

# The Literary Review

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Section Three

### A MAN WHO KNEW NOT IDLENESS

Story of Dr. Osler's  
Life Shows Success  
Came by Hard Work

By THOMAS L. MASSON

AMONG other reasons, Dr. Harvey Cushing's Life of Sir William Osler should be read as an antidote to Sinclair Lewis' "Arrowsmith." Mr. Lewis has satirized doctors. Dr. Cushing has exhibited one in real life whose memory is still cherished by many Americans who loved him. He quotes, with evident approval, Southey's remark that "a man's character can more surely be judged by those letters which his friends addressed to him than by those he himself penned," and carries out this rule in this voluminous work, not a dull page in it.

It is possible that in the minds of future generations Arrowsmith may live longer than Osler. Among Balzac's gallery of 2000 characters, Père Goriot is remembered where living personalities have been forgotten. But Sinclair Lewis is not Honoré Balzac. And Martin Arrowsmith is not William Osler. He never took much to practice. His work was broader. He might have been termed, instead of a national physician. After his eventful life in Baltimore in 1905, his wife, in a humor, spoke of "leading the shattering years afterwards, indeed to be remembered by his polio for having declared that a man was reformed. Of course, he said, the doctor now being almost as well as he report. Let us, however, reproduce the Here is what he really said:

I have two fixed ideas well known to my friends, harmless obsessions with which I sometimes bore them, but which have a direct bearing on this important problem. The first is the comparative uselessness of men above forty years of age. This may seem shocking, and yet, read aright, the world's history bears out the statement.

He then proceeded to illustrate his remarks with examples, and went on:

My second fixed idea is the uselessness of men above sixty years of age, and the incalculable benefit it would be in commercial, political and in professional life if, as a matter of course, men stopped work at this age.

He continued with a reference to Anthony Trollope's "The Fixed Period" and concluded:

Whether Trollope's suggestion of a college and chloroform should be carried out or not I have become a little dubious, as my own time is getting so short.

"The storm did not break until next day," chronicles his biographer, "when it was headlined throughout the country that 'Osler Recommends Chloroform at Sixty.'" For some reason, however, there seems still to be a division of opinion, and the present reviewer has heard many refer to forty as being the fatal age. In either case it was bad enough.

We have come to view this enlivening incident, if we think of it at all, with historical complacency. At the same time, in the light of the evidence, is there not something to be said after all for the much-abused newspapers and the silent and generally pains-taking obscure reporters who, in the face of a public hullabaloo, never have a chance to answer back?

The opinions occasionally and impulsively uttered by prominent citizens when off their guard are often more likely to be their real convictions than more carefully prepared platitudes. Displayed in cold type the next morning and exaggerated in their picturesque spots, these gentlemen are likely to

#### An Attic Salt-Shaker

By W. Orton Tewson

WHEN Captain Bertram Hayes, Commodore of the White Star Line, was second mate on the windjammer "Falls of Dee,"—his last voyage in sail—the cargo shifted during a heavy gale and for a time it looked as though it would be the end of her, and him, and all.

"A LOT of us were gathered together hanging on as best we could, wondering what was going to happen," yawns Captain Hayes in "Hull Down," his very salty book of reminiscences, just published, "when the old sailmaker said:

"Here goes for a — good smoke before I go to hell."

"WITH that he got hold of a rope and lowered himself down to the deck, crawled along to the deck-house, and by and by struggled back with his pipe filled and well under way."

"THE BOSUN, who was really a bigger blackguard than the sailmaker—he certainly had used fouler language up till a few hours previously—reproved him for swearing at such a time, and 'Sails' answered: "I've been swearing ever since I could talk, and I don't suppose it will make any difference where I go to if I knock off for the next half-hour." "Which," adds Captain Hayes, "effectually squelched the Bosun."

DURING the South African war Captain Hayes was in command of a troop ship. "One morning as I was going along the deck," he relates, "I caught a fireman sitting on a steam-pipe selling 'Coolers.' I kicked his bucket over first and then told him what would happen if I caught him again."

(Continued on Page Five)

throw fits, and passionate repudiations follow. Theodore Roosevelt is almost the only example we have had of a man who didn't much care what he said and rarely took anything back, and in the end he usually—as they say on lower levels—departed with the goods. When he called a man a liar and it came out

#### "Too Old at Forty" Myth Clung to Him To His Dying Day

the next day, he generally repeated it for good measure, or if he seemed to back down, always showed his teeth.

In the case of Dr. Osler we are by no means suggesting that he did not have cause for complaint. Perhaps he was something more than a victim of that spirit of practical joking for which he himself was so notable from boyhood. His equanimity and sense of humor kept him from being much damaged.

Was he wrong? There are vigorous controversialists on both sides, the pro-chloroform school being under forty themselves and the anti being over forty. Osler's own marriage at forty-three would suggest the thought that, to paraphrase a well-known author, two heads are better than one, even if one is an exception to the chloroform rule. For his life showed that his usefulness did not diminish. On the contrary.

He might have said then, as has since been said so often, that a man's spirit and character remain stable throughout his life and that those results which depend upon organic efficiency are always incidental. In his own case, by purity of thought and tolerance and toil and the spirit of service to mankind, he was able to demonstrate that Man always holds dominion over any material machinery. His life is precisely the kind of thing which is suggested matter for those who follow after.

And what a book this is! On all counts it is the best biography since Beveridge's "Life of John Marshall." (How different!) It is plainly a labor of love, full of natural unforced anecdotes. Its unprofessional atmosphere gives it rare charm. The author, himself a distinguished doctor, knows his subject and his period. He obtrudes himself but slightly, spreading his material before us with a lavish hand and letting it quite largely tell its own story.

There must always be a reticence in passing too definite a judgment upon such a varied character;

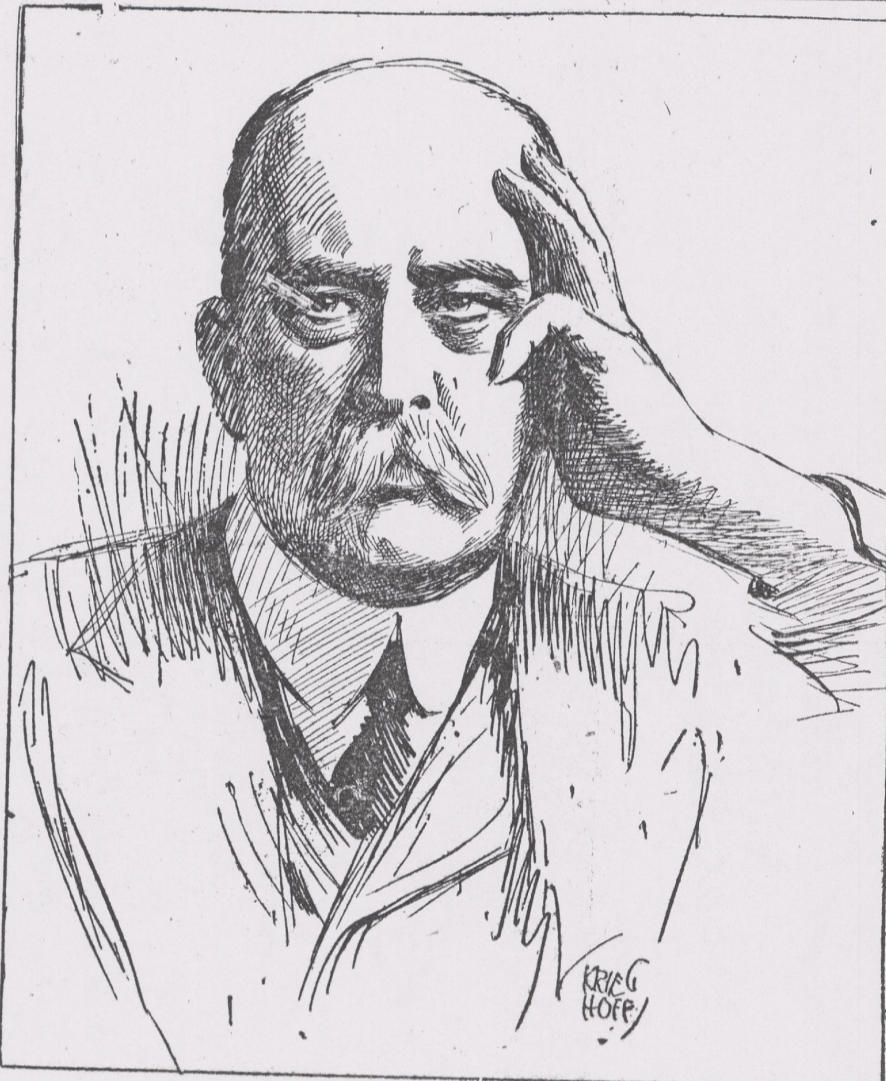
yet the impression we get of William Osler from this book is that, admitting his remarkable parts and diversified gifts, he was not a really great man. He had enthusiasm, but not passion. He believed in keeping one's affections on ice. And he lacked originality. He was the antithesis of Nietzsche (perhaps not such a bad thing to be). He showed none of that spirit of detachment displayed so vividly in Napoleon and Nietzsche, which renders everything else subordinate to one's natural genius.

His description of his visit to Walt Whitman is full of delightfully human touches, but the good gray poet made no other impression on him than that of a nice old man who had aged majestically. He read Walt's poems, but they "were not for my pampered palate." But after subsequent visits he "gradually came to realize what Whitman's life and message meant to his followers." His mind was conventional, but with a sort of super-conventionality which placed him on a much higher level than the mere commonplace.

Similarly, he had to be stirred by gradual absorption into a correct understanding of Pasteur. "It is apparent," writes Dr. Cushing, "that Osler, like many other physicians, did not appear at this time fully to grasp as Lister did the significance of Pasteur's work, or to show great interest in Koch's remarkable contributions."

It is evident that he lacked that higher creative imagination tinged with the fine frenzy of the poet, displayed so strikingly by two great Frenchmen, Louis Pasteur, the doctor, and Henri Fabre, the naturalist. Men who fall short of

#### "Brought Healing and Health"





## Page

A Man Who Knew Not Idleness.  
By *Thomas L. Masson* 1

A review of Harvey Cushing's.  
"The Life of Sir William Osler."  
An Attic Salt-Shaker....By *W. Orton Tewson* 1, 5

"The Collected Essays and Papers of George  
Saintsbury," and "A Last Scrapbook," by  
George Saintsbury.  
Reviewed by *Ernest Boyd* 2

"St. Mawr," by D. H. Lawrence.  
Reviewed by *Donald Douglas* 3

Two novels of college life.  
Reviewed by *E. C. Beckwith* 3

"Power," by Arthur Stringer.  
Reviewed by *Dawn Powell* 3

"Georgian Stories, 1925."  
Reviewed by *Herschel Brickell* 4

"The Life of James Elroy Flecker," by Geraldine  
Hodgson.....Reviewed by *J. Ranken Towse* 4

"Edmund Spenser," by W. L. Renwick.  
Reviewed by *Joseph T. Shipley* 5

"Hesperides," by Ridgely Torrence.  
Reviewed by *Carl Magg* 5

A review of three travel books.  
By *Lawton Mackall* 6

"Human Nature and the Gospel," by William  
Lyon Phelps...Reviewed by *J. A. MacCallum* 6

"Beatrice d'Este and Her Court," by Robert de la  
Sizeranne.....Reviewed by *Mary Huntington* 7

"The Sons of the Sheikh," by E. M. Hull.  
Reviewed by *A. E. Werner* 7

What Is the Most Beautiful Line of Poetry?  
A symposium..... 8

Labeling the Week's New Books..... 9, 10

Readers' Guide ..... 10

Book Sales and Rare Books..... 11

The Literary Lobby.....By *Kenneth Digby* 12

Thus we find Dr. Osler forming attachments for many books, in particular Sir Thomas Browne's "Religio Medici," and for associations with people, his capacity for friendship being spontaneous and continuous after it got started, although even here there seems to have been a process of steady development. Dr. Johnson would have held him up as a model of one who kept his friendships in constant repair. Everywhere he speaks of what he owes to others. He was self-effacing, industrious, studious, lovable, tactful and delightfully human and humorous. One of the most beautiful letters ever paid, and which a woman was given to him by our own Nancy Astor (Lady Astor), during the war (1917). It is here quoted only in part:

I wish that I could have seen you and told you of our beloved Sir William at the hospital. Like all things that are wonderful and true and different, it is almost impossible to write of him, or to say in language worthy of him what one would want to. He made the whole difference to the hospital. Of course to the staff that was natural, but the patients waited for him and accepted his word as final, and it was never one of discouragement. I always felt that no case was hopeless and I waited for him to come and say so too. That was the wonderful part about him, he really brought Healing and Health, Life not Death. . . .

I wish that I could really write about him, but you see I can't. My children adored him. They waited patiently for his Monday visits. He called them "the darlings" and spoiled them outrageously. . . . Waldorf shared my admiration for him, but my love began when I was fifteen, a patient at the Johns Hopkins.

William Osler was born in 1849, on the edge of the upper Canadian wilderness, the youngest of a family of nine. His parents came from Cornwall. His father was "stocky, fair, gray-eyed and broad-headed." A clergyman. His remarkable mother (who lived to be over one hundred) was known as a "black Celt"—"thought to be remainders of the original Briton."

The boy grew up thus in the midst of privations such as pioneers have endured (now no more, alas, for our vigor!) and eventually becoming (at twenty-six) professor of the Institute of Medicine at Montreal, was called to Philadelphia in 1884 (flipping a cent for his choice), and from thence to the new Johns Hopkins in 1889. In 1904 he accepted the call of Oxford to become regius professor of medicine in that university. He died on December 19, 1919. Among his last utterances was:

Well, it's good to have gone so long with so little wrong with me. But I felt with Franklin that I have been too far across the water to go back and have it all over again.

He did notable work during the war, especially for his beloved Canadians. It is all down in the book, with humor and charm and the always accurate Oxford typography.

As we sailed our slender reviewer's barque (on as even a keel as possible) through these moving pages, we could not help but feel what a lesson this record of the slow upbuilding of a highly useful man should carry for some of the young smarties of today. Willie Osler as a boy, learned concentration in a fourth-form room full of *enfants terrible*. "In the pandemonium Osler might be seen grasping his head with thumbs in his ears, oblivious to everything but his book." To how few (outside of our humming newspaper offices, certainly not in our schools) would it

He early acquired the notebook habit, frequently mentioning its value to his students, and referring to himself as "a notebook man!" He had few oratorical gifts. In the beginning his literary work was mediocre. He slowly improved it by hard labor. He never made any effort to build up a private practice and was a marked influence against undue medical extortion.

He was fond of quoting from "that wisest of rulers, Antoninus Pius, who, as he lay dying in his home at Lorium in Etruria, summed up his philosophy of life in the watchword *Æquanimitas* . . . a calm equanimity is the desirable attitude. How difficult to attain, yet how necessary in success as in failure!" He shied away from drugs, was one of the first to adopt the sensible, open-air treatment for tuberculosis, and it was the reading of his text-book, "Principles and Practice of Medicine," to John D. Rockefeller by F. M. Gates of Montclair, which directed Mr. Rockefeller's attention to medical research.

How does it happen that this man, through the cultivation of his talents never approaching genius, was able to do so much for his day and generation? The answer is so simple it will scarcely be grasped by a rising generation of wise men, whose giant intellects are focussed on the idea that a boy can be inoculated with education and that it will "take." From his beginning, Willie Osler had to work and work hard for everything he got.

THE LIFE OF SIR WILLIAM OSLER. By Harvey Cushing. 2 volumes. New York: Oxford University Press (American Branch). \$12.



JAMES ELROY FLECKER

Poet and Dramatist

*"The Life of James Elroy Flecker,"* by Geraldine Hodgson  
is reviewed on Page 4.

THE COLLECTED ESSAYS AND PAPERS OF  
GEORGE SAINTSBURY. Vol. IV. Essays in French  
Literature. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. \$4.25.

A LAST SCRAP BOOK. By George Saintsbury. New  
York: The Macmillan Company. \$3.

Reviewed by ERNEST BOYD

AS Professor Saintsbury looks back over a long career devoted to letters and closes his records with a handsome volume of his essays and three diverting scrap books, he must be aware of the good fortune which has attended the final phase of his activities. He has lived long enough to find a young generation, which delights in his rabid Toryism, and it is amusing to watch the enthusiasm with which he is read and quoted today when one remembers how exasperating he seemed to those of us who were growing up twenty years ago. Nowadays, not only does his conservatism please but his extraordinary English passes unnoticed or is defended as part of his charming idiosyncrasy. He has always been critical of the style of others, but his own abounds in such jargon as "fustianish," "omnilegent," "a skilled attempter of epicedes" and "flashes of sobering"; in grammatical errors such as "a better writer than either of these three" and "poetry such as there is not perhaps more than a small volume-full in all languages"; in solecisms, tautologies and meaningless redundancies, of which J. M. Robertson once compiled an amazing anthology.

These peculiarities, coupled with the violence of Mr. Saintsbury's social and political prejudices, make him perhaps the worst teacher to whom uncritical and undeveloped minds could be exposed. At the same time, he is the most admirable guide and companion in lit-



## "PEPINO"

*After an etching by Emil Fuchs.*

From "With Pencil, Brush and Chisel," by Emil Fuchs (Putnam).

erature, provided one be armed with other ideas to serve as a check upon his misrepresentations. In this volume of essays on French literature he includes an essay published in 1875 in praise of Baudelaire, which is not only one of the earliest English appreciations of that writer but also one of the best essays which Mr. Saintsbury has ever written. It is followed by a contemporary study of Flaubert, which is dated by the detailed summary of the story of "Madame Bovary," but is, nevertheless, another striking instance of the critic's perspicacity and feeling for fine work. With Anatole France he was not so sure, though his trusted essays—one written in 1895, the other in 1900—dealing with this author show that he is a fine tribute, especially as Mr. Saintsbury strives to forget his anathemas and to hold unorthodox political opinions.

Unlike the three volumes literature, in this edition, the fourth volume most of the material which was published ten years ago in "Essays on French Novelists," is due partly to the fact that some of that material was revised and used in his astounding two-volume "History of the French Novel," and partly—I hope—to an act of self-criticism leading to a rejection of views which are peculiarly unintelligent. Here he is more cautious than when he wrote of Paul Bourget: "He is never exactly dirty, but he appears to be under a complete obsession of erotic ideas." But, as in the "History of the French Novel," his bias against the Naturalistic school remains, and he is at pains to dissociate Flaubert from that aspect of the Realistic movement.

He can approve of the "delicately indelicate" piffle of a person like Gustave Droz, and even the cheap smut of Armand Silvestre arouses in him no protest. But Huysmans, Maupassant and the Goncourt brothers are beyond the pale. In his treatment of these last two, consummate artists and refined men of letters, Mr. Saintsbury has never been more unjust. He calls their novels "chronicles of wasted grime" and distorts the purpose of their famous "Journal" until one might be tempted to believe that they were two filthy-minded, morbid egomaniacs, without a claim to fame or esteem. When Edmond tells amusingly how he once entered the bedroom of a pretty young cousin and chanced to see more of her than he had expected or . . . hoped, the incident assumes in Saintsbury's mind a sinister significance.

In the three "Scrap Books" devotees of Professor Saintsbury discover the quintessence of their author. These rambling notes reveal the whole man. He evokes charming pictures of his university days; he recalls feelingly meals that will never be forgotten and wines upon whose like we shall never look again. At the mere thought of Home Rule for Ireland, prohibition, trade unionism and labor government, he becomes apoplectic and never loses an opportunity of taking a shot at these bogies.

He is a thorough John Bull of the old school, as truly an Englishman as Anatole France was French, as Georg Brandes a good European. A comparative study of these three old men, representing an era whose very memory is disappearing, would be valuable, for all three were devoted to the life of letters and, divergent as their ideas are, they have in common something that has ceased to be part of the equipment of a man of letters. They were learned and human, and carried both their learning and their humanity without self-conscious ostentation.