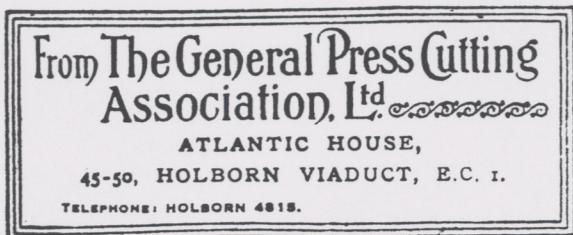


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## WILLIAM OSLER, HUMANIST.

"Sir William Osler." By Harvey Cushing.  
(Oxford University Press. 2 vols. 87s.  
In 1 vol. on India paper, 50s.)

Reviewed by SIR SQUIRE SPRICKE.

Sir William Osler was a big man, but it is doubtful whether the attempt to write a very big book about him will introduce his personality to a corresponding audience. This biography runs to over 1,400 large octavo pages, and is packed with letters of which only a certain proportion need have been included. Many of them are amusing, most of them are of a personal nature, and all of them reveal the writer, but such voluminous and repetitious evidence as to the manner of man he was becomes unnecessary, and clearness may be defeated by a blurring of the portrait from too much detail. It is pleasant to have expressed at once the only reservations which we have to make in commending to everyone Professor Harvey Cushing's life of Sir William Osler.

Osler was the typical humanist. He followed the trend of thought which has had so marked an influence over the development of Christianity, which obliterates the old conceptions of theology, and finds in a devoted interest in the affairs of men a definite service of God. Professor Cushing puts on the title-page of his book an extract from Osler's favourite author, Sir Thomas Browne, which runs as follows:—

Thus there are two books from whence I collect my divinity: besides the written one of God, another of his servant Nature, that universal and public manuscript, that lies expanded unto the eyes of all: those that never saw him in the one have discovered him in the other.

### A Great Clinician.

He was the greatest personality in the medical world at the time of his death. By his scientific attainments he had earned a place in the first rank of physicians, and that place he adorned by a keen cosmopolitan knowledge of men and things, and by large literary activities which ranged through clinical medicine and every side of scientific education, and included philosophical and biographical essays and humorous disquisitions. Wherever his pen travelled the subject was illuminated by clear thought, accurate knowledge of literary predecessors, classical accomplishment, playful wit, and the most deep and honest charity. As a physician he was alike a great clinician and a great professor. In Canada, America, and, lastly, at Oxford he displayed the same rare combination of qualities—he could acquire information untiringly, and could disseminate it clearly. All these things emerge from Professor Cushing's biography, and, further, it may be gathered in what an all-round way Osler was a happy man. Apart from the tragic stroke dealt him by the war, when he lost his only son, his life was fortunate throughout, for having reached high position through the merits of accomplishment and the force and charm of goodness, his successes brought no envy in their track. And his abounding popularity was the outcome of an unfailing and instinctive desire to help all who came to him in the most practical way, without either flattering his beneficiary or laying him under a burdensome sense of obligation. He was an embodiment of the fact that the science of medicine should know no racial tie, but should place itself at the disposal of the world.

### When War Came.

Osler died in December, 1919, and therefore the biography covers the whole period of the war. There is, of course, an abounding literature of the war, political and general, military and scientific, but even so there will be found in these pages a picture which has never been bettered of one aspect of it. We see by Osler's letters how the five years of horror and glory affected the man who, by his public position and private circumstances, was deeply influenced by events as they occurred from day to day on the various fronts. In his home at Oxford telegrams and telephone messages even in peace time were a frequent event, for few in England could have had more numerous intimacies, but now they poured in whencesoever the British or allied colours were to be found, and during a great part of the war any one of these messages might announce the death of a much beloved and only son. We see throughout a brave man working hard, facing his own terror, and sympathising with that of others, and when at last the blow, which he said that he had always expected, came, he refused to break down; his work went on apparently unaltered, and both his private letters and his literary communications contained their old note of brave cheeriness. Until the very end of his life he gave no sign that he felt alone or depressed, and the detailed description of the last scene presents a wonderful picture of gay courage.