

LIFE OF A GREAT PHYSICIAN

Osler's Work in Three Countres

By Dr. JOSEPH COLLINS.

THE LIFE OF SIR WILLIAM OSLER, by Harvey Cushing. Oxford University Press. Two volumes. \$12.50.

Sir William Osler occupied a unique position; he was the most widely known and best beloved physician in the world. He made an indelible impression on the teachings and practice of medicine in three countries—Canada, the United States and England. He lived the number of years allotted by the psalmist to man, and each succeeding year of his life he added to his mental stature by taking thought, and to his emotional profundity by doing deeds of kindness.

He was the son of an Anglo-Saxon pioneer parson, Featherstone Lake Osler, and of Ellen Free Pickton, a Celt, who went from Cornwall to the province of Toronto in 1837. His spiritual parents were Hermes and Minerva, and he had three god-fathers—a parson, Arthur Johnson; a physician, James Bovell, and a professor, Robert Palmer Howard—and to them he dedicated the best and most widely read text book on the practice of medicine ever written.

He had a genius for friendship that exceeded anything I have ever known or hope to know; he had a capacity for quick and accurate observation which is not vouchsafed to one man in a thousand; he had a prehensile mind to which synthesis and logic appealed; he had a liking and capacity for work that resembled those of Theodore Roosevelt, and he loved his fellows. When they were ill he added great tenderness to his love. He was playful, prankful and guileless, with the face of a sphinx and the expression of an ascetic. To cap all, he had exhaustless humor and boundless generosity. He was a scholar without pedantry, a scientist without pretension, a wit without venom, a humanist without scorn. Small wonder that he was the man without an enemy.

A Great Biography.

One of his most beloved friends and esteemed pupils has written his biography, and at the same time achieved one of the most difficult of all tasks: he has kept himself out of the book, and refrained from eulogizing the subject. There are many biographies of physicians that merit the designation "great," among them John Morley's "Life of Jerome Cardan," Rene Vallerey-Radot's "Vie de Pasteur," Stephen Paget's "Life of Victor Horsley," Agnes Repplier's "Life of William White," and to this list must be added Harvey Cushing's "Life of Sir William Osler."

Osler did three great things for medicine: he conceived and effected bedside teaching; he demonstrated the value of history as a pedagogical agency and of culture as a humanizing one, and he succeeded to make the medical world heed that cure meant prevention. He had but one fundamental dislike: chauvinism. One abiding disdain; nil admirari; one supreme contempt: pretence. He could not abide a faker, unless he were feeble minded; then pity facilitated tolerance.

On his seventieth birthday his former pupils and intimate colleagues of this country sent to Oxford two memorial volumes, made up of the contributions to the science and art that he had fostered and developed. Replying to his fellow regius professor of medicine in Cambridge, who made the presentation, he said:

"Among multiple acknowledgment I can lift one hand to heaven that I was born of honest parents, that modesty, humility, patience and veracity lay in the same egg, and came into the world with me. To have had a happy home in which selfishness reigned, parents whose self-sacrifice remains a blessed memory, brothers and sisters helpful far beyond the usual measure—all these make a picture delightful to look back upon. Then to have had the benediction of friendship follow one like a shadow, to have always had the sense of comradeship in work, without the petty pinpricks of jealousies and controversies, to be able to rehearse in the sessions of sweet, silent thought the experiences of long years without a single bitter memory—to have and to do all this fills with gratitude. That three

and Johns Hopkins. In the former he stayed five years; in the latter fifteen. The temptation to respond favorably to the call from New York was very great, and greater still that from Edinburgh. But temptation for Osler was created to be resisted and there was a star that guided him as it guided the wise men of the East; he had but to follow it at night, and to be counseled during the day by the voice that once had counseled Socrates to reach his goal; a true knowledge of himself and of his relations to his fellows, and to plant his banner there, bearing the masterword in medicine, work.

Called to Oxford.

Then came the call to Oxford. He had been in the harness actively for thirty years and the load had begun to drag; the burdens that he had not only willingly borne but sought had begun to bend him, and the unfinished literary material of many years clamored for academic leisure and favorable environment. Oxford was the place and Osler was the very man! Going for good meant farewells; and out of one of them flowed a stream of notoriety which, for a time, threatened to drown him. The day after he took leave of his students, colleagues and trustees, in an address in which he discussed many problems of university life; particularly the danger of staying too long in one place, and the danger of not thrusting opportunities and responsibilities upon young men—he was not sure whether it was Anthony Trollope who suggested that there should be a college into which men of sixty retired for a year's contemplation before a peaceful departure by chloroform, but there was much to be said in favor of it—the journalese rendering of this was "Osler recommends chloroform at sixty." The storm gathered during the night. It broke in the East the following morning and by the evening it had spread throughout the country.

Every man and woman above 60, or approaching it, would seem to have been affronted. Following the acrimonious discussions of the newspapers and the caustic cartoons, came the studied magazine articles proving that Enoch not only begot Methuselah after he was 60, but walked with God; that Edison was in the heyday of his inventive activity; that Ford would practically fly after the chloroform age and that Clemenceau would save the world for democracy, perhaps for socialism. For a short time, it looked as if the man without an enemy had lost his distinction. Again, his inner voice counseled him wisely. He did not attempt to explain; he could not be persuaded to refute the alleged statement. He had said the truth, and the truth sufficed William Osler to the end.

Of the many extraordinary things in Dr. Cushing's adequate and appealing biography, none is more arresting than the account given of the birth of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research and the part that Osler unconsciously played in it through his textbook. A young man who had access to the ear of John D. Rockefeller read it and was appraised of the fertile field awaiting planting by preventive medicine. The crops that have been harvested have been enormous, but they are as naught compared with those about to be garnered. How little it is generally appreciated that the colossal success of the Panama Canal was due as much to Gorgas as to Bunau-Varilla, and that Osler mediated his appointment to the Commission, and still less the leading part Osler played in decapitating the gorgon typhoid fever in this country thirty years ago.

In England Osler added to his cultural fame. He was made president of the Bibliographical Society, of the Ashmolean Society and to cap them all of the Classical Association, an honor which probably pleased him as much or more than any that had ever come to him, and the address to it which embodied the whole spirit of his ideal cost him the greatest labor of his life.

He found great joy in England, but he found also his greatest sorrow, for his son, a singular combination of his mother's suavity and his father's fortiter was killed in the war. It did not kill Osler, it only killed his desire to live. Like his master, Sir Thomas Browne, he knew that oblivion is not to be hired and that the night of time suppresseth the day. He had lived every moment of his day, and every hour had been joyous save one, and he had never stopped to compute his facilities. He died as he had lived, like a marathon runner taking the hurdle.

Dr. Cushing's biography is documented and detailed. It is the kind of biography of Osler that should exist, but there should be another made from it: the story of his life and the charm of his personality in narrative form followed by interpretation, characterization and estimation. The present one will be received gratefully by his former pupils and colleagues by his connections and

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There is the man, modest, grateful, appreciative. He attributes his material success to what others have done for him; his spiritual to his inheritance. Had he added that, early in life, he had a vision and had striven heroically and worked laboriously to make it concrete for the benefit of mankind, and that extraordinary success had attended his efforts, he would have explained William Osler and his career.

A Canadian Boyhood.

What more need be said of his parents? They struggled successfully with the virgin soil and primitive civilization; the father ornamented his profession, and the mother fulfilled bounteously her destiny; she mothered eight children, four of whom became famous. The youngest, the subject of this biography, was in nowise remarkable as a child or boy:

"I started in life with just an ordinary everyday stock of brains. In my schooldays I was much more bent upon mischief than upon books, but as soon as I got interested in medicine I had only a single idea: to do the day's work that was before me just as faithfully and honestly and energetically as was in my power."

And this he did to the day of his death.

He was steered into medicine by a strange mixture of scientific and pletistic ardor. James Bovell and he studied and graduated at McGill Medical School, then a proprietary institution at the head of which was R. Palmer Howard, who by possessions and conduct influenced Osler's life, for he said of him thirty-five years later: "I have never known one in whom was more happily combined a stern sense of duty with the mental freshness of youth."

He went abroad and while increasing his knowledge of medicine laid the foundation of friendship and intimacies which years later after he had become a famous teacher, facilitated a call to one of the most ornamental professorships in Great Britain. At 28 he had a chair in his alma mater. In ten years he went to the top. Then began that series of calls to colleges and universities here and abroad which did not cease so long as he lived. He refused them all save those of the University of Pennsylvania

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What medicine gained by the accession to its ranks of the distinguished professor of surgery in Harvard University, literature lost. Dr. Harvey Cushing has shown by this biography of his old teacher and dear friend that he has also the qualities of a great writer.