of it; he went on, as usual, doing his best for pilgrims, showing still further his courage and his skill. Sir William Osler was indeed a great man and greatly he lived—and all I want to prove this is the way he conquered Oxford and stood up to all sorts of death and darkness.

ARTHUR HOYLE.