



## BOOK REVIEWS

**THE LIFE OF SIR WILLIAM OSLER.** By Harvey Cushing. 2 Vols., Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1925.

The material for a biography may be based upon or drawn from many and various sources. There is the public record of the subject's achievements, such as the positions he held, the honors he received, and his especially notable deeds or expressions of opinion. The letters and journals and private papers of a man are invaluable to the biographer—more than his published writings, which are, of course, also most useful. Lastly, there are the expressions of his colleagues and friends and, we might add, his enemies, concerning him and his actions.

The biographer of Sir William Osler has had an unusual abundance of material from the above-mentioned sources to draw upon and he has made a notably judicious use of it in writing an adequate biography of the most notable Anglo-American physician of this time. Osler's career as a teacher was unique in the impression he made by the results he achieved in no less than four distinct medical centers, and the mere relation of that record would be of interest. His correspondence was world wide and he wrote thousands of letters, many of which have most fortunately been preserved. These letters are most characteristic of the writer. Few men could express more in a few lines than Osler, and it is because he only wrote what was essential that his letters though very brief are invaluable as indicating the state of his mind or what he was engaged in at the time they were written. Although he did not keep one of those formidable daily records or journals, extracts from which form the appalling bulk of so many biographies, he was in the habit of jotting down brief notes in his professional day book or in some of the books which were his daily companions and these notes are of much interest. Dr. Cushing could have been at no loss for information from his friends and colleagues. Few men have been held in the esteem that Osler was. While living he was the victim of many spontaneous demonstrations of the affection of his colleagues, such as dinners, subscription gifts, and so forth, culminating in the two

huge volumes of papers written by upwards of one hundred and fifty of his friends and former pupils which were published in honor of his seventieth birthday. After his death there were many memorial meetings, in Canada, the United States and England at which papers were read relating to various aspects of his career. Again, few men were on more intimate terms with Osler than was the author of this book, and in view of that fact we cannot refrain from noticing the notable modesty with which he has abstained from the mention of his own name throughout the book.

The life of William Osler divides itself into three distinct periods, the Canadian, from his birth in 1849 until his migration to the United States in 1884; his life in the United States from 1884 until he went to England in 1905, and the last years which he passed as Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford.

His father, a hard working clergyman in a small Canadian town, spared no means to give him a good educational foundation, and Osler throughout his life loved to express his gratitude to two of his early teachers, William Arthur Johnston and James Bovell, by whom his interest in natural history which led to his studying medicine was stimulated and fostered. Gratitude to his early teachers was a prominent trait with Osler. He dedicated his "Textbook of Medicine" to Johnston and Bovell and R. Palmer Howard, his professor of medicine at McGill.

When at college Osler for a time thought seriously of entering the ministry but the intense interest aroused in him by his natural history studies led him, as stated above, to turn to medicine. The influence of his early work with the microscope was strong in him throughout his entire life and gave him that fortunate bent towards emphasizing the importance of clinical microscopy which was such a prominent feature in his teaching. After graduating at McGill he spent nearly two years abroad in study, chiefly in English laboratories of physiology and pathology. It is curious to find him inclined to try the practice of ophthalmology in Montreal,



chiefly because he thought that the practice of such a speciality would afford him more time to devote to laboratory work. Fortunately he decided that there was not a good opening for him, and very shortly after his return to Montreal he secured the appointment of Lecturer on the Institutes of Medicine at McGill, and sometime after that of Pathologist to the Montreal General Hospital, and in these two positions found just the right sphere to lay the foundations of his subsequent lifework. In 1875 he was made Professor of the Institutes of Medicine at McGill and was soon generally recognized as a new leader among the teachers of the profession. When nine years later he accepted the call to become Professor of Clinical Medicine in the University of Pennsylvania every possible effort was made to retain him at McGill, as it was realized what a tremendous loss he would be to that institution.

In Philadelphia Osler manifested the remarkable faculty, which he possessed in the highest degree, of making himself welcome and beloved in new and somewhat difficult surroundings. He also, as usual, stirred up things medical and introduced many new methods and ideas into the teaching at the oldest medical school in America. Heretofore there had been practically no teaching at the bedside and no attempt to teach clinical microscopy, two things which Osler immediately set about accomplishing. He also made use of the hitherto somewhat neglected material to be had in the deadhouse of Blockley, as the Philadelphia almshouse hospital was known in those days. There are in the archives of that deadhouse the longhand records in Osler's handwriting of no less than 162 autopsies which he performed there. Osler was appointed one of the visiting physicians to Blockley but as there were two regular pathologists and but few of the attending physicians ever performed any autopsies, his record of post mortems is a remarkable one. He became immensely popular with the students and the members of the Faculty at the University of Pennsylvania and when, in 1889, he accepted the chair of Professor of Medicine in the newly-established Johns Hopkins Medical School there was genuine regret at his loss in the medical community of Philadelphia.

In Baltimore Osler had the great opportunity of his life and he grasped it splendidly. With practically unlimited power over the establish-

ment of the medical teaching and hospital work in a new institution, unhampered by traditions, and with a rich endowment, Osler made the fullest and best use of the chance and achieved results such as had never been imagined before in this country. Gathering a group of able young men about him, firing them with his zeal, he threw himself into the work and in an amazingly short time the Johns Hopkins Medical School acquired the national eminence which it has maintained ever since. It is a great tribute to the judgment and wisdom of those in authority over the founding of the medical school that they should have made such excellent selections in their choice of the first professors, for in surgery, gynecology and pathology the pace set by the medical department was worthily emulated. Osler's faculty for making friends stood the new school in good stead. Baltimore was an old conservative city, with a highly respected medical profession, so that when it was learned that all the professors in the school which had been founded by a Baltimore man's money were to be called from outside of the ranks of the medical men of Baltimore there was deep and widespread indignation. Probably the personality of Osler had more to do with overcoming this resentment than any other factor. In 1892 Osler married the widow of Samuel W. Gross, and their house at No. 1 West Franklin Street became a center of hospitality whose irradiating influence did much to aid the work which Osler was steadily accomplishing by his universal geniality and genuine goodwill and above all by the modesty and self-effacement which went hand-in-hand with his scientific attainments. Throughout the pages of the Biography tribute, oftentimes unconsciously, is paid to the wonderful companionship of Lady Osler with her husband and the great assistance she was to him throughout their married life.

Another event marked the year 1892 in Osler's career, the appearance of the first edition of his famous "Textbook of Medicine," a work which by its originality, thoroughness and adaptation to the needs of the practitioner and student at once achieved a splendid success and still remains the most popular book of this character in the English language. Cushing gives an interesting letter written by a gentleman who was concerned with Mr. J. D. Rockefeller's beneficences relating how he, a layman, had read the new Textbook while on a vacation and



been so impressed that he had written a memorandum of some of its contents for Mr. Rockefeller directing his attention to the need for research institutions in this country, which ultimately resulted in the establishment of the Rockefeller Institute.

In connection with Osler's work in Baltimore, Cushing says: "The influence which, first and last, Osler exercised as a national and civic sanitary propagandist has been too little emphasized," a statement amply justified by the part which he took in urging sanitary reforms in Baltimore and in the formation of the national association to combat tuberculosis.

One of the most useful forms in which Osler's energy found a vent wherever he might be was in the organization of professional associations or in the rejuvenation of such as had become moribund, and especially such as bore on the literary or historical aspects of medicine. He was one of the founders of the Association of American Physicians and also one of the organizers of the First Triennial Congress of American Physicians and Surgeons and was active in founding several other national organizations. But it was in local organizations that his work was especially fruitful. Thus at McGill he had founded a Journal Club, and in Baltimore he founded a Book and Journal Club and the Johns Hopkins Historical Society, both of which proved invaluable adjuncts to the students and teachers.

One of the dominating interests of Osler's life was medical libraries. At McGill, to which he ultimately left his own library, he stimulated an interest in the library which has led to its becoming a most important collection. In Philadelphia he found a well-established library, that of the College of Physicians. He became a member of its Library Committee and took the most active interest in its affairs. In Baltimore he at once felt the lack of library facilities, the only medical library being a few hundred old books belonging to the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of the State of Maryland, which were stored in the basement of the Maryland Historical Society. The Faculty bore the same titular relations to the profession in Baltimore as the College of Physicians did to the profession in Philadelphia. Osler at once became interested in the rejuvenation of the Faculty. He went on the Library committee and secured the appointment of a trained librarian. By his efforts the

whole aspect of things changed so that when he left Baltimore the Faculty was an active body with a well-furnished library of 15,000 volumes. He was a frequent user of the Library of the Surgeon-General in Washington and lost no opportunity to acknowledge his indebtedness to it. As Cushing says: "His interest in libraries was cumulative, and a contact once made was never subsequently lost." Even when he had taken up his abode at Oxford he continued to pick up books which he thought should be in the library of McGill, or the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, or the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty, and would send them where he deemed appropriate. The Association of Medical Libraries which was suggested by George M. Gould in 1898 owed its success most largely to Osler's fostering care.

Osler was no dry-as-dust bookman. Dr. Johnson would certainly have classed him as a "clubbable man." In every city in which he sojourned he became a member of social clubs and enjoyed them. He writes in his later years of the pleasure he derived from his membership in "The Club" which was the society of which the pages of Boswell contain such pleasant pictures.

One of the most astonishing features of Osler's career was the prodigality with which he met the constant demands for his already fully occupied time. His kindness not only led him to respond to every appeal but prompted him to go out of his way to perform kindly offices of all sorts, not only to those to whom he was bound in the golden circle of friendship but to others who merely trespassed on his good nature. Thus he responded to innumerable requests to read addresses or write articles, or contribute introductions to books. He became known wherever he dwelt as "the doctors' doctor" because wherever or whenever a doctor was sick, Osler was the consultant whom he and his friends desired to have for him. Many were the instances in which Osler hearing of the illness of a friend or former associate, perhaps in some far distant place, would steal away from his arduous work and hastening to the bedside would bring a ray of hope and consolation beyond the value even of his professional knowledge and experience. These self-sacrificing trips must have cost him much in time and money and energy.

An address by Osler was always a valuable feature of any gathering and he seemed always



able to meet the demand. Besides professional papers read before medical societies and addresses made to medical students or nurses, he was called upon to speak before lay audiences. Probably his best-known address to a lay audience was the most delightful Ingersoll Lecture on "Science and Immortality" which he delivered at Harvard in 1902. It is doubtful if anyone could have handled such a delicate topic with the same grace and skill.

In the summer of 1904 came the most momentous change in his life—the call to the chair of Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford. The whole series of events is excellently described by Cushing. No greater tribute could have been paid him. As his predecessor, Sir John Burdon Sanderson, exclaimed when Osler's name was mentioned, he was "the very man." His long stay and the peculiar advantages of his position in Baltimore made the wrench a hard one. But he and Mrs. Osler both thought that the pace would be less strenuous and that it was absolutely essential that he should cease overworking. Little did they foresee the terrible strain he would be subjected to ten years later. A wail went up not only from Johns Hopkins and Baltimore but throughout the entire United States when it was announced that he had accepted the offer. It was when making his farewell address at Johns Hopkins on February 22, 1905 that he made the famous reference to the "fixed period" at which it might be well that men should be quietly put out of the way, an idea suggested by Anthony Trollope in a novel bearing that name. Most readers will remember the outburst of unpleasant newspaper notoriety which resulted from Osler's most innocent pleasantry. The unpleasant details are given in full by his biographer. It is pleasant to think that sensible people were able to appreciate the circumstances under which Osler spoke and to comprehend his meaning. We think it is a wise step to go into the details frankly and that hereafter there will possibly be as a result a further diminution in public interest in the matter.

On May 2, 1905 a memorable farewell dinner was given him in New York by over five hundred members of his profession, and on May 19, he sailed to enter upon the last phase of his noble career.

The second volume opens with a charming picture of the life of the Oslers in their new home.

Their surroundings were ideal and they soon adapted themselves to their environment. By virtue of his position as Regius Professor of Medicine Osler was also one of the Curators of the Bodleian Library and until the day of his death he took the most eager interest in its affairs. His duties at the medical school were very light. There were laboratories of physiology, anatomy and pathology but the students went to London for instruction in their fourth and fifth years. There were 150 beds in the Radcliffe Infirmary and Osler arranged to give clinical instruction to a small class of men. Osler became a Fellow of Christ Church and took great interest in its affairs, but his chief joy and interest at Oxford lay in the affairs of the Bodleian Library. Until the day of his death, he was devoted to its interests. Very shortly after his arrival in Oxford he was one of the most active participants in getting back for the Bodleian the copy of the First Folio Shakespeare which had once belonged to it but had been sold in the seventeenth century. Osler subscribed and got others to do so, to a fund to repurchase it and, when at the last moment it seemed as though the necessary sum could not be raised, he got it by a personal appeal to a rich Canadian friend. Burton, the author of the "Anatomy of Melancholy," had left a portion of his library to Christ Church, but the books had become scattered throughout the library. Osler gathered together about 500 of them, and had them placed on shelves surrounding a portrait of their former owner which he had copied from one which hung in Brasenose College.

At Oxford Osler was in a position to pick up historic rarities more frequently than was possible in Canada or America. It was wonderful how he would scent them out and the generosity with which he would give them to an appropriate recipient. Thus in 1911 he found a letter from Laënnec, written in 1810, in which "he refers to an unusual astronomical phenomenon observed in Baltimore which had been referred to him." This he promptly sends to the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland. Again, he spies a set of early Harvard theses and lists of graduates in the Hunterian Museum at Glasgow, which he remembers are lacking from the library of Harvard. He has them photographed and sends them to be deposited there. He came into possession of Sir William Petty's manuscript



letterbook in which was a sheet dealing with his Survey of Ireland. This Osler presented to the Library of Trinity College, Dublin.

Osler's services to the living were rivalled by his anxiety to keep green the memory of the dead. How many heroes of medicine Osler rescued from oblivion and by revealing the lessons taught by their lives and achievements stimulated his contemporaries to emulate them. Servetus, Elisha Bartlett, J. Y. Bassett, Beaumont and Daniel Drake were but names, even if as much, to most of the profession until Osler made their fame blossom in their dust. Although Charles Lamb had done much to arouse interest in Sir Thomas Browne and old Burton, it is to Osler that most of their present readers owe their taste for them.

The home of the Oslers in Oxford became famous for its hospitality. The hosts of friends they had made in their successive sojournings in Canada and America rarely visited England without dropping in at Oxford and never failed to receive a warm welcome at "The Open Arms." The Oslers loved young people and some of the most charming of Cushing's pages tell the stories of Osler's games which he carried on with some of his little friends.

At the coronation of King George V in 1911 Osler was made a baronet, an honor which sat very lightly on his shoulders and made absolutely no difference in his manner of living or attitude towards life in general. His chief delight was in the companionship of his son, Edward Revere Osler, who was born in 1896, and was growing into a fine youth. As he approached manhood he developed a distinct taste in a literary and bibliographic direction, and began the collection of a library. He was an enthusiastic fisherman and devoted to the works of Isaac Walton, which led to frequent references to him in his Father's letters as "Ike Walton."

In 1914 came the thunderbolt. The Oslers threw themselves heart and soul into war work. When the professors and their families who had been driven absolutely penniless from Louvain arrived in England, they were taken in by the teachers at Oxford and Lady Osler did everything possible towards providing them with food, clothing and employment. Huge hospitals were soon established in Oxford and its neighborhood and Sir William, now an honorary colonel in the British Army Medical Corps, became a chief consultant in the area. Enormous

contingents of Canadian troops were camped on Salisbury Plain and Osler took the deepest interest in their welfare. He was especially energetic in urging that every soldier should be vaccinated against smallpox and given anti-typoid inoculation, and delivered many addresses to the men urging the importance of these measures. It would be impossible in a review to attempt any account of the innumerable and invaluable services which Osler rendered to the Canadian and later the American medical forces during the War. It is hard to realize their importance and extent.

The great tragedy which befell the Oslers when their boy was killed is vividly unfolded and as it was so typical of one of the most tragic features of the War it will have historic value in the future. When the War began Revere, a charming, healthy, normal lad, full of the joy of life and with delightful literary and artistic tastes, responded at once to the call. The agony of his father and mother is only revealed in glimpses as they concealed it with a noble reticence. Revere had absolutely none of the thirst for adventure or interest in the glamour of military life. Nevertheless he went into training and after some time spent as orderly and supply officer with the McGill Unit in France insisted on being transferred to the artillery. As early as November, 1915, Osler wrote that his friends "Schafer, Moore, Rolleston, Garrod, Hanford, Herringham and others have all lost boys" and from the outset he seems to have felt that the same fate was in store for him. He and Lady Osler had seen Oxford deserted by all the bright young men who had gone and they realized how few of them returned. After Revere left they only did more if possible to brighten the lives of others and there is but little to indicate what they suffered. In the midst of their private grief and laboring with all their might to aid their country their house "The Open Arms" was a haven to which resorted an innumerable throng of visitors who were always sure of a warm reception. No estimate can be made of the exact number of Canadian and American doctors who enjoyed the warm-hearted hospitality of the Oslers from 1914 to the close of the War. No sooner had a "Unit" arrived from some hospital in the United States than Osler heard of it and insisted on the officers coming down to visit him at Oxford. He seemed to have a faculty of finding



out even the unattached doctors who would be astonished at receiving a note bidding them come and see him. When on leave from France they trooped to Oxford. People in Canada or the United States would cable to him of a relative, sick or wounded, and they might be sure that Osler would spare no effort to be of service to the one in whom they were interested. If Osler laid the profession under his debt before the War he certainly multiplied the obligation out of all bounds during it.

In May 1920 the Classical Association under the presidency of Osler met at Oxford and he delivered one of his most splendid addresses with the title "The Old Humanities and the New Science." In conjunction with the meeting he had arranged with R. J. Gunther an exhibit of early scientific apparatus drawn forth from obscure corners of the Oxford colleges and printed a valuable catalogue of old physical, chemical, astronomical and other scientific instruments used by former Oxford scientists. Of his election to the distinguished position Professor Welsh well said: "It was in recognition not merely of his sympathetic interest in classical scholars, but also of his mastery of certain phases of the subject, especially the bibliographical and historical sides, and the relation of the work and thought of classical antiquity to the development of medicine, science and culture," and, after hearing his address he turned to Lady Osler and said "That was Osler at his very best."

Osler's seventieth and last birthday was made a great occasion by his multitude of friends and admirers in all the quarters of the globe. A splendid book in two large volumes composed of articles especially written for the work by some one hundred and fifty of his colleagues, former pupils and others was presented to him. For no man was such a gift more appropriate and by none could it have been more greatly appreciated. A number of the *Johns Hopkins Hospital Bulletin* containing a series of twenty articles dealing with various aspects of Osler's career and concluding with a bibliography of his writings compiled by the Librarian of the hospital, Miss M. W. Blogg, was another touching tribute.

Just after his birthday he had an attack of bronchial pneumonia which prostrated him severely. When he had recovered he and Lady Osler went to a quiet place in Jersey where they

spent six weeks during which Osler seemed to have recovered much of his old time health and spirits. In September Osler was called in consultation to Glasgow. On his return there was a railroad strike in progress and he had to motor from Newcastle to Oxford and when he finally reached his house he was again prostrated with a bronchopneumonia. The details of the protracted illness, which proved to be his last, are very fully given. He must have suffered greatly, as he had pleurisy, followed by empyema and abscess of the lung. He underwent several operations, and died after a severe hemorrhage on December 29, 1919. Through the last months of suffering he maintained his interest in everything and everybody, writing joking little notes, jotting down memoranda as to the disposition of books, reading his favorite authors, and cheering up those about him, although from the first he evidently knew what the outcome of his illness would be. The last pages of Cushing's book are heartrending but should be read by everyone who would realize how consistently Osler practiced his grand philosophy of life.

Dr. Cushing has written a splendid record of a noble life, a book that is worthy of him of whom it was written. He has given us Osler as he was. The reader is impressed throughout with the love and admiration of the author for his subject and he inspires his readers with the same feelings. The book should be placed in the hands of every young doctor or medical student. We know of no better stimulant to good work.

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OPUSCULA SELECTA NEERLANDICORUM IV. AULETIUS. WALAEUS. DE GRAAF. DE FREMERY. VAN DEEN. Curatores Miscellaneorum quae vocantur Nederlandsch Tijdschrift Voor Geneeskunde Collegerunt et Ediderunt. Amstelodami, Sumptibus Societatis, 1922.

This is the fourth of a series of reproductions of medical classics, printed with Latin text on one page and Dutch translations on the opposite page, under the editorship of Pekelharing. The first volume was devoted to short classics by Erasmus, Leeuwenhoek, Swammerdam, Boerhaave, Gaubius and Donders, the second to Petrus Camper, and the third to Vesalius. For the present volume, several smaller works have again been chosen.