

The Saturday Rev.

of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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The Writing of English

IF RHETORICS, composition books, manuals, guides could of themselves assure the writing of good English, our prose style should now be purer than Chaucer's well; but a multitude of text-books is no more a guarantee of good writing than a million of books on etiquette is a warrant of good manners. It remains to be proved that the congregations who heard two sermons each Sunday were more moral than their agnostic descendants.

That there is so much imperfect English after such a pressure of honest endeavor in teaching, is best explained by the vast number now to be educated, who in the past would not have written at all, and who may properly regard their slovenly grammar and stilted phrasing as so much won from illiteracy. But what of the more fortunately gifted who surely with the impact of so many books, such determined counsellors, from earliest youth up to correspondence courses for the middle-aged, should have developed a new prose style for modern America and justified the concern of their elders? We have good writers of course, but only the least fastidious in our tongue could name this an age of supple, or beautiful, or rich, or forceful, or anything but varied and useful styles in English.

If we get little style in English, the text-books teach even less. Good English in their view is first and last clear English, which means English that is plain, unsubtle, direct; it is typewritten English where the meaning jumps to the eye at a glance. Not the infinite complexities of my emotions, nor the baffled struggling of my thought, but what I can readily express in easy sentences neither too long nor too short, is what the rhetorics teach.

They are right to teach thus, for the mind of the young writer is a yeasty mass of unformulated desires and undirected emotions. It surges with aspirations which begin as mighty heavings of the dough and emerge as bursting bubbles. Order, restraint, clarity are steps in a discipline which the most imaginative need most; and failure to mark them would result in floods of wild words. Fortunately undisciplined writers, like clocks without pendulums, soon tick themselves into silence.

Yet the text-books are wrong when they make, as in effect they do make, a sermon on accuracy the sum of good English. Accuracy is enough for the dictator of business letters; for the professional writer it is only the first step. He can be as accurate as a slate roof and as clear as a plate glass window and yet have no more life in him than a billboard or a declension. He will never develop a style worthy the name unless he struggles with half meanings, gropes in personality, yields to passion, fancy, intuitions, and much else opposed in every way to simple clarity.

There must be two Muses at the elbow of every writer ambitious of the best in English, one to hold back while the other pulls on, one for discipline and the other for expansiveness; one to teach grasp, the other reach; one with a set of principles, the other with a vision of truth, beauty, hope, and unlimited accomplishment.

And if one asks why so many clear and simple books produce so many dull and flat writers, the answer may be that there is too much starching and ironing of poor material. We laugh at the older rhetorics with their talk of the sublime, of the great style, of dignity, of eloquence. But at

Five O'Clock

By LEONARD BACON

"WHAT no more tea? Do have a cigarette." You are very pretty, but it's very plain That you don't see beyond the sheeted rain That dog-eared arch, that bush-grown parapet, Which somehow I can't manage to forget, Despite your pleasant chat. But I refrain From comment. "Nice to see you once again, Sorry you go tomorrow. Glad we met."

Tea! Cigarettes! Automobiles and calls On ladies like yourself. Well it may be, It would not add to your felicity To know that aforetime, where you chattered thus, The starving Goths yelled from the cracking walls Shaken by the engines of Belisarius.

This Week



"Fishmonger's Fiddle." Reviewed by Ben Ray Redman.

"The Elder Sister." Reviewed by Grant Overton.

"Krakatit." Reviewed by Ernest S. Bates.

"Dipper Hill." Reviewed by Zephine Humphrey.

"The Panchatantra." Reviewed by W. Norman Brown.

"A Grammar of Politics." Reviewed by Lindsay Rogers.

Conrad Essays. By J. DeLancey Ferguson and Donald Davidson.

Next Week, or Later

Calverley of Christ's. By Cameron Rogers.

"Thunder on the Left," by Christopher Morley. Reviewed by Leonard Bacon.

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least the authors of these treatises promised to able writers something more inspiring than unity, coherence, and emphasis. They implied, even if they took no means to secure it, an active intellect, stirred by passionate ideas, and quite as desirous to express itself as to discover how to be obvious to others.

The weakest element in American literary prose is its style. In the novel, in drama, in poetry, in the essay, whether our work is superior or inferior to the English product, it is usually inferior in this respect. And if Americans lack style it is partly because they have been taught for a generation that good writing is clear writing, which is true, and that clear writing must be excellent writing, which is false. Water, except by the miracle of style, does not become wine.

Physician and Humanist

By WILLIAM H. WELCH, M. D.

WHILE Carlyle's conservative statement that "a well written life is almost as rare as a well spent one" does not imply any necessary connection between the two, it is delightful to find that Dr. Harvey Cushing has linked to the well spent life of Sir William Osler a well written story* of that life, so rich in accomplishment, so strong in influence, so fine in character, so varied in interest. With full knowledge of the facts and events of Osler's life, admitted to close intimacy, himself not merely a spectator but often a participant in these events, possessed of the requisite literary skill, and impregnated with the Oslerian æther as truly as Boswell with the Johnsonian, Dr. Cushing has produced a biography fully satisfying the hungry anticipations of the host of friends, disciples, and admirers of Osler and of much interest to the general reader.

The subject of this biography, born in Canada and dying in Oxford in 1919, was a physician, endowed with singularly attractive qualities of mind, heart, and character, who attained the highest eminence as a clinician and a teacher in four important universities—McGill, Pennsylvania, Johns Hopkins, and Oxford. Not only the participation in the great forward movement of modern medicine, but also the events, the personal contacts, and tenacious friendships, the engaging character, the humanism, the historical and bibliographical studies, the extraordinary power by example and precept to inspire devotion and to influence ideals and conduct, especially of young men, all combine to impart to the story of Osler's life a variety of interest scarcely matched in other medical biographies. This interest is in large part intimate and personal and differs from that found in the lives of great creative minds in medicine and science, as of Pasteur, Darwin, Huxley, Lister, Helmholtz, Virchow, Koch, whose "official" biographies fill much smaller space than the 1430 pages of Cushing's "Life of Osler."

Goethe's saying that every one is a citizen of his age as well as of his country was particularly applicable to Osler, who was not only a great international figure but also possessed of the international mind in a measure which even the tragedy of the World War, bringing the overwhelming sorrow of his life in the death of his only son, could not shatter. It is, therefore, no digression when the author without ever losing sight of his central theme and without confusing biography with history, places his subject in the proper setting by succinct and skilful presentation of surrounding and contemporary conditions, both local and general. He thus succeeds in bringing Osler "into proper alignment with that most remarkable period in the annals of medicine through which he lived and of which he was a part." Yet he does not attempt a critical appraisal of Osler's professional contributions and accomplishments. His theme is Osler, the man, even more than Osler, the clinician, the teacher, the man of science. The interest and appeal

*THE LIFE OF SIR WILLIAM OSLER. By HARVEY CUSHING. New York: Oxford University Press. 1925. 2 vols. \$12.50.

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Osler's natural endowment. On the death of an older brother in 1901, a Canadian paper referred to the family as one which "had produced more distinguished men than any other contemporary family in the Commonwealth."

There are certain interesting parallels between the education of Osler and that of Darwin. Both were originally intended for the Church and entered college with the expectation of becoming clergymen; each came under the influence of a clerical naturalist of no special originality, but of scientific enthusiasm combined with religious zeal; Osler walked with Father Johnson as Darwin "walked with Henslow," a phrase thereby made memorable as descriptive of the best type of education; diatoms and polyzoa played for Osler the rôle which beetles did for Darwin in stimulating interest in natural history. Darwin, however, never attained the almost sublime height of Osler's Hippocratic reverence for his teachers. In his life there was no haunting personality as of James Bovell, M. D. in Osler's life.

Osler's type of mind thus early made manifest on the scientific side was distinctively that of the descriptive naturalist, and so it remained to the end, even in his study of disease—interrogating nature by keen, accurate observation rather than by experiment, asking "what" rather than "why" or "how," delighted and contented with the study of form and obvious function without great concern for explanations, theories, and speculations, addicted to the collection of specimens.

The two years' study following graduation in medicine at McGill University in 1872, spent in England, Germany, and Vienna, were of the utmost importance for Osler's subsequent career. During the ten years of Osler's professional life in Montreal and the five years in Philadelphia he laid that solid scientific foundation for his clinical work which the cultivation of pathology in early professional years has been for most clinical physicians rising to high eminence since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Transplantation to other fields never uprooted the friendships and local attachments there formed. His great opportunity came with his call to the chair of medicine in the Johns Hopkins University with the opening of the Johns Hopkins Hospital in 1889. Here were spent the sixteen golden, most productive years of his life, and here he made his two greatest contributions to medicine, the most important being the creation of the first medical clinic worthy of the name in any English speaking country, and the other the publication in 1892 of his text book presenting, with rare literary skill and unexampled success, the principles and practice of medicine adequately and completely for the first time in English after the great revolutionary changes brought about by modern bacteriology.

Osler left no doubt of the nature of his professional ambitions which he summarized in an address at a farewell dinner given by the profession of the United States and Canada in 1905 as being first "to rank with eminent physicians of the past" whom he names, an ambition more than fulfilled; and second "to build up a great clinic on Teutonic lines, not on those previously followed here and in England, but on lines which have placed the scientific medicine of Germany in the forefront of the world. And if I have done anything to promote the growth of clinical medicine it has been in this direction, in the formation of a large clinic with a well organized series of assistants and house physicians and with proper laboratories in which to work at the intricate problems that confront us in internal medicine. For the opportunities which I have

had at Johns Hopkins Hospital to carry out these ideas I am truly thankful."

If the omission of these significant words from the biography, which extracts another part of the same address, be due to fear of antagonizing a certain body of public sentiment by the reference to Germany, this feeling might have been partly allayed by pointing out that Osler improved upon the German model by engrafting upon it the English system of clinical clerkships—a feature indicated by Dr. Cushing in the beautiful dedication of the work which embodies the sentiment of the epitaph desired by Osler for himself: "Here lies the man who admitted students to the wards." His clinic was pervaded by the true spirit of scientific inquiry and here were trained assistants and workers who became distinguished clinicians and investigators. His own contributions to medical knowledge were many and valuable, although his name is associated with no great scientific discovery. It is, however, attached to two diseases, to which the biographer suggests adding a third.

* * *

Osler was well aware of the need of improvement and further development of the clinic and writes to his successor: "Much remains in the way of organization for higher lines of work." Although he himself could not have carried longer than he did the double burden of conduct of the clinic and an ever increasing consulting practice, he was not in sympathy with the introduction later at the Johns Hopkins of the so-called "full time" system, intended to relieve the heads of the major clinics and some of their assistants from the necessity of engaging in private practice for a livelihood. Dr. Cushing has introduced in the second volume several passages expressive of Osler's opinions on this much discussed subject, which, by the way, should not be called, as is done by the author, "the Rockefeller programme," for it did not originate with any Rockefeller Board. Although Osler expressed himself generally in opposition, "he hedged a good deal," as the author remarks, and was evidently perplexed, as appears from a sentence following an expression of disapproval of full time teaching in an address in 1912: "At the same time let me frankly confess that I mistrust my own judgment, as this is a problem for young men and for the future." A correction should be made at the end of the foot-note in Vol. II, p. 420, for Osler's final utterance on this subject was not in the paper of 1915 there referred to, but in the open letter to the Dean of the Medical Faculty of McGill University, his own alma mater, written in August, 1919, only a few weeks before the onset of his last illness, from which a few phrases are quoted later in the volume, but with regrettable omission, in view of what had appeared in previous pages, of the essential part of the letter urging the appointment of "whole-time, or if thought wiser, largely so," heads of clinics and of assistants, "whole and part time."

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In the 375 pages devoted to the Baltimore period is presented a vivid narrative of the life of the mature Osler, the great physician and teacher, in the full vigor and plenitude of his powers, with his professional and intellectual interests fully developed and given free scope. Here one can follow Osler's important share in the great reforms of hospital organization and medical education effected at the Johns Hopkins, his inspiring methods of clinical teaching, his intimate relations with staff and students, his inimitable ways with patients, his establishment and rejuvenation of medical societies, for which he had a ravenous appetite, his helpful participation in the life of the community and of the local profession, his championship of the cause of public health, his stirring addresses, and many other activities all told with a wealth of detail and of anecdote, which make the real Osler live again for the reader. His joy in the companionship of children was a striking trait. Perhaps the playful wit and humor and zest of the many practical jokes and pranks and mystifications somewhat evaporate when committed to paper, but the impression of a radiant and sympathetic personality, of a lovable, generous, and delightful friend and

companion, and of an inspiring teacher, is firmly fixed, and one can understand that his disciples are "sealed of the tribe" of Osler, the Chief.

Throughout the story the author dwells with merited enthusiasm upon Osler's services in the anti-tuberculosis and other public health movements, and considers justifiable that his vigorous early participation in the world-wide campaign against tuberculosis stands "in the forefront of the many public services he rendered." One pauses, however, when in another connection the feeling is expressed "that Osler's greatest professional service was that of a propagandist of public health measures," and is frankly startled when the Philistine remark follows that this "is a rôle as important as that of the laboratory scientist whose cloistered studies supplied the knowledge on which our whole public health movement is based"—that is to say of a Pasteur or a Koch. There might possibly be acquiescence in the former statement in England where Osler had no real clinic nor opportunity for important clinical teaching, but after all he was a clinician, not a sanitarian, and as already indicated won his brightest laurels in the field which he cultivated so assiduously and successfully and where his professional ambitions lay. It is not necessary to shift these laurels in order to appreciate properly the aid which he rendered to the movements of public health, in which he was deeply interested. He had the "dæmonic" faculty, which awakens intelligent enthusiasm in others.

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Particularly well told are all the circumstances connected with Osler's call to the Regius Professorship of Medicine at Oxford and with his departure from Baltimore in 1905, including the commotion caused by the "Fixed Period" valedictory address, cited some years later in an article entitled "The Confessions of a Yellow Journalist" as one of the two best known modern examples of persons victimized for the purpose of "copy." His leaving was a serious loss to the Johns Hopkins Medical School to which he had brought great distinction and rendered services of incalculable value. But under the circumstances his decision would be expected. The chair at Oxford, notwithstanding its prestige, offers no opportunities for clinical work and teaching comparable with those which he was leaving at the Johns Hopkins and would not have tempted him a few years earlier. He had already declined attractive offers from Edinburgh, Harvard, and other Universities. But he was quite sincere in his oft expressed intention to resign active clinical teaching at sixty years of age. Above all he was physically for the time being literally at the end of his rope. No mortal could carry further the double burden, ever heavier, which he had assumed of the clinic and outside practice—he was the doctor's doctor—without neglect of one or the other. His letters to his colleagues at the time are full of such expressions as "I am on the down grade, the pace of the last three winters has been such that I knew I was riding for a fall." The call to Oxford offered an ideal opportunity to retire to a life of relative academic ease amid congenial and delightful surroundings, and ten years later he records in his account book that the experiment of this translocation had been "most successful"—"extraordinarily happy years"—"The one thing I miss is the active teaching and the close association with students and a large group of young doctors, but I console myself with the thirty-one years of strenuous work I had in Canada and in the United States." As he often expressed it: "I have had my innings."

The interest of the story now shifts, but it never slackens, and as the end approaches the effect is cumulative. There remained fourteen years of anything but academic ease—years crowded with work, incidents, and experiences, surpassing in interest to the general reader those which had preceded.

While Osler's clinical contributions became fewer and less important, being derived largely from his American material, his literary output remained considerable, although in his account

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Physician and Humanist

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book in 1915 he bewails that "it has been so much less than in the previous decade." Few physicians have ever felt a more imperative necessity to write and publish. As his biographer says: "Almost everything he did became grist to his literary mill." Much of his writing was journalistic—editorials, book-reviews, obituaries, brief notes on men, books, and questions of the day, travel and news letters, and the like—and it is surprising how well written and interesting are many of the fugitive pieces.

While Osler could and usually did write the most simple, clear, direct, terse, and forcible English, he indulged often when occasion and matter permitted, and sometimes without this permission, in recondite allusions, quotations, metaphors, analogies, and conceits reminiscent of his familiarity with the Bible and of the style of his favorite authors—to whom he stuck as he did to his other friends—as Sir Thomas Browne, Robert Burton, Donne, Montaigne—a style which would be considered in another artificial and pedantic, but so assimilated by him as to become almost his own idiom and natural literary garment. Although he did not profess to be a man of letters, he had the literary temperament and there is a general savour of letters in many of his writings. He was received as one of their own in the inner circle of literary scholars and lovers of books. There is a literary as well as a scientific side to almost everything, and he did much during his spacious life to bridge the wide gulf between the literary and the scientific worlds. His scholarship was less that of an *érudit* than of Macaulay's scholar, who reads his Plato with his feet on the fender, albeit in Jowett's translation, for his classical foundation was only moderate. Not only could he transcribe the facts of knowledge in diction befitting a scientific composition, but he had also that rarer gift, an imaginative sense of fact, which is the deepest secret of the literature of power. He was a transmitter, a transmuter, and a vitalizer of knowledge more than a creator. Osler did not abandon medicine for the muse, and Goldsmith and Keats, no cultivate the

them, into the Temple of Esculapius, the son of Apollo, and made them feel at home there.

With the passing years his love of books, his enamoured pursuit of the art and mystery of book-collecting, his devotion to libraries, both his own and those of others—"Every book," he used to say, "has its natural habitat"—and his studies in medical biography and bibliography, all interwoven from the beginning in the history of Osler's professional life, absorbed more and more of his time and eventually became his chief literary interest. His published papers and monographs in the field of medical biography and bibliography—"bio-bibliography" he called it following French usage—as those on Beaumont, Bartlett, Bassett, Dover, Linacre, Servetus, Fracastorius, Sir Thomas Browne, Burton, although less popular than his general addresses, are his most important contributions outside of clinical medicine. In a field where it is difficult for scholarship to escape the dryness of dust Osler was never dull and as Sudhoff, the most eminent living medical historian, as quoted by Garrison, remarks, "an essay of Osler's is worth many ponderous tomes of dry erudition." He often applied to himself Gibbon's admission that "he had drawn a high prize in the lottery of life," and surely his career also "represents a successful experiment in the great art of living." One cannot fail to be impressed with the almost perfect adaptation of his talents and temperament to the accidents and circumstances of his life, and not less with the dexterous ministration of these diverse external events to the orderly development and eventual fulfilment of purposes and ideals formed in youth and early manhood. Rarely has Alfred de Vigny's conception of a great life been more fully realized: "*Qu'est ce qu'une grande vie? Une pensée de la jeunesse exécutée par l'âge mur.*" Osler's characteristic good fortune has followed him beyond the grave by this complete and worthy record of his life.